Developing Web Contents for your Program Web Site
organizing your content and building the navigation concept

When developing the navigation and page hierarchy for your department or program web site, it is best to start with a clean slate and fresh perspective. To insure that each audience of your web site will be adequately served, try to think from each of their perspectives when laying out the contents of your site. Start with the most important of those groups, your program’s students.

- *What information will they need?*
- *What are they looking for upon their visit to the site?*
- *How can you get that information to them quickly?*

Organizing your content for the web

After you have identified each area of your audience that you wish to reach and have all of your materials together, it is time to start thinking about site layout.

- *How can we organize the site so that it is easy to use?*
- *How can I manage my contents effectively and efficiently?*
- *How can I place as much information on my program’s web page without having a cluttered web site that is difficult to navigate?*

These are important questions to ask yourself when thinking about how to layout your web site. In most cases, you will have what is called “content rollover”. This is when a page’s content is updated frequently and is accessible from several points on your web site. The best way to effectively manage your content while offering the maximum amount of information to your users is to build a central section of your web site for content that is universal. This would be information regarding enrollment, course requirements, checklists, any materials or contents that would be used by all of your audience members. This way, if you have one page that is referenced by several sections of your web site, you will not need to manage one page per section, just that one, single page.

You also want to think about organizing your content into groups. By organizing your web content into groups, it will become much easier for your users to navigate through the site. In most cases, the user is looking for more than one piece of information with each visit. By grouping content, the user can browse to a section of your site, and find content with a specific connection. For instance, a user may come to your site to find the admissions requirements and required courses. After they have found this information on your site, their next step may be to find information on transferring credits they may already have which are required by the program. By grouping these similarities in content, the user can usually find what they are looking for with one or two clicks of the mouse. The less clicks, the better.

Another important step is to be as objective as possible when developing your web content. Critically identify all NLU-specific jargon and acronyms. If you are targeting prospective students - or even current students - avoid the use of such jargon. For instance, referring to the Center for Academic Development as the “CAD” will confuse visitors who do not know what the CAD is. Also, if using the words “cluster”, “cohort” and “field”, define these terms to your visitor so they will carry an understanding of these terms with them throughout their visit on the NLU web site.
Building the navigation concept

Once you have decided on the content needed for each audience, you should now move your focus to navigation.

- **How can I make my web site’s contents readily accessible to users?**

This is best done by making links easily recognized and by locating your navigation together. Also, using your content in groups (see previous section) will help streamline the process of organizing your content into a table of links. If you have numerous links on a page, it is best to place them together so a user will know where on that page they should look to move to the next page, or to a section of the site you have referenced in your content. Here is an example of a web page developed using these ideas and practices (this example can be viewed at: [www.nl.edu/development/cas/](http://www.nl.edu/development/cas/)):

![Example web page](http://www.nl.edu/development/CAS)

Notice that the homepage of this web site features a program introduction and a tabular breakdown of the contents of the web site. Once a user clicks beyond this page, they know exactly where they are going and how to get back. Also, the contents are organized on the homepage based on user groups, Prospective Students, Current Students and Alumni.

Once you have developed a core idea of how your web content will be navigated, it is time to **TEST** your concepts on someone else - someone who was NOT involved in the discussions that lead to your design. Ideally you would sow your design concept to members of each of your
target audiences - faculty, students, staff, alumni or whomever you wish to attract to your site. Your own “logical view” of the web world is quite likely different from others’ views.

As you build the pages and the navigation scheme, continue to test. Before releasing the pages to production, be sure to do another thorough user test with a variety of audiences. Also, during these testing phases, a lot of spelling errors, typos, broken links and any other overseen issues will arise. Broken links can be frustrating for your users and spelling mistakes and typos are a poor reflection on your program. Show them why NLU is the right choice.

Now it is time to begin building your site in CommonSpot! If you have any questions or comments, feel free to contact the OIT web team at webdev@nl.edu.