

re.web

Wednesday, November 7, 2007 (10:45AM and 2:00PM)

AGENDA and NOTES

Present: Ambler, Broaddus, Carpenter, Evans, Gamage, Kane, Martin, Mellor, and Wallace

Guests: Voltaire Santos Miran and Patrick DiMichele from mStoner

Unable to Attend: Bailey, Connolly (ex officio), Donaldson, and Kuffel

Agenda: Presentation of the W&M Web Strategy Report

Voltaire Santos Miran and Patrick DiMichele from mStoner presented the W&M Web Strategy Report. The report was the compilation of their review of W&M web sites, publications, communication and marketing studies, and other materials. Additionally, the mStoner team facilitated small group meetings with faculty, staff and students during an on campus visit, and conducted a competitive analysis of peer and overlap schools.

Copies of the full W&M Web Strategy Report were distributed to the Provost and to all members of the W&M Web Redesign Advisory Committee. A separate Strategy Report for the W&M Law web site was prepared and presented to senior administrators at the School of Law.

Summary of “Redeveloping wm.edu”

Introduction

The mStoner web strategy presentation began with a reference to the goals of the W&M Web Assessment Report written in 2006. The mStoner team concurred that these objectives are hallmarks of best practices in web development:

1. A user-centric focus
2. A clear, persistent navigation scheme
3. A balanced approach to respond to unique characteristics of diverse audiences
4. A robust and effective search feature
5. A well-structured content model for marketing, news, and multimedia
6. A consistent design that coincides with College communication initiatives
7. An intuitive information architecture with a focus on usability and accessibility
8. Integrated and more easily accessible information about curriculum, academic policies, and programs

What mStoner heard from W&M

The following five statements sum up the bulk of the conversations that the mStoner team had with about 150 people (within about 19 small group, onsite interviews) and the follow-up conference calls held with stakeholders at the College:

“I’m proud of the College. Give me a site that makes me proud.”

“Show me the opportunities that I didn’t realize I need to know about.”

“Make it easier for me to find information.”

“Make it clear who we are, and what we’re not.”

“Build something that we can sustain . . . and keep in mind what we haven’t got.”

Based on feedback and experience, mStoner determined the re.web project must address three main issues: messaging, functionality, and the ongoing management of the W&M web presence.

Competitive Analysis

The mStoner team looked at the web sites of some of our peers. The schools they examined included Duke, Cornell, Wake Forest, Virginia Tech, UNC-Chapel Hill, University of Virginia, University of Richmond, Georgetown, and Boston College. mStoner looked for emerging standards to employ in the redesigned William & Mary site and summary findings are:

University of Richmond has robust information architecture and site navigation. Categories are well defined, and universal navigation is consistently available throughout the site.

Duke successfully uses audience-based navigation (e.g. navigation categories for prospective students, current students, parents, alumni, etc.). This type of navigation works best when consistent usability testing is in place to determine the content presented on each audience-based page.

University of Virginia, Virginia Tech, and Duke use various techniques to convey the beauty of their campuses. Currently, William & Mary is not taking full advantage of campus beauty on our web site. Schools that do this most effectively don't overwhelm the users with huge pictures, and they use photographs to tell a story. UVA uses a rotating picture and caption on the home page, and they have a feature entitled "The Week in Photos."

A university web site must also convey the campus experience. Cornell and UNC employ blogs to connect visitors with the lives of current students. Universities have different ways of approaching blogs; the less-scripted approach seems to resonate with both site visitors and prospective students.

Key Messages

mStoner will feature three key messages to inter-relate the content of the redesigned W&M site:

Access to Access -- As a public institution with a commitment to serving a diverse student body, W&M is a welcoming and affordable education for any student who meets the school's stringent academic standards. Committed to close student faculty interaction, students get access to professors, facilities, and research opportunities that would be limited to graduate and doctoral students at other, larger publics.

Historically Innovative -- From being one of the country's first institutions of higher learning, to being one of its most "unwired" campuses, to the forward-thinking research done by its students and faculty, innovation is part of William & Mary's DNA.

It's Fun to be Intense -- Every student said William & Mary was a fun campus and pointed out that students are engaged in social issues and creative expression. It's important that the website showcase stories of students having fun in their own way.

Information Architecture and Wireframes

On the redesigned W&M home page, three main navigation sets deliver information by topic, audience, and task. The task-based navigation focuses largely on areas of interest to prospective students. The mStoner team assembled wireframes to demonstrate the information architecture and basic layout of the new site.

The home page will prominently feature a picture, slideshow, or movie. There will be substantial space on the home page devoted to special interest features designed to draw visitors deeper into the site. Teasers for student blogs may also be appear on the home page.

The new site will make it easy to surface interesting stories, photos, and events to the home page. Many "functional" pages will also include space for photos and special interest stories.

How to Accomplish the Project

The College has already laid the groundwork for a successful web redesign project. Over the next several months, mStoner will engage the re.web Project Team, the IT department, the Office of Admission, and the Office of Public Affairs to:

- refine the proposed new site structure and create web-ready content.
- develop, test, and execute a new interface design.

- create accessible HTML code, and customize the selected CMS for build out.

To sustain the new W&M web presence we must establish both training and governance policies. Our training should include tracks for:

- Contributors (those modifying content)
- Web Editors (those developing new content)
- System Administrators
- Developers

mStoner will also serve as a resource to the Web Redesign Advisory Committee and the re.web Project Team to establish necessary policies and procedures. A few examples of the policies W&M needs to have in place include:

- A definition of what is “marketing critical” and “service critical” to the College.
- A statement about what are considered official versus unofficial College web pages.
- A proposed list of authoritative sources of information (ASIs).
- An articulated key messages document.

Conclusions

Suggestions for measuring project success were also reviewed. The web strategy report appendices included:

- Detailed information architecture
- Design and usability best practices
- Models for determining necessary resources
- Recommendations about an internal communications plan