

## **Website content guide**

LAS Office of Communications and Marketing

November 2016

### **1. Evaluate your current content and needs before you start writing**

a. Important questions include:

- i. Who are your audiences? Common audiences for LAS units are listed below. These may vary from unit to unit, but are in priority order based on suggested strategic importance and traffic patterns we commonly see on our sites.
  - Prospective students and their parents – they use websites as their main source of information. They're often our most important audience
  - Current students
  - Faculty and staff
  - Alumni
  - Prospective faculty
  - Donors
  - Corporate partners
  - The campus community
  - Other clients/partners/people your unit serves
- ii. What are your goals – what do you hope to convey?
- iii. What kind of content exists on your site now?
  - The ATLAS Web team will provide you a content inventory. This can help you evaluate what currently exists on your site.
- ii. What can you do to prepare your content for a new site?
  - Think about how you can start revising and reorganizing current content now.

### **2. Use the resulting answers to write a content outline**

- a. Your main content categories should match the site navigation. In most cases, main categories will be:
  - Admissions
  - Academics
  - Research
  - Resources
  - Directory
  - Alumni
  - About
  - Calendar
  - News
- b. Much of the content you want to include should fit in one of these categories.

- c. Make sure everything contained in your outline appeals to one of your target audiences. The content shouldn't be written for you, but for those who need to use your site.

### 3. Once you know where you plan to put everything, start writing

- a. Break your content into digestible chunks.
  - i. Group information using meaningful headers and subheaders makes it easier to scan/read and for search engines to find. An easy way to do this well is to complete a full outline first.
  - ii. Focus each paragraph on one key concept.
  - iii. Use bullet points and numbered lists to break up text.
  - iv. [Research says](#) people will scroll down on sites they're interested in, but the best real estate on a website is still at the top of the page. Keep that in mind.
- b. Think about the tone you want to share and use standard styles throughout your web content
  - i. The LAS Office of Communications and Marketing will provide style guidelines for both the college and the campus – they can be great resources for this
  - ii. Tone: Writing for the web is less formal than printed pieces, *especially* academic publications. Work to use language across your site that reflects who you are as a unit while being approachable.
- c. Use plain language and short sentences and paragraphs.
  - i. Assume you're competing for your readers' attention and that they're easily distracted.
  - ii. This will also help make your content more searchable.
  - iii. Use set word counts per page to help you.
- d. Link responsibly.
  - i. Links are an easy way to add context or help your readers find more information.
  - ii. If content appears elsewhere on your site or on the Internet, link to it instead of repeating it.
  - iii. When you link, make sure you embed the link in a verb or action phrase – this makes the link more accessible. **Don't** write out a url or embed a link in a phrase like, "Please click here for more information."
- e. Realize that your content will change, either as you add updates or as your users give you feedback. Web content is a work in progress! Remember that factual, up-to-date, grammatically correct and easy-to-read/digest content will build trust with your audience.

### 4. Finding and using the right images for your website

- a. When choosing photos for your website, keep these factors in mind:
  - i. Choose photos that serve a purpose – they should tell a story or help illustrate a concept

- ii. Photos that show student, staff, faculty and alumni faces are often a good choice – they can show off your department’s personality and make your site more welcoming
  - iii. Make sure the photos you use are high-quality: that means they’re in focus and shared at the right resolution
- b. It’s important that you have permission to use all the images in your website’s design and content. Some affordable image sources include:
  - i. The [campus image database](#) (email [ui-photo@illinois.edu](mailto:ui-photo@illinois.edu) to request access).
  - ii. Photos [shared online with Creative Commons licenses](#) are a great resource, but be careful to attribute them properly and respect whether they can be edited. You can [search Creative Commons](#) to find images for your site.
- c. If you’re taking photos you plan to use on your site, make sure to have anyone pictured sign a model release form. [Download campus’ template](#) and customize it to list your contact information and how you plan to use the image. **Campus requires you to print this form and have your photo subjects sign it.** Once you have it, keep it on file.
- d. The ATLAS web team will help you make sure your images are shared in an accessible way – this can be done through entering caption and alt text in your content management system.

## 5. If you’re considering video

- a. Videos can make excellent web content – they’re engaging, and done well, can do a great job conveying your message. However, make sure you consider your audience when posting:
  - i. Young viewers prefer short (think three minutes or less) videos. If you’re targeting alumni or other adults, you might be able to get away with slightly longer videos, but they must include high-quality videography, audio, and editing.
  - ii. Make sure your video includes a clear message or call to action. Use a video when you simply can’t convey these through other types of web content.
- b. It’s important that you have permission to use the video you’re posting. If you created the video yourself, make sure you have permission to use all the components included in the video, including music. Creative Commons is an excellent resource for [finding music you can use with attribution](#). You can also [find video footage](#) you can share using a Creative Commons license.
- c. If you’re creating a video, make sure to have anyone featured sign a model release form. [Download campus’ template](#) and customize it to list your contact information and how you plan to use the video. **Campus requires you to print this form and have your photo subjects sign it.** Once you have it, keep it on file.
- d. You can embed video on your website using YouTube or other tools. The ATLAS Web team can help you decide how to share video on your site.

- e. To make video accessible, you must include captions. If you're working with a campus vendor, ask about fees for captioning. Or, you can add captions yourself. If you share your video via YouTube, you can add captions by going to "Edit," then selecting the "Subtitles & CC" tab. YouTube can even get you started by adding voice-recognition captions. You'll want to go through and correct these, though. [Find more information about captioning on the Public Affairs website.](#)
- f. Campus resources for video:
  - i. You can hire Public Affairs' video team to produce a video for you. For more information, please contact [videoservices@illinois.edu](mailto:videoservices@illinois.edu).
  - ii. You can hire the Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning to [record an event, and edit and caption videos.](#)
  - iii. CITL's [Lightboard Studio](#) in the basement of the Foreign Languages Building can also be an excellent resource, especially if you want to capture video of someone lecturing. Email [citl-lightboard@illinois.edu](mailto:citl-lightboard@illinois.edu) for more information.
  - iv. Learn more about producing high-quality video yourself using help from the [Media Commons](#) in the Undergraduate Library. You can check out equipment, learn how to edit video, reserve studio space in front of a green screen, and even hire experts to do this work for you.