Bringing Industry Best Practices to Academic Web Strategy

Presented by:
Georgia State University

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Institutional context

- Atlanta Research University
  - Doctoral/research-extensive
  - Comparative advantage of downtown Atlanta
  - Atlanta based learning
- 28,500 students
  - 30% graduate
  - 40,000 different over fiscal year
  - 50,000 eligible to register each term
  - 2,400 new freshmen per year
- Diverse, Urban, Commuter
  - 2,000 beds (1996)
  - 51% undergraduate minority
Institutional context

• Rapid growth and increase in quality
  – 5,000 students in 4 years
  – 1998 60% would not have meet 2004 entrance requirements
  – Increase of 90 points on SAT

• Major budget challenges
  – Need to do more with less!
  – Need to establish a culture of online access to records & services

• No sense of community
  – Students “lost” on a decentralized campus
Challenges

• Enrollment management mission
  – produce an undergraduate student body reflective of a top 100 research university
  – become more student friendly

• Silos
  – Historical and a result of rapid change

• No central control of “branding”

• No unified marketing plan
Challenges

- Students frustrated with services and websites following silos of reporting units rather than need.
- Resistance of units who want website to reflect their own reporting structure.
- Historically procedures designed to be “staff friendly” with little regard to impact on student.
Goals

• Use discussion around creation of “CoreWeb” as a change agent
  – Unite campus & campus pride
• Use project and CoreWeb to establish Georgia State identity and a sense of community
• Make sites and services “student friendly”
The Department
Web Services Department

• Gard joined Georgia State in 1998 as Director, University Educational Technology Services (UETS)

• Web Services reported to CIO
  – Made websites for campus units
  – Units were responsible for support
    • Trained students for hire

• Web Services moved to UETS in 1999
Background GSU.edu

- Campus website redesign was underway in 1999
  - No agreement between University Relations and Information Systems & Technology
  - Project cancelled
- A temporary site was installed 2001
- GSU.edu project site will launch November 15, 2004
Web Services Popularity Overwhelms

- Staff consisted of manager and 2 graphic designers/web developers
  - About 10 student assistants
- 6 month backlog on projects
- Attempted major project: IS&T’s entire website
- Needed staff with other skill sets to organize information in client centric manner
Staffing Web Services for Large Projects

• Project Manager, Jarrett King, hired July 2001
• Information Architect is vital and one was hired
  – Experienced in usability testing
• Web Designer hired by University Relations
• Content Specialist hired for the GSU.edu project
• This was the original implementation team led by Carolyn Gard.
GSU.edu Core Web Project
Industry Influence

• Project structure
• Web strategy based on business objectives
• Use of concept to drive development
• User-centered design and usability testing
• Implementation of CMS to centrally control experience while decentralizing maintenance
Project Structure Today: client and service provider
Objectives

Web strategy based on business objectives…

Business Objectives
• Increase high-quality applicant pool
• Increase enrollment rate of high quality applicants
• Promote awareness of our research initiatives
• Increase donations

Other Objectives
• Bring consistency to the look, tone, navigational structure
• Reduce the amount of redundant information
• Reduce the amount of inaccurate / out-of-date information
• Increase self-service on GSU.edu
• Create a framework and standards for web development at Georgia State
What is a concept?

Use of concept to drive development...

A concept is a strategy for making a website meaningful to visitors

- The same collection of content and functionality can be organized and presented in different ways that give different impressions.

Community  Library  Storefront
What does the concept affect?

- Organization/navigation of the site
- Imagery
- Voice and tone of copy
- Page layout
- User interface design
The Concept

• Campus Atlanta
  – Atlanta as a differentiator
  – Challenge and support (imagery and content)
  – Satisfy expectations and then raise the bar – change perceptions
The Concept

"Georgia State won't just tell me about the world... I'll get to sample the world."

"Georgia State is a world-class school with growing research opportunities."

"Atlanta is full of internship opportunities: CNN, Coca-Cola, Home Depot, GA government."

"The connections I form at Georgia State will help me succeed after I graduate."

"Atlanta is exciting--lots to do."

"I'll be in the middle of everything."

Georgia State is student-friendly.

"This site is easy to use. I won't get the bureaucratic treatment."

"I fit in here."

Campus Atlanta

Research

Practicums etc.

Internships

Business and government

Practical education

Integral part of the Atlanta community

Campus integrated with city

Cosmopolitan environment

International

Urban lifestyle

Diverse population

Student-centric

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## Goals

User-centered design and usability testing…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Useful</th>
<th>Usable</th>
<th>Desirable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Center GSU.edu around user needs (not around our organizational structure)</td>
<td>Make Georgia State information easier to find and understand</td>
<td>Give Georgia State a more distinctive, memorable and compelling image</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

And…
- Flexible enough to be responsive to changing needs of both users and the university
- Consistent and coherent
Prototypes

- **Process**
  - Developed three initial designs
  - Conducted user testing with current and prospective students
  - Improved design based on user feedback
  - Iterated

- **Results**
  - The design exceeded standards of usability, usefulness and desirability

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>87% of top-3 tasks mentioned in survey are addressed within the core</td>
<td>84% 1st click</td>
<td>Avg. rating 7.2/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93% 2nd click</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Content Management

Georgia State University

Welcome to Georgia State University, a leading research university located in the heart of downtown Atlanta.

Georgia State medical research grant

Georgia State University Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Ron Henry has been honored with a national award for his efforts to generate international education at the university, administrators announced today. This is an additional sentence to take up space. More >>

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Time Table

• Phase 1:
  – “Core” and “Registrar” Site
  – Go-live November 15

• Phase 1a:
  – Add lower priority content to the Core and tweaks/embellishments
  – Go-live throughout December

• Phase 2:
  – Remainder of the Enrollment Management departments
    • Admissions, Financial Aid
    • Undergraduate Studies, Advisement, International Student Services
    • Student Accounts

• Phase 3:
  – Remainder of central service units within university

• Phase 4:
  – Colleges, centers and departments
Questions

What questions do you have?

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