Minnesota State University Moorhead Case Study Presentation

In Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the StudentAffair.com Virtual Case Study

Presented to the Vice President of Student Affairs
Western Idaho College

By
Joanie Kyllo
Trina Pisk-Hall
Melissa Rademacher
Carrie Stenseth

February 23, 2003
Please note that this critique looks only at the weaknesses of the website. For your website critique, you are required to present both the strengths and weaknesses. The information presented here may or may not relate to the website you are asked to critique. You MUST interact with the website that is posted and use the guidelines given. Try to determine the audience of the website, the purpose and relevance, accuracy of information, appearance etc. Please write using academic language and write in the third person. The overview for your critique will address “Cyber crime”. In the critique below, please note how the writers included other sources to support the points that they make by including the in-text citation as well as the References. Please use sub-headings to organize your presentation.

Website Critique

Overview

The website is an increasingly valuable medium to foster an institution of higher education’s mission and, thereby, must be critiqued with rigorous standards to effectively serve the learning community. Benedict (1996) encourages student affairs professionals to embrace the personal responsibility to develop technology competencies, as he advocates technology will constitute a core competency in the 21st century.

The use of student affairs websites as a reliable source for disseminating information and interacting with students is a growing area of interest in providing services to students. Reality is that website technology is not a phase and is an essential part of academic life; web browsers are standard on campus delivery systems, campus libraries provide electronic text resources, and students are routinely provided with computer access on campus (Spitzer & Warters, 2002).

There are many benefits to using websites to aid in the functions of student affairs divisions. According to a study done by Bitler, Rankin, and Schrass (2000), the benefits of using websites to inform included lower production expenses (electronic vs. paper handouts), immediate updating capabilities, and flexibility to provide a variety of formats. According to Barratt (2001), over time,
using website technology to reorganize student affairs practices will promote working with students in new ways and allow more time to work with them individually. The efficiencies provided by technology change staffing and budget focus.

The following paragraphs will provide a critique of the current Western Idaho College (WIC) Student Life Department website. To present a coherent layout, this critique will follow the format of the website with a review of each page that warrants improvement.

**Target audience**

Current students at the college are the primary targeted audience. However, the site can serve as a resource for the campus community by providing information on the developmental tasks of students and the services available to address those tasks.

**Home Page**

This page is a key opportunity to engage the user in the site information, as this will most likely be the first page seen. Whitney (2002) purports that the goal of every website is to increase the probability of engagement with the user. As it is currently, this page does not invite the student to become interactive with the website. Although the links to the other pages are available, the page does not explicitly ask the student to explore further. In the headlines section, the two included news events do not affect the students at WIC directly, and are thereby, irrelevant to this website page.

The schedule for upcoming events is confusing and outdated. First, the fact that the residence halls are open does not fall into the category of an event. Rather, it is a routine piece of schedule information that would be best served in another context. This page was retrieved on February 18, 2003 and there is an “event” that is past; this is evidence of the lack of website maintenance. Frequently updated information is an inexpensive way to enhance the content of the website (Nielsen, 2002). If the user knows that new items will be included on the website regularly, this will increase the probability that he or she will return (Whitney, 2002).
Mission and Program

The link to this page is misleading in that the information presented only includes the mission and not the program information. If the information following the first paragraph is considered “Program” then it needs to be clearly indicated.

Residential Life Department

This section of the website was incomplete. Whitney (2002) explicitly cautions that a website should not invite a user to a section that had not been completed. This wastes the student’s time and decreases the probability of a return visit. He recommends hiding the section, or gathering enough information to make it worth the users visit.

Career Services

The link to career services is “dead” and this makes it unprofessional and ineffective. If a website is to be effective, the user must be able to access the relevant information that has been promoted. Whitney (2002) claims that there is no excuse for this website design mistake.

Policies & Procedures

Although the various sections are listed first on this page, There is a large of amount of scrolling by the user. The large amount of scrolling will decrease the likelihood that the student will persist through the entire page. Nielsen (2002), cautions that the majority of users do not scroll beyond the immediately visible information.

Athletics

This page, being exclusive of other athletic activities, is not comprehensive and therefore not an accurate representation of the campus athletic community. The only sport that is highlighted is basketball. In addition, this page uses elements that constantly move which was a source of distraction. Nielson (2002) cautions against using a page element that constantly moves, as it affects the reader’s peripheral vision and distracts from the content of the page. Similarly, Cavanaugh and
Cavanaugh (2002) recommend that any moving objects must have the option of being paused. The Warrior logo is an aesthetic addition, but should not move incessantly.

**Site Index**

The language of this page is vague, trite and does not invite the reader to explore further the information available. While the site index is a vital component of this website, the location is awkward and inefficient.

**Critique Summary and final comments.**

The current website tends to render the student a passive viewer of the sparse material, rather than inviting him or her to be an engaged participant. The WIC student life department division website has many elements that need to be addressed to become an interactive and engaging proponent of the institution’s mission.

It is hoped that this exploration of an innovative medium is one filled with enriching learning opportunities for staff and colleagues instead of dread and trepidation towards change.
References


