



WESTERN USC

Web Redesign

Project Team

Emerson Tithecott (Communications Director)












Geoff Pimlatt (Project Manager)

Paul Craig (Web Development & UX)

Tyler Benning (Web Design UI & UX)

Jas Irwin (Copywriter)

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Preamble

Our goal “how can we best improve the experience of the USC’s website?”

As recent Western University grads, we approached the web redesign from a student-oriented perspective. We had our own ideas and assumptions about what a University Students’ Council website should include. Ultimately, we based our final designs on our consolidated research, in turn proposing solutions to common problems faced by students. This document outlines the research we undertook, the demographic information we inferred, and the solutions we presented.

Our research consisted of a series of **in-person interviews** (with student executives and student-facing USC administration staff) as well as an **online survey** answered by about 800 Western University students. These research methods allowed us to gather both standardized, measurable data (from the survey, for example), as well as more granular, insight-based commentary. We aggregated both data types for our conclusions.

Research Groups

Interviews of outgoing USC Student Executive

USC student executives use the USC's website in various capacities throughout the year, so we figured they were a good group to approach. Our questions were mostly about **how they use current information** on the site, as well as **how they add new information** to the site.

KEY FINDINGS

One has likely never heard so many politicians so closely aligned in their views without strategic end game. Almost all mentioned and agreed with the same things:

- 1 Improve Search functionality for documents & people
- 2 Information on the student government should be more accessible for people. Make the government more friendly and engaging in content and copy.
- 3 Make it mobile friendly.
- 4 Executives mostly engage with announcements and updates. Solution would be to create standardized formats for jobs, news, carousel slider items.
- 5 It's hard to update and maintain so many different satellite sites (the Spoke, the Wave, Western Film). It would be great to consolidate these sites.

Research Groups

Interviews of USC student-facing staff

Put simply, student-facing staff are the explicit purveyors of USC-related information. Obviously their duties are more complex, but, in essence, they serve as a link between students and the USC. As such, they would certainly have insight into the kinds of questions that students ask.

KEY FINDINGS

Students use various communications technologies to acquire information. The website is one of a few different ways people find information. Improving the site with reliable and up-to-date information is a necessity in the digital age.

1

Site Structure

Staff use all resources that they can to answer student questions.

Information owned by the USC must be accurate and easy to access.

The site should be organized with different navigation systems that link intuitively between different content areas. Many pages need to be solidified and grouped together.

2

Popular Pages for Students

We asked staff to rate different services based on how often students ask about them. Based on our “grading scale” results were as follows:

8 points: Health Plan

7 points: Bus Pass, Events

6 points: Clubs, Jobs, Creative Services

This closely matched data from Google Analytics which showed these as the areas of the website with high traffic volume.

Research Groups

Public Web Survey

We needed both people who used and didn't use the website to tell us why or why not. As such, a public survey was initiated to gather simple demographic information, as well as thoughts and concerns about the USC's past website.

The survey oscillates between very structured (5-point-rating-scale) questions and more open-ended ones. Structured questions collect opinions on specific points, while the open-ended questions offer opportunities to raise other concerns.

KEY FINDINGS

The survey was a success! (Go Mustangs!) We had over 800 responses that helped us further consolidate and support different issues we had found with the previous site.

1

General Assumptions Reinforced

Many of the survey respondents echoed our initial assumptions, the recommendations of the student executives, and USC student-facing staff in multiple areas (ie, quality and wealth of information, navigation structure, website design). This suggests, at the very least, ambivalence towards the previous website.

2

Current Structure Hard to Engage With

A lot of misplaced criticism about issues that have little to do with the USC (ie, tuition, textbook prices) might indicate either that students aren't trying hard enough to research the USC, or that the website doesn't properly communicate the USC's goals to students (for our purposes, we assume the latter).

Research Groups

Public Web Survey Continued

3

Pain Points in Accessing Key Areas of Engagement

Many student comments directly addressed issues we have heard in other contexts (students often gave feedback related to employment opportunities, bus pass and health plan, clubs, events, usc documents, out of date information, and/or affiliated sites).

- A** Certain areas (like Events or Job Opportunities) are important for large numbers of students
- B** Other areas are important for smaller groups (ie, finding USC documents)
- C** USC information (often spread over so many sites, with deep confusing structures) is not always hard to find, but it is not *always* current.
- C** Groups with different levels of involvement in the USC have varying priorities

Note *Deeper analysis of our survey results also led to the creation of three different user personas, which helped us when crafting solutions (for example, we can make assumptions as to how many people will care about specific problems and how much effort they'll expend before giving up).*



User Personas

Who is using the USC website?

Using our research, we constructed **User Personas** (general types of people who use the site), which helped us to design for different people's needs. To perhaps better understand the wide audience to cater to, we posited **three types of users** -- condensed from five -- each with their own set of needs from the website.

We understand that generalizations can never be perfect. In this case, they are useful in communicating the needs and goals of different users of the site which effectively help in the design process.

Jim R. Ray

User Persona: Average Student

He's not too involved with the USC--maybe not much else on campus either--but that's okay, he still knows how to have fun. He doesn't ask a lot from the USC -- mostly static information for the most popular services -- but the information he needs should be accurate and easy to find. In-site search might be helpful, but probably he just gets to the site from Google.

1

Internal static pages need to be accurate and stewarded (where do I pick up my bus pass?).

2

Sites have opening/closing hours and contact emails.

3

USC Exam shuttle is easy to find when it starts up.

Lindsey DaSoff

User Persona: Campus Citizen

She likes hanging around the UCC and probably knows who she's voting for in the next USC election either because she's friends with someone on a campaign or she's painting signs for it. She's big into campus culture and always wants to know what's going on. She's who we built our home page for: she'll read what's on the carousel, she'll have a look at upcoming student events, she'll notice if the Tweets are different from yesterday's, and maybe she even reads the News.

- 1 List of Clubs to join should be accurate.
- 2 Jobs and Events should be centralized and easy to find.
- 3 Carousel items, Twitter stream and News let her know what's happening on campus. They're not just easy to find, they're impossible to ignore.

Andrew Keaner

User Persona: Highly Involved Person

Whether he loves or hates the USC's website doesn't really matter, because Andrew is totally committed at this point. He's been involved in some extracurricular since second semester of first year, and now his reward is that he has to try and make sense of the USC Documents--if he can find them. Club executive or USC Councillor, he needs those pdf files: he's the one who will spend the time learning how to navigate the site, but hopefully he doesn't have to.

EXAMPLES OF PERSONA NEEDS

- 1 site search should be awesome.
- 2 Documents with metadata would make life so much easier.
- 3 Up-to-date contact information for list of people involved with the USC is imperative.
- 4 Really appreciates the mobile site.



Solutions

MAJOR SITE ARCHITECTURE RESTRUCTURING

“Interface is unorganized and information is very difficult to find”

Students and staff noted that information was hard to find and access. By analyzing a variety of data we created an information hierarchy, after which we could build a well-thought-out navigation structure to help the site’s future users find what they need quickly and easily.

JOBS

On the previous site, online postings of opportunities to get involved in the USC were a bit ad-hoc. In the interviews we found that there wasn’t a clear place to find jobs and volunteer opportunities. We built a “Jobs” hub, meant to list all current volunteer and work opportunities in one central location. Our hope is that it will help people like Jim R. Ray to get a bit more involved in the USC, as well as reduce headaches for USC staff or volunteers responsible for posting the jobs.

Solutions Pt. 2

CLUBS HUB

The USC previously made use of multiple platforms to relay basic information about clubs, and research showed that many people were frustrated with how information on clubs was laid out.

"I was looking for clubs, but it was not very straight forward it kept redirecting me to different pages."

Our goal was to consolidate this information into the central site under a familiar layout (bringing information in from off-site, where possible). We built out a hub for general club information, clubs list, and clubs documents. Much like our Jobs listing, the clubs list makes use of optimized search and filtering options to more easily enable students to find what they're looking for.

"WHAT'S HAPPENING" LINKS

"Some of the things on this website [are] just really hard to find - you really have to navigate your way through it."

The goal was to create a highly visible area on the main page that lead to the most-sought-out content. Through interviews, web survey, and Google Analytics, we came up with a possible list of the most often desired pages. This is particularly useful for mobile use, where it is less likely that students will appreciate digging through the structure of a large website.

Solutions Pt. 3

HOMEPAGE CAROUSEL

The carousel on the USC's previous homepage was a good idea that was poorly executed. We wanted to create an area filled with useful information that could actually be interacted with. We added large titles for users to click on, as well as video content integration. The carousel will be useful for announcements, promotions, or anything else happening right now (such as exam shuttles or bus pass pickup)! This content should be constantly changing, as it will be the best place for students to find important updates.

NEWS FEED

"I would love to see the main webpage updated more often with news stories"

Previously, the long list of infrequently updated news stories resulted in a homepage that often looked neglected, with stagnating information collecting immaterial dust on the landing page. Now, the three news latest stories will be highlighted in the "News Slider" area further down the page, with all past releases and less-important releases archived in the News section. Based on the general frequency of use over the past year of USC news updates, we decided that 3 of the latest USC news updates would suffice for students.

Solutions Pt. 4

IMPROVED SITE-WIDE SEARCH

"I would love if the search bar could be improved. Often I'll search for something I know is on the website, but I'll get results that I may not be looking for."

The default WordPress search functionality is totally inadequate for a complex organization like the USC: often returning 2 year old press releases rather than more current, more useful, information. If the site search doesn't work, the site becomes very tough to use and even harder to recommend. Thus, in addition to moving more highly-sought-after information onto the site (ie, club information, and general info on all USC Services), we have also implemented a much-improved search function which privileges core information about the USC rather than years-old News Posts.

Solutions Pt. 5

IMPROVED DOCUMENT SEARCH

"Documents. It's a single page of disaster."

Document management has long been a problem for the USC's website (just ask anyone trying to locate them). Essentially, this is another variation on the problem of an inadequate search function: the information exists on the site, but it's impossible to retrieve. We were fortunate that our Searching solution is also capable of indexing content in PDF files (the default format for documents on the USC's website); we created a separate search function on the Documents page which exclusively searches through PDF content, finally rendering important USC meeting and policy documents uploaded to the website accessible to those trying to find them.

Solutions Pt. 6

EVENTS

"It's a central location for upcoming events which is mainly what I use it for."

The Event Listing on the USC calendar became a lot more useful once Facebook events from USC Clubs were integrated -- many students in the online survey specifically mentioned visiting the USC calendar for event listings -- but it was often slow to retrieve events, and the layout couldn't accommodate smaller screens. We have added the option to display Facebook events in an existing WordPress calendar plugin, we've optimized it for speedy event-retrieval, and we've built a mobile event listing. Having a reliable, self-updating list of campus events is, arguably, vital to the USC's claim of being some sort of student-culture-facilitator, and so we're very happy to have gotten the Events Calendar up and running.



Parting Words

The hope is that the structure that we have built has laid out a solid framework for the USC to grow and build upon. With dynamic, up-to-date information, the USC website should become a home for visiting students to find information about events, clubs, involvement on campus, and any new or ongoing USC initiatives to improve the undergraduate experience at Western.