

*University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Web Presence –  
Recommendations for the Future*

**A White Paper by the Next Generation Web Committee**

**May 26, 2006**

**Brenda Caine**, IANR Communications and Information Technology

**Robert Crisler**, Office of University Communications

**David DeFruiter**, College of Business Administration

**Todd Jensen**, New Media Center - Information Services

**Kirk Kluver**, Office of Admissions

**Nancy Mitchell**, Associate Professor - Advertising

**Ronald Roeber**, Associate Vice Chancellor for Facilities and Information

**Allen Steckelberg**, Assoc Professor - Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education

**Matthew Moehle**, PhD Student - Music Education

**Brian Moore (Chair)**, Associate Professor - School of Music



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**Acknowledgements**

This white paper reflects the careful thought, consideration, and energy of many individuals. The **Next Generation Web Committee** worked from December 2005 to May 2006 on crafting these observations and recommendations to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I believe that this group reflects the heart of what UNL aspires to be... excellence pursued without compromise within the context of a diversity of ideas and people. My gratitude is extended to the members of the committee for their part in this document.

Thanks to Meg Lauerma in the University Office of Communications for her encouragement and support of this initiative. The committee also thanks Barbara Bowers, Office of Communications, for her logistical help and support.

It is the intention of the committee that this white paper begins a continuing dialogue. Recommendations offered here are with the best intentions for greater action and interaction regarding all aspects of our Web presence, including teaching, research, creative activity, service, and outreach.

Brian Moore  
May 26, 2006

## Executive Summary

The World Wide Web has given new meaning to the term “ubiquitous” – It pervades virtually every aspect of our lives, personally and professionally and is unique among the media available to us, providing content on demand to a global audience. At its best, it allows us to connect with one another on multiple levels, to learn, to teach, to create, to reach out. Such interactions are at the heart, at the core of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln:

- *Learning that prepares students for lifetime success and leadership;*
- *Excellence pursued without compromise;*
- *Achievement supported by a climate that celebrates each person's success;*
- *Diversity of ideas and people;*
- *Engagement with academic, business, and civic communities throughout Nebraska and the world;*
- *Research and creative activity that informs teaching, fosters discovery, and contributes to economic prosperity and our quality of life;*
- *Stewardship of the human, financial, and physical resources committed to our care.*

As the committee grappled with the present and future campus-wide issues regarding our Web presence, especially in light of its stewardship, several themes emerged which require further development:

(1) *Need for Shared Vision and Oversight* – Tremendous work has been done to date regarding the Web. UNL is a comprehensive institution with remarkable talent and achievement. However, these efforts aren't always obvious to the campus as a whole, due to their dispersed nature. The need for a campus entity to provide direction and oversight and to respond quickly to emerging needs and technologies is critical.

**Recommendation:** A **steering committee** model should be adopted that functions in an *ad hoc* manner to provide direction and coordination to the campus' continuing and growing Web presence. This committee should report directly to upper administration (SVCAA) in its efforts to facilitate, coordinate and address emerging issues as well as provide guidance and support to the web development efforts already underway at UNL.

(2) *Design for Audience* – from the prospective student to the international graduate student, from alumni to faculty, from the general public to decision makers, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln serves diverse audiences. These various audiences (and others not specifically mentioned) have differing needs and expectations. Content, presentation, organization and other factors targeted to audiences must influence future Web development. While a unifying framework of navigational tools and institutional branding is necessary to provide effective interaction with all audiences, more attention and resources must be paid to developing and presenting content in a manner that it is compelling to each targeted audience within that framework. **Recommendation:** The **site map** should be organized and developed based on audience rather than subject. **Recommendation:** Web development for new audiences should begin immediately with the “**prospective student**” (high school). This particular audience presents perhaps the campus' highest priority and is the most challenging in terms of its needs and expectations.

(3) *Present a Consistent Message* – The UNL brand needs to be protected and celebrated. The particular ways in which this is accomplished via Web technologies must be intentional. **Recommendation:** Identify the **best practices** that yield the UNL brand and identity in such a way that they can be adopted by any aspect of UNL who desires a Web presence, be it department, unit, organization or individual, and communicate these practices through carefully developed **documentation, training, and support**.

(4) *Write for the Web/Embrace the Technology* – The Web is not print. We need to consciously develop our content recognizing that it is a qualitatively different medium. To address this need will require new resources as UNL does not currently employ any dedicated copywriters, either for print or for web communications. **Recommendation:** The University, as a central resource, should provide **editorial oversight and education** in Web-writing, Web-editing and content development to UNL colleges, departments and units. **Recommendation:** Continue to design and implement resources that are

**technology-specific** and thus unique to the Web and to UNL (i.e. podcasts, branded multimedia downloads).

(5) *Infrastructure* – Finally, the committee notes that these recommendations require much commitment of resources, both financial and human. To move ahead as efficiently and effectively as possible, an exclusively “top-down” approach is neither prudent nor reasonable. At the same time, individual Colleges and Units should not be expected to “reinvent the wheel.” **Recommendation:** adopt a **distributed/collaborative model** of Web development and deployment with the steering committee providing oversight. This concept is a reoccurring theme in our recommendations regarding technical, data, and human infrastructure. Such collaboration ensures a much more robust and comprehensive Web presence, in all of its facets. (As a starting place, the committee members each were asked to suggest what their particular College/Unit could “bring to the table.” These observations may be read in Appendix A.)

**Preface/Purpose***"Charge of the Committee"*

In December 2005, the Office of University Communications began the redesign of UNL's Web presence. The immediate outcome was conceived as a set of new "Web templates" and the necessary documentation and training to insure smooth adoption and use. Of primary concern was that this process be undertaken as a campus-wide initiative.

An ad hoc committee was conceived to provide direct recommendations to the already existing Web Developers' Network. This group, the **Next Generation Web Committee** (NGWC), reflects a balance between faculty and staff, with representation from city and east campus.

While the Web Developers' Network was viewed as the primary technical and design entity on campus, it was deemed critical to identify specific individuals who might constitute a core committee – thus the **Next Generation Redevelopment Group** (NGRG) was formed.

While each committee had separate charges, the two were conceived to be parallel in structure and complementary in purpose and, thus, very closely aligned. (Please refer to Appendix B for a membership list.)

NGWC members are not generally directly involved in developing, designing or coding Web pages. However, each member does reflect expertise and experience in the myriad aspects of our campus' Web presence, especially in the areas of oversight, knowledge of the various audiences we seek to reach and an understanding of the inherent complexity and richness of the University of Nebraska "brand."

The NGRG is similarly broad-based, with most appointments directly related to the membership of NGWC and others from a call for participation from the membership of the UNL Web Developers' Network. Each member of the NGRG is directly involved in the design, development and coding of UNL Web pages.

**Short-Term Goal:** Begin the redevelopment of the current Web templates, (originally published December 2003).

NGWC:

- Provide recommendations for the immediate redevelopment of what currently exists with the actual design work carried out by the NGRG.
- Assist in developing a set of guidelines/recommendations/policies for the immediate development of these new templates/features/services for [www.unl.edu](http://www.unl.edu) [target date for implementation is August 2006], including suggestions for Web organization (site map).

NGRG:

- Develop prototype design, code and structure, based on input from a variety of sources (NGWC, audience research, Web Developers' Network, Office of University Communications, and others).
- Develop the necessary templates, code, etc. as well as training recommendations and instructional and support modules to facilitate campus-wide adoption.

**Long-Term Goal:** [NGWC] Develop a set of recommendations, in the form of a white paper, as to immediate and future directions for UNL's Web presence, from a 3 to 5 year perspective. Issues to be addressed included deployment and maintenance; adoption and training; continued development and necessary infrastructure; and protection of the UNL brand and identity.

The NGWC enthusiastically embraced this long-range goal of providing the University a white paper outlining the present and future of our Web presence. For all, it represented a unique opportunity to provide recommendations, guidance and informed thought about an aspect of UNL that will only continue to increase in both perceived and real importance. It should also be noted that by design, this committee met often and worked quickly but thoughtfully, all with a stated term of December 2005 to May 2006.

*Audience for this Document*

The Committee worked for the academic year and plans to present a final version of this document by May 26, 2006. At that time, the committee's work is complete. The perspectives and recommendations offered here are presented in a "non-partisan" manner realizing that the administration of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln will need to make decisions on how to institutionally move forward.

## Introduction and Background

### *"Statement of Need"*

The role of the Web within the context of a public university has taken on mission-critical importance. It is a crucial medium of our culture and time:

*By the end of 2005, 50 million Americans got news online on a typical day, a sizable increase since 2002.<sup>1</sup> The most recent Pew Internet Project survey finds that 87% of all youth between the ages of 12 and 17 use the Internet.<sup>2</sup>*

The ubiquitous aspects of the Internet present issues of convergence (any time / any place) in our application of this technology as well as issues of competition (recruiting and retention). The society in which our graduates will participate requires "a learning environment that prepares students for success and leadership in their lives and their careers."<sup>3</sup>

Decision makers both external and internal to this University desire accurate and accessible data, presented in a professional manner. Our commitment to extended education through Internet technologies is well established and will only continue to grow. University of Nebraska-Lincoln's extension, outreach and distance education audiences have different needs than the traditional prospective and current students and alumni. They are general adult audiences looking for specific educational information or program information and represent a diverse group of people.

These audiences include agricultural producers, agricultural industry representatives and citizens looking for specific educational programs. Reflecting Nebraska's population, they may be in urban or rural areas; they may be in any age group; some will be Hispanic; and they may work for an organization, be independent farmers or ranchers or be entrepreneurs.

Other audiences in this group include 4-H youth and leaders, non-traditional students from in-state or out seeking degrees or certificate programs via distance education programs or everyday citizens seeking information to improve the quality of their lives with the University's help.

### *"Design for Audience"*

The committee recognizes that various audiences have different needs and expectations. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln finds itself being "all things to all people" including:

- general public (news, PR, sports, events)
- incoming undergraduates (prospective students)
- incoming transfer students (prospective students)
- incoming graduate students (prospective students)
- extension / outreach / distance education students
- parents
- alumni
- international students
- faculty and staff
- current students (WAM, Blackboard, DARS)
- higher education faculty and administrators
- decision makers in business, industry, and government

Of primary importance is the need to "Design for Audience." The expectations (and informational needs) of a high school senior considering an engineering major at UNL is vastly different from a prospective graduate student from China who desires to earn an advanced degree in piano performance. These audiences need to be identified, and our Web content and context developed to meet their needs, rather than developing content in terms of "what we want to tell them". The expertise this University has in marketing, instructional design, recruiting and business practices was directly reflected in the makeup of this committee. We know

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1 [http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/178/report\\_display.asp](http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/178/report_display.asp)

2 [http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/163/report\\_display.asp](http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/163/report_display.asp)

3 [http://www.unl.edu/svcaa/planning/documents/core\\_values/#current](http://www.unl.edu/svcaa/planning/documents/core_values/#current)

who we are trying to reach, with whom we need to communicate. It is helpful to ask ourselves "what are the tasks that our various audiences need to accomplish with our Web site?" As an example, the prospective student who is a high school student has different needs and expectations when compared to a transfer student.

*High School Student: This largely teenaged audience is a Web savvy group that uses the Web as an important part of its college search. This young audience is usually on the cutting edge of Web technology and expects to find the same features from college sites as they find on other popular sites they frequent. A recent national study, confirmed by data from recent UNL surveys, revealed that this unique population views its interaction on college sites as an "information experience" over a "multimedia experience." Well organized and easy-to-find information is important to this group. Not only does this audience look to college sites for information, but they also expect to interact with the college through its site. The minimal key areas of online interaction include: 1) Applying for admission, 2) Requesting a campus visit or registering for an open house 3) Completing a Web form to be placed on a mailing list.*

*Transfer Student: This group is a more diverse audience than the incoming freshmen group, but they value many of the same features. The transfer student audience tends to visit a college site with a specific purpose in mind. It is extremely important for this group to access information on how classes will transfer from their current institution to the institution they are considering. Others who intend to transfer at some point in the future will look to college sites to find a "guide" that can instruct them on what classes they should take at their current institution to make the transfer process as seamless as possible.*

Addressing such specific needs and expectations may not be best handled by any central committee, but rather by those at UNL who most closely work with that particular audience. This "Design for Audience" theme will pervade this white paper.

*"Present a Consistent Message"*

While acknowledging that tremendous differences exist in our intended audiences, a second goal of our Web presence must be to present a clear, consistent and quality brand identity on every site. A brand is more than the institution's color or logo. A brand, according to many branding professionals, is a promise you make to your audiences. It is everything that people know, perceive, and feel about the organization or product or service.

At UNL, our brand is the way our faculty teach classes, how our Admissions staff follows up with prospective students or how a student helps a stranger looking for directions on campus. It also includes all the Web sites that have our name on them. It is the impact of faculty research and creative activity on the academic life of undergraduate and graduate students alike. It is a "personality" of high achievement and Midwestern values of friendliness and a strong worth ethic. It is, in short, "The uncompromising pursuit of excellence."

If we create a Website that manifests the special community and pride of Nebraska, but our content does not convey the same message, our audiences are confused and do not believe our brand promise. We cannot forget that content must also support this brand identity.

At the same time, our content must reflect the complexity of the University. While there must be commonalities among all Web sites in terms of standard navigational tools and elements established within the base templates, departments, organizations, and other university entities must have the freedom to create content that addresses the specific identities and needs of their audiences in terms of style, language and even grammatical structure.

And while we view the Web presence as perhaps our most important communication vehicle, it must be in harmony with other media used to communicate to our UNL audiences. Visitors to the sites who also receive written materials or see ads, must feel that the content has the same "voice" or "personality" even while taking on a different character based on the medium used to communicate.

*"Write for the Web"*

People read online content differently than printed content. Online, they want information in small chunks. It needs to catch their attention quickly and keep it through succinct, clear and compelling copy.

Writing for the Web, therefore, requires specialized skills. While UNL has highly professional and experienced writers and editors, their expertise lies more in educational publications, targeted publications and news writing. We have writing/editorial staff with little Web-writing experience. While it may be easy to imagine that good writers and editors can make the transition to Web writing easily, in reality, it requires training, experience and a different skill set. Some will make the transition more easily than others, but the bottom line is that we must train writing/editorial staff to develop online content and hire experts from outside who already possess these writing/editing skills who can ensure effective and consistent online content.

In a nutshell, writing for the Web is most like direct marketing copy writing, with a twist for the special format of the computer screen (or other electronic device). Writers/editors of online content must:

- Write copy in short blocks.
- Use headers to help break up copy. Headers should generate interest and excitement.
- Write compelling copy to keep the visitor engaged.
- Sell the benefit to the visitor, why he/she should continue reading. Answer the question, "What's in it for me?"
- Include a call to action. What do you want your visitor to do? Ask him/her to do it.
- Use good direct marketing language with active voice, clear language, simple yet variable sentence structure.

Writing Web copy/content for a university also requires careful consideration of the audience and purpose of the content. The description of an academic major for a prospective student will be very different once that student matriculates and becomes a UNL freshman. The Web content may "shift" from informational and persuasive (content aimed at recruiting) to archival and retrieval (content aimed at advising).

*"Infrastructure"*

Much like the University itself, a Web site and presence is a very complex enterprise. From a development perspective, creating technology that is easy and simple for the user actually requires very complex and sophisticated software and hardware. Conversely, simplicity in software/hardware design often results in confusing and complicated end user experiences. (The iPod nano from Apple is an excellent example of a simple and elegant user experience that required incredible technical prowess in development...

*"We use every fraction of a millimeter of space to get things in there," says Apple senior vice president Phil Schiller. "It's like a puzzle to fit all that stuff together. It has the tightest tolerances of anything we've ever made in the history of this company."*<sup>4</sup>

For our Web presence to meet the needs and expectations of our audiences, present a consistent message and embrace the existing and future potential of the Internet requires quite a bit of "behind the scenes" infrastructure, much of it very complex and sophisticated.

The committee provides a set of discussion points regarding both software/hardware and human resource requirements for this initiative to find full success. This discussion is greatly informed by the past and current efforts of the Web Developer Network, as it continues developing relationships among campus entities for greater collaboration. The specific work of the Next Generation Redevelopment Group as a subset of the Web Developer Network is closely aligned with the NGWC and the recommendations of this white paper.

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4 Grossman, Lev, TIME, September 15, 2005.

## Recommendations

### **(1) Need for Shared Vision and Oversight**

Tremendous work has been done to date regarding the Web. UNL is a very comprehensive institution with remarkable talent and achievement. However, these efforts aren't always obvious to the campus as a whole. The need for a campus entity to provide direction and guidance and to respond quickly with support for emerging needs and technologies is critical. **Recommendation 1:** A **steering committee** model should be adopted that functions in an *ad hoc* manner to provide direction and coordination to the campus' continuing and growing Web presence. This committee should report directly to the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. This particular recommendation reflects the need for this steering committee to facilitate, coordinate and address emerging issues that involve both academic and business functions.

### **(2) Design for Audience**

From the prospective student to the international graduate student, from alumni to faculty, from the general public to decision makers, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln serves diverse audiences. These various audiences (and others not specifically mentioned) have differing needs and expectations. Content, presentation, organization and other factors targeted to audiences must influence future Web development. **Recommendation 2a:** The site map should reflect this aspect (audience-based rather than institution-based) in its organization. *(Please see below for more discussion of the site map.)*

**Recommendation 2b:** Redevelopment of web content and infrastructure should begin immediately with the **"prospective student"** (high school) audience. This particular audience presents perhaps the campus' highest priority and is the most challenging in terms of its needs and expectations.

### **(3) Present a Consistent Message**

The UNL brand needs to be protected and celebrated. The particular ways in which this is accomplished via Web technologies must be intentional.

**Recommendation 3:** Identify the **best practices** that yield the "UNL brand and identity in such a way that they can be adopted by any aspect of UNL who desires a Web presence, be it department, unit, organization or individual.

### **(4) Write for the Web/Embrace the Technology**

The Web is not print. We need to consciously develop our content recognizing that it is a qualitatively different medium.

**Recommendation 4a:** The University needs to identify and place Web editors whose function is to ensure strong, compelling online content that matches the strong, compelling look and feel of all our diverse Web sites. These individuals must come to these positions with a Web-writing/Web-editing background and expertise. Then they can serve as trainers and mentors for the other writers and editors on campus. The Web editors need to be located in various departments and units across campus, to ensure that the hundreds of Web sites and thousands of Web pages generated by faculty and staff may be properly evaluated and edited. Web editors needs to be located, at a minimum, in the following areas:

- University Communications
- IANR Communications and Information Technology (CIT)
- Colleges (e.g., College of Arts and Sciences and College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources)
- Other larger units such as the School of Natural Resources

**Recommendation 4b:** Continue to design and implement resources that are **technology-specific** and thus unique to the Web and to UNL (i.e. podcasts, multimedia downloads). This recommendation should be addressed in conjunction with the "Design for Audience Recommendation 2b" since the high school student, as prospective student, expects such a technology-rich environment. *Please see the following discussion concerning site map in regards to technology-specific implementations and suggestions.*

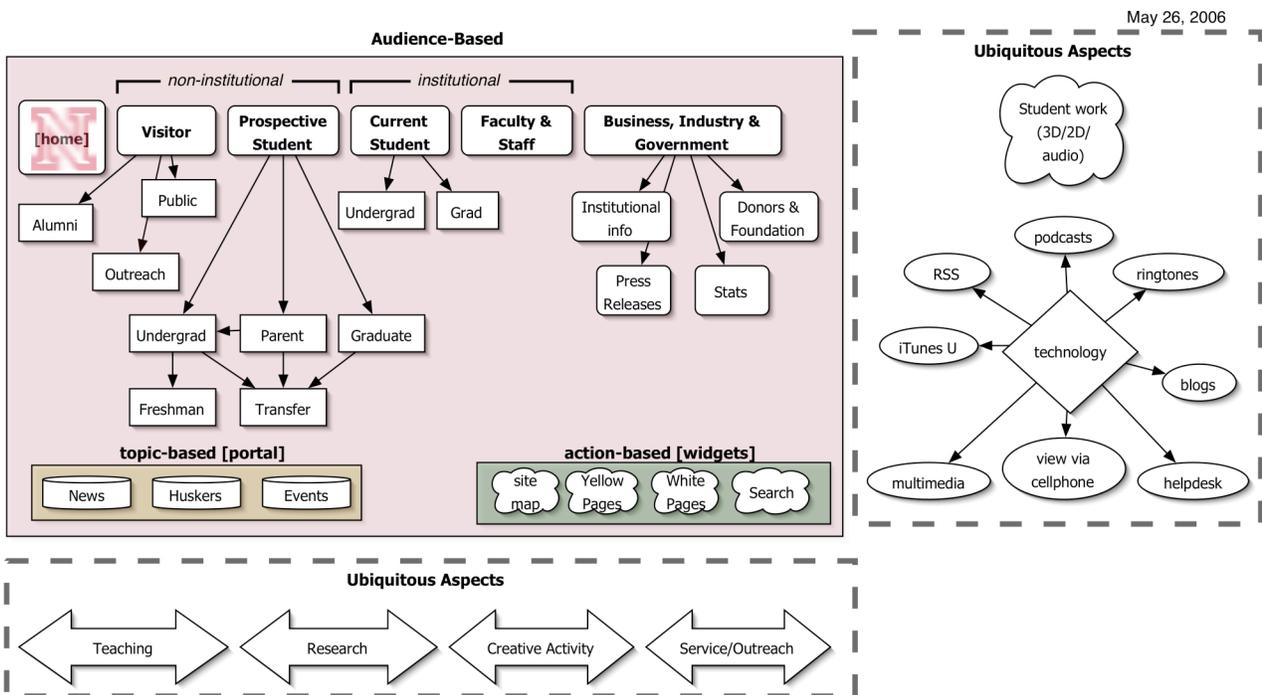
**(5) Site Map**

This initial proposal for the revised site map accounts for the broad areas of (1) Design for Audience, (2) Present a Consistent Message and (3) Write for the Web/Embrace the Technology. The Audience-Based approach structures our presence as “non-institutional” and “institutional.” Often, universities present themselves as if everyone understands their particular nature and structure. As an example, a high school senior interested in majoring in dance will NOT know to go to the School of Music, let alone something called “Hixson-Lied College.” Once that same student is a freshman, such institutional knowledge has been gained.

Topic-based [portal] and action-based [widgets] reflect product and process that would pervade every page. Such tools and topics are NOT audience-specific, but rather help support the identity.

We have added a category titled “ubiquitous aspects” that is concerned with technology itself and what separates UNL from other organizations. Since our medium of concern is technology based, we suggest ways of providing value-added aspects that highlight our technology (i.e. download ringtones, enable Web pages to be viewed on cell phones, provide podcast content). The other aspect relates to our mission of teaching, research/creative activity and service/outreach. These are the qualities that separate us from corporations, from peer institutions (and rivals) and other Nebraska universities and colleges.

**Recommendation 5: Site Map**



**(6) Infrastructure – Technical**

Rather than a specific recommendation, listed here is a somewhat prioritized listing of needed resources and services. Further discussion and strategies will need to be outlined, especially as to whether each needs to be centralized, localized or both.

- Content Management System (CMS) – this would provide dynamic content and a more robust means for maintenance and, hence, adoption of UNL Web content. This requires a database-driven approach and moves UNL forward from a template-based development scheme to a true Web Publishing System. The Next Generation Coding Group has specified the PHP/MySQL framework for their collaborative projects and is thus designing now with this potential in sight – a critically

- important design decision. For complete adoption and scalability, UNL will need to provide for a centralized, centrally-maintained infrastructure for database-driven Website publishing.
- Search (site wide and area specific), people, white pages, yellow pages. (Noted in site map recommendations) (NOTE: metadata for searching and/or authorship needs to be addressed on a page-by-page basis)
  - Events Publishing System (Calendar, Upcoming Events, eNews) lists, *NOTE: This effort is currently under way in the Next Generation Redevelopment Group by bringing together a large-scale collaborative effort that will result in a university-scale solution to the problem of storage and display of event information. The NGRG is working in partnership with the University of California-Berkeley in this area.*
  - Feed Publishing System: Podcasting / RSS / blogs [itunesU]
  - Transactional services (registration and forms)
  - E-commerce
  - Intellectual copyright
  - Stats of department/unit site *NOTE: this service is currently offered to Web Develop Network members who have adopted templates.*
  - Organize R & D, testing, training, deployment – Project Management
  - Use of Web resources as strategic tools (tracking, usage, interaction) – data-driven decision making
  - Distributed/Collaborative models coupled with central resources
    - Distributed model asks all “what can you bring to the campus to support this initiative?” – See Appendix A
  - Design: separate structure from appearance from interaction – Model-View-Controller Paradigm – a “non-static” approach – helps to maintain currency and allows for potential future rapid development
  - support of innovation via open source/open standards possibilities
  - LDAP – directory services for universal authentication and other uses such as password protection for non-public content. *NOTE: Modern websites adapt themselves as they learn who a user is. The same page that presents data to the public by default can be programmed to deliver personalized data to people it knows. To do this, universal authentication is a mission-critical priority.*

### **(7) Infrastructure – Data**

Building a Web Data Warehouse would allow faculty, staff, experienced system developers, and institutional researchers to perform direct queries on academic and administrative data. **Recommendation 7:** Campus content such as course listings, schedule of classes, and student information should become centralized to provide data feeds that would be accurate and timely.

### **(8) Infrastructure – Human Resources**

As noted earlier, the Committee recommends (**Recommendation 8a**) that a **steering committee** model be adopted that functions in an *ad hoc* manner to provide direction and coordination to the campus’ continuing and growing Web presence. This model reflects the idea that membership would be more fluid than a standing committee, both in terms of number and makeup. The *ad hoc* manner refers to the need for such a committee to easily re-invent itself for any emerging technology or issue. Such an approach more closely parallels the team approach often taken in large software development projects. This committee should report directly to upper administration in its efforts to facilitate, coordinate and address emerging issues, as well as provide vision and forethought.

Furthermore, the current campus entities related to the Web need to be clarified in regards to these recommendations. This should include, but not be limited to, CWIS, Academic Affairs, Office of Communications, and Information Services. Recommendations should be offered for new responsibilities/entities where appropriate.

Other human resource issues include:

- Determine organizationally whether Web and web application developers need to be centralized, localized, or both.
- Determine best campus organizational approaches – committees vs. volunteer structures – (identify current models of campus-wide oversight – i.e. Honors) for Web content providers.
- Assist with “writing for Web” and content issues
- Train existing writing/editorial staff in units and departments across the University to develop Web-based content. Hire professional marketing writers to develop high-level content.

- Identify Web editors to oversee all Web content. These editors must be distributed across the campus. It is unrealistic to believe that one centralized editor can oversee the Web content for hundreds of sites emanating from units and departments at the University.
- Develop multiple strategies for encouraging and ensuring adoption – internal communication plan – marketing plan
- UNL administration must give authority to a designated group to develop an internal marketing communications plan that achieves the following objectives
  - Clearly delineate the audience benefits of adopting a University-wide Web development strategy.
  - Develop a coordinated communications campaign to help internal audiences understand what the Web development strategy entails, how it will be implemented, the role that each individual will have in implementation and where to find help in implementing the strategy.
  - Identify resources (human, Websites, training, etc.) to help internal audiences implement the Web development strategy.

Several issues impact upon the campus-wide adoption of any of these recommendations. It will be critical for implementation of any compliance concerns/strategies be accompanied (or even preceded) by:

- perceived ease of use/authoring
- perceived benefits (for power-users)
- training (materials, workshops, podcasts, documentation, etc.)
- accessibility issues
- provide adequate tools, utilities and materials
- provide access for beta testing and development for specific audiences; not only does UNL have a broad audience, but also broad group of developers.

To assist further in campus adoption, it would be beneficial to identify “champions” (both individuals and units) who serve as mentors and models. There is an important need to identify key people for buy-in as well as the expertise on this campus that may not be obvious (i.e. Greg Beaver, cellist for the Chira String Quartet is a key player in the PEAR open-source PHP arena). The campus may benefit from formal and informal recognition for creative/technical work done in the area of Web as well as seeking publishing venues for the dissemination of lessons learned in our collective efforts.

Finally, the committee notes that these recommendations require much commitment of resources, both financial and human. To move ahead as efficiently and effectively as possible, an exclusively top-down approach is neither prudent nor reasonable. At the same time, individual Colleges and Units should not be expected to reinvent the wheel. **Recommendation 8b:** adopt a **distributed/collaborative model** of Web development and deployment with the steering committee providing guidance and oversight. The Web Developer Network, as a volunteer entity, has undertaken this approach since its inception in 2003. To provide examples beyond the Web Developer Network, the committee members each were asked to suggest what their particular College/Unit could contribute such an endeavor. These observations may be read in Appendix A.

### Recommendation for Initial Implementation Timeline

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| May 26, 2006     | White Paper completed   |
| May-August, 2006 | NGRG develops, designs and codes UNL '06 web design, based on sitemap from Recommendation #2a. Units using current template are first priority to move to new design. |
| June 2006        | Briefing of White Paper with Joan Giesecke, Kent Hendrickson, Gary Aerts  |
| June/July 2006   | Transition phase where makeup of steering committee (personnel, structure, responsibilities, etc.) are conceived and approved   |
| June/July 2006   | NGRG develops reference designs for content areas. Web Template Training curriculum redeveloped   |
| August 2006      | Steering Committee constituted (Recommendation #1)  |

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|-----------------|--|
| August 14, 2006 | Public deployment of UNL '06 redesign, with majority of current template-based sites moving to new design  |
| August 2006     | Recommendations #6, 7, 8 (Infrastructure) begin planning and implementation  |
| August-Dec 2006 | Continuing development of documentation, training components for adoption of UNL '06 templates   |
| Sept/Oct 2006   | Steering Committee coordinates pilot for <b>Prospective Student</b> audience (process should be carefully documented to facilitate replication for future content development effort) (Recommendation #2b and #4b) |
| Jan 2006        | Infrastructure Proposals developed that pertain to campus organization of resources (Recommendation #6-8)  |

### **In Closing**

Our Web presence is more than our identity – it is in part not only who we are, but also what we do. Many corporations and institutions require Web technologies to implement their business functions. UNL is no different. However, our need and application of the Web extends well into our academic mission, especially in teaching, research and service. UNL has faculty and students with tremendous experience and expertise in all aspects of web technologies, from design to deployment. We have degree programs that can be delivered all on-line and courses in the areas of Website creation, graphic and sound design, instructional design of software, and technology for research and creativity. For UNL, the Web is not simply process, but product as well.

As diverse as this University is, so much more are the audiences with which we need to reach, connect and interact. Much has been accomplished and we need to acknowledge and even celebrate what has been done. Much more however, lies before us if we are to actualize our core values through our Web presence. The recommendations presented here are made in the spirit of campus communication, cooperation and coordination, all in the pursuit of excellence without compromise.

## **Appendices**

### *Appendix A: Toward a Distributed Model of UNL Web Development and Deployment*

#### **CBA Contributions to the Short- and Long-Range UNL Web Presence**

The College of Business Administration can offer UNL Web services such as leadership, project management, marketing design, aesthetic design, page development, software application development in ASP.NET and PHP framework, site hosting, e-commerce PayFuse hosting and development, application hosting in ASP and PHP, Microsoft development software, server administration in Microsoft IIS/SQL, PHP and Windows 2003, and site backups.

#### **CIT Contributions to the Long-Range UNL Web Presence**

IANR's Communications and Information Technology (CIT) offers a broad range of creative and technical services. The DEAL Lab makes learning come alive through interactive teaching tools, 2-D and 3-D simulations and Website development and content management systems. Electronic Media provides professional production services for TV, radio, satellite, Internet, podcasting and vodcasting. Publishing offers professional graphic design, illustration, writing and editing services and consulting for printed and online media. News and Photography assists with information dissemination locally to internationally; offers live photography and photo library services; and provides scientific writing and editing services. Finally, IT offers infrastructure support, Website hosting, e-commerce and content security management. The benefit to UNL's Web audiences from CIT's contributions would be targeted and compelling content integrated across media and incorporating innovative leading-edge technology.

#### **College of Education and Human Sciences Contributions**

Perhaps no other college has invested the amount time and talent towards distance education as CEHS. Current courses directly impact the issues addressed in this report including: production and design of instructional materials ((TEAC860), Instructional Message Design (TEAC859), Interactive Media (TEAC882D) and database design within the context of instructional media (TEAC882B). The College has undertaken several projects which have potential for campus-wide adoption (such as eARFA which is an attempt at on-line faculty evaluation portfolio development and analysis). Clearly CEHS is positioned to offer expertise in measurement and evaluation as well as project management. For example, the doctoral population in Education Administration offers tremendous expertise in supervision, curriculum and administration. Much work and attention has already been directed at "fringe technologies" such as podcasting and how they can be integrated into the education setting.

#### **Hixson-Lied College of Fine and Performing Arts Contributions to the Long-Range Web Presence**

The Hixson-Lied College of Fine and Performing Arts represents tremendous creative potential and output from faculty, staff and students alike. Student work in the form of 2D art (i.e. Photo, original art, line drawing) for graphic design use, 3D (multi-media movies, slideshows) and audio (music) ought to be made available to the university community for inclusion in sites. Issues of ownership and copyright will need to be addressed, however the impact of external visitors seeing and hearing creative work BY STUDENTS would be a huge plus.

#### **Information Services: New Media Center Contributions to the Long-Range UNL Web Presence**

As part of a larger consortium, the Information Services New Media Center serves as a catalyst for the development of new applications of technology to support learning and creative expression, and sponsors programs and activities designed to stimulate innovation, encourage collaboration. The NMC stimulates dialog and understanding through the exploration of promising ideas, technologies, and applications. A key component of the center is the union of teaching and research by using applied principles learned in the research process.

#### **Office of Admissions**

The Office of Admissions has expertise in marketing to prospective students through a multifaceted communications plan. Admissions maintains a dynamic database of all prospective undergraduate students.

A "Get More Information" Web form is available to all departments. Information from this form is loaded directly into the database ensuring students receive information in a timely manner. Colleges have access to this data through their college recruitment coordinator

Admissions maintains the online "Red Bar" sheets that provide information on all University of Nebraska-Lincoln majors. Information is updated at the request of the department.

**Office of University Communications**

The Office of University Communications Internet and Interactive Media department coordinates the continuous development of UNL templates, and is responsible for the top levels of the UNL website, including the UNL homepage and the 'UNL Today' internal homepage. University Communications also develops web applications and multimedia content, such as the Peoplefinder directory and the UNL Online Tour. UComm engages in outreach and discussion with UNL web developers by coordinating the over 140 members of the UNL Web Developer Network and its associated Next-Generation Design Group and Next-Generation Coding Groups. University Communications, in collaboration with Information Services, provides curriculum and direct support to UNL web developers engaged in template adoption for their websites.

*Appendix B: Initial Memo of Invitation to the NGWC*

December 9, 2005

UNL ad hoc: **Next Generation Web Committee** (NGWC)

UNL Web Developer Network: **Next Generation Redevelopment Group** (NGRG)

**Overview:** The Office of University Communications has begun the process of redesign of UNL's Web presence and has sought to undertake this as a campus wide initiative. An ad hoc committee was conceived to provide direct recommendations to the Web Developers' Network. Prior to accepting the chair of this ad hoc committee, I asked if the charge could be broadened to include "strategic planning" and the answer is YES!

Two groups are thus formed: (please see roster) (1) Next Generation Web Committee and (2) Next Generation Redevelopment Group. Each has separate charges, but are very closely aligned.

The NGWC has two goals: (1) Develop a white paper/strategic plan (3 to 5 year perspective) for UNL's Web presence in all categories and (2) provide recommendations for the immediate redevelopment of what currently exists (this work carried out by the NGRG)

The NGRG has two goals as well: (1) Based upon #2 from NGWC, undertake the design work the next revision of the UNL Web target deployment being Sept 2006 and (2) develop the necessary templates, code, etc. as well as training recommendations and instructional and support modules to facilitate campus-wide adoption.

An important point to be emphasized: adopt a "blank screen" starting point. In all phases, let's not think in terms of the current designs, and what we'd do different. Rather, consider what is best to do as if we were starting from scratch.

### **Goals for the Next Generation Web Committee:**

There are two rather large goals for this ad hoc University Committee:

NWGT #1 - Develop a set of recommendations/policies (in the form of a white paper) as to future directions for UNL's Web presence [in short, a strategic plan for UNL Web development and deployment from a 3 to 5 year perspective]

- Outline the audiences and producers of Web content at UNL
- Identify attributes/characteristics/features/best practices that yield the "UNL brand and identity"
- Identify attributes/characteristics/features that allow for variety and creativity while still maintaining a UNL identity
- Identify needed resources and whether they need to be centralized or localized
- Outline and clarify roles of various campus entities related to Web (CWIS, Academic Affairs, Communications, IS, Blackboard, units, etc.) – create new responsibilities/entities where appropriate

NWGT #2 - Develop a set of guidelines/recommendations/policies for the immediate development of new templates/features/services for [www.unl.edu](http://www.unl.edu) [target date for implementation is September 2006]

- Develop guidelines and standards for required global elements for immediate revision of UNL Web [navigation, search, required elements, etc.]
- Outline standard optional elements (promo, photo library, streaming, transactional services, etc.)
- Develop recommendations outlining best practices for immediate Web development at UNL

### **Process:**

The primary group is the **Next Generation Web Committee** (NGWC). Membership reflects a balance between faculty and staff, with representation from city and east campus, and the **following colleges:**

- **Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources**  
*Architecture*  
*Arts and Sciences*
- **Business Administration**
- **Education and Human Sciences**  
*Engineering and Technology*

- **Fine and Performing Arts**  
*Graduate Studies*
- **Journalism and Mass Communications**  
*Law*

The following campus entities are also represented:

- **Information Services**
- **Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources**
- **Office of Academic Affairs**
- **Office of Undergraduate Admissions**
- **Office of University Communications**

The Next Generation Web Committee will provide the vision, oversight, recommendations and white papers for the topics presented above. A second team, drawn from the Web Developers Network, will complement the membership of the NGWC (see roster below). The Next Generation Redevelopment Group (working title!) will be asked to develop prototype design, code, structure, and technical documentation for NGWC Item #2.

The following timetable is suggested:

| <b>Date</b>          | <b>NGWC Effort</b>  | <b>NGRD Effort</b>                                   |
|----------------------|---|--|
| <b>December 2005</b> | Initial meeting of NGWC   |  |
|                      | begin work on Item #1   |  |
| <b>January 2006</b>  | Develop specs for prototypes for Item #2 based upon preliminary points from Item #1 | Initial meeting of WDN Work Group                    |
|                      | Draft of outline of white paper for Item #1   |  |
| <b>February 2006</b> | Develop protocols for use of focus group as additional resource                     | Alpha Design Phase Begins Based Upon Item #1 outline |
| <b>March 2006</b>    | Focus groups: student input begins here<br>Review Alpha Design                      | Beta Phase with focus group as additional resource   |
|                      | Draft of white paper for #1   | Continue work on beta #1                             |
| <b>April 2006</b>    | Feature set for Item #2 frozen  | Testing of code and design                           |
|                      | Recommendations for adoption process for #2   | Draft of Technical Documentation and Best Practices  |
| <b>May – August</b>  | Preparation of final white papers   | Training sessions developed, tested                  |

**Next Generation Web Committee****Brian Moore** – CHAIR [bmoore1@unl.edu](mailto:bmoore1@unl.edu)Assoc Professor - School of Music  
358 WMB UNL 68588-0100  
(402)472-2537**Brenda Caine** [bcaine2@unl.edu](mailto:bcaine2@unl.edu)Director - Comm Information Technology  
104 ACB Lincoln 68583-0918  
(402)472-2821**Robert Crisler** [rcrisler1@unl.edu](mailto:rcrisler1@unl.edu)Internet and Interactive - Office of Univ Comm  
321 ADM UNL 68588-0424  
(402)472-9878**David DeFruiter** [ddefruiter1@unl.edu](mailto:ddefruiter1@unl.edu)Director - College of Business Administration  
214 CBA UNL 68588-0405  
(402)472-7927**Todd Jensen** [tjensen2@unl.edu](mailto:tjensen2@unl.edu)New Media Center Manager - Information Services  
116 ARCH UNL 68588-0104  
(402)472-0979**Kirk Kløver** [kkløver2@unl.edu](mailto:kkløver2@unl.edu)Assistant Director - Admissions  
1410 Q St ALEX UNL 68588-0417  
(402)472-4256**Nancy Mitchell** [nmitchell1@unl.edu](mailto:nmitchell1@unl.edu)Assoc Professor - Advertising  
337 ANDN UNL 68588-0449  
(402)472-5647**Ronald Roeber** [roeber1@unl.edu](mailto:roeber1@unl.edu)Associate Vice Chancellor for Facilities and Information  
208 ADM UNL 68588-0420  
(402)472-3751**Allen Steckelberg** [asteckelberg1@unl.edu](mailto:asteckelberg1@unl.edu)Assoc Professor  
Teaching Learning and Teac  
59 HENZ UNL 68588-0355  
(402)472-5491**Matthew Moehle** [moehle@bigred.unl.edu](mailto:moehle@bigred.unl.edu)PhD Student, Music Education  
356 WMB UNL 68588-0100  
(402)472-6041**Next Generation Redevelopment Group****Robert Crisler** – CHAIR [rcrisler1@unl.edu](mailto:rcrisler1@unl.edu)Internet and Interactive - Office of University Comm  
321 ADM UNL 68588-0424  
(402)472-9878**Vishal Singh** [vsingh2@unl.edu](mailto:vsingh2@unl.edu)Comm Information Technology  
002 ACB UNL 68583-0918  
(402)472-7856**Brett Bieber** [bbieber2@unl.edu](mailto:bbieber2@unl.edu)Interactive Media and Web - Office of Univ Comm  
321 ADM UNL 68588-0424  
(402)472-1598**Angela Stueckrath** [astueckrath2@unl.edu](mailto:astueckrath2@unl.edu)Web Services Coordinator  
College of Business Administration  
18A CBA UNL 68588-0405  
(402)472-3769**Mark Hiatt** [mhiatt1@unl.edu](mailto:mhiatt1@unl.edu)Associate Web Developer - Information Services  
118 501 UNL 68588-0203  
(402)472-0067**Seth Miranda** [smeranda2@unl.edu](mailto:smeranda2@unl.edu)Admissions Computing Coordinator  
1410 Q St ALEX UNL 68588-0417  
(402)472-1530**Marilyn Hahn** [mhahn1@unl.edu](mailto:mhahn1@unl.edu)Communication Specialist  
College of Journalism and Mass Communications  
318 ANDN UNL 68588-0443  
(402)472-0876**Paul Erickson** [perickson3@unl.edu](mailto:perickson3@unl.edu)Manager, Faculty/Staff Development  
Information Services  
118C 501 UNL 68588-0203  
(402)472-1657**Daniel Schmit** [dschmit2@unl.edu](mailto:dschmit2@unl.edu)Instructional Technology  
College of Education and Human Resources  
207 MABL UNL 68588-0234  
(402)472-1717**Zeljka Hassler** [zpaul2@unl.edu](mailto:zpaul2@unl.edu)Comm Information Technology  
002 ACB UNL 68583-0918  
(402)472-5292**Marcelo Plioplis** [mplioplis2@unl.edu](mailto:mplioplis2@unl.edu)Publications Specialist  
EE&O Independent Study HS  
212 900 N 21st St UNL 68583-8101  
(402)472-4423**Brian Moore** [bmoore1@unl.edu](mailto:bmoore1@unl.edu)Assoc Professor - School of Music  
358 WMB UNL 68588-0100  
(402)472-2537