

Memorandum

To: Dr. Reynolds

From: Team Yellow- Kelley Ryan, Marquia Whitehead, Ana Williams, Angela Willingham

Date: 1/13/2019

Re: Recommendations Report for Graduate Students page and Department of Language & Communication page

Attached is our Recommendation Report for the Graduate Students page and Department of Language & Communication page. We completed the tasks described in our Group Project Assignment document: A transmittal letter (this memo), cover page, abstract, table of contents, executive summary, introduction, methods, results, conclusions, recommendations, references, and appendices.

To perform these tasks, we individually performed comparative research by looking at our assigned websites and comparing them to other websites. Then, discussed our observations with each other and compiled the elements together in to one report.

Our findings suggest that the University will probably be very receptive to our suggested changes. In addition, if Northwestern implements our suggestions, students will be positive about it-provided that the changes are made with the students in mind.

On the basis of these findings, we recommend that the University proceed with a test website and gather a test group to see if the changes are effective.

We appreciate you giving us the opportunity to participate in the initial changes of this website, and we look forward to working with you on other projects.

Please let us know if you have any concerns. You can reach us at these email addresses: Kelley Ryan: kryan7@student.nsula.edu, Marquia Whitehead: mwhiteh8@student.nsula.edu, Ana Williams: ACOLLS001@student.nsula.edu, Angela Willingham: awilling@student.nsula.edu.
Thank you.

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**Redesigning Northwestern State University of Louisiana
Department of Language & Communication and Current
Graduate Students' Page:
A Recommendation Report**

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Northwestern State University of Louisiana

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July 22, 2013

Abstract

Recommendations Report for Graduate Students Page and Department of Language and Communication Page

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The Graduate level Advanced Technical Writing summer course was assigned a group project that called for students to analyze the Northwestern State University English Department's webpage. Dr. Reynolds assigned each group two specific pages from the website. The above group, named the "Yellow Team," was asked to evaluate the Current Graduate Students Page and the Department of Language and Communication home page. Each member evaluated the pages and gave their opinion of what should and should not be changed. When conducting the research, each group member used either outside sources or the course textbook as guidelines for a successful webpage. The group members also compared the current website to other universities' websites. Each group member worked both independently on specific portions of the project and collectively to combine ideas to form one consistent document. By comparing the websites and researching other sources, we found that the main concern was the lack of creativity and use of media to provide an attention-grabbing website that not only gives information but also attracts potential and current students. It is important for the department website hold students' attention. Unlike many of the websites used for a basis of comparison, the department webpage is not able to accomplish this. There are many elements in the website that need to be changed. We believe that if the recommendations entailed in the group project are followed, the English Department's website will become a top website to visit.

Keywords: successful websites, creativeness of websites, font size, graphics, color, visual organization, web browser, Louisiana State University Graduate page, Department of Language and Communication, navigation

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Executive Summary

Dr. Reynolds assigned the Advanced Technical Writing class a group project, in which each team was to evaluate specific pages of the Department of Language and Communication's webpage. Each group was to evaluate the assigned pages and submit a project that provided recommendations that could be used to improve the website. Each group received a name; our name is the Yellow Group.

First, we evaluated the Current Graduate Students page. Currently, the webpage is lacking interest and creativity. The Yellow Group evaluated the entire page and considered different ways to improve it in order to attract student use. Because a major method that can be used to attract students is the creative use of media and pictures, the group decided a banner would be a useful addition to the page. We went a step further and compared it to the graduate websites of Nicholls State University and Louisiana State University. Both websites exhibited a great amount of color and use of pictures, making them attractive webpages. These comparisons can be found in the results section, through the use of screen shots.

The Yellow Group also evaluated the Department of Language and Communications home page. We came to the conclusion that the website is lacking the content and creativity needed for an attractive webpage. We noticed the lack a section for a calendar and upcoming events. We found the organization of the page to be lacking. Despite the downfalls of the webpage, the group did notice some positives, the inclusion of a picture of Dr. McFarland and the proper use of headings. Both are considered to be great qualities of a webpage.

We found that there are several ways for a website to be successful. Not only did we make use of the course textbook, but we also found other helpful websites that gave guidelines for this topic. We compared other universities' websites to that of Northwestern. By comparing, we were able to observe a difference in structure. Conclusively, we understand that in order to be classified as a successful website, it should be professional, attractive, include photos, and easy to navigate. The webpages we were asked to evaluate each were lacking in these areas.

On the basis of these evaluations and recommendations, we recommend that Northwestern State University consider our improvements and make the necessary changes to the website. Because we are students, we understand what is desirable from a student's perception. Students would like to see a school webpage that does not initiate boredom. Instead, it should be attractive and creative, yet provide all of the necessary information.

The Yellow Group is very proud of the Northwestern English Department and is also delighted to be a part of such a great program. We ask that you consider these changes so that the website exemplifies to the public, prospective students and current students the greatness of the department!

Introduction

On July 1, 2013, Dr. Thomas Reynolds, Professor of the Advanced Technical Writing course at Northwestern State University of Louisiana instructed students enrolled in the course to review, evaluate, report on, re-envision, and, ultimately, redesign a specific web pages for Northwestern State University's Department of Language and Communication's website.

Currently, Northwestern State University's Department of Language and Communication's website is filled with information for the user, yet the information is not presented in a fashion which is eye-catching or appealing to the average reader. Similar issues exist with the Current Graduate Students Page—information is unclear, disorganized, and visually unappealing.

Dr. Reynolds has asked the Yellow Group to describe, analyze, and evaluate the pages as they currently exist based on the work from the semester, including consideration of appropriateness to audience, purpose and subject with regard to the information, organization, and design of the pages. He has asked that we make recommendations for ways in which the pages might be made more effective, efficient, and user-friendly, and that ultimately, we end with redesigned web pages.

Research Methods

The students of ENGL 5230 have been contracted to evaluate and aid in the redesign of Northwestern State University's Department of Language and Communication's website. Our group, the yellow group, was given two tasks:

1. Consider ways to improve the "Current Graduate Students" webpage.
2. Consider ways to improve the "Department of Language & Communication" home page.

In order to complete this task, each member of the group reviewed the assigned webpages and wrote evaluations of and recommendations for each of the pages. Many of the group members viewed comparable websites at other colleges and universities to use as a basis of comparison. We then emailed each group member a copy of these evaluations. After reading each other's thoughts, we conducted online meetings to review and discuss the various team members' opinions regarding the webpages. We then determined which recommendations would be formally presented in the final report.

Results

The Current Graduate Students Page

In this section, we present the results of our research for the Current Graduate Students page. For each of the tasks we carried out, we present the most important data we observed.

Task 1. Consider ways to improve the Current Graduate Students page.

The purpose of the Current Graduate Students page is to provide graduate students with guidelines on earning a graduate degree, examples of information graduate students are required to submit, and examples of Thesis proposals.

There were several positive elements found on the page. The page contains the same sidebar menu as the department webpage, keeping the website consistent. Useful contact information can be located at the bottom of the page. The university name and logo are located in the upper, left-hand corner. This logo acts as a link that allows the user to easily return to the university's home page.

When evaluating the page, we also discovered several negative elements. The page provides a list of bulleted links to .pdf files containing useful information for current graduate students. However, the links appear to be disorganized due to inconsistent spacing. While the headings are in bolded text, the font size is the same as the font size used for the link names, making all of the text run together. The font size is small and may be difficult for some users to read. This page is uninteresting because it lacks graphics, color, and visual organization. The page does not contain the same banner as many of the other pages. Finally, the tab on the web browser bar is labeled "Argus" instead of "Current Graduate Students," which is confusing.

The following pages contain screenshots of the Current Graduate Students page and two successful pages from academic websites.

Figure 1 shows that Northwestern State University's graduate page does not contain graphics or a large text size. The top right tab is labeled "Argus" instead of "Current Graduate Students".



Figure 1. The Graduate Students Page of Northwestern State University

Figure 2 shows a webpage that does contain graphics and headers in a larger text size. The tab is labeled "Welcome-Department of" so that the reader knows what page they are on.

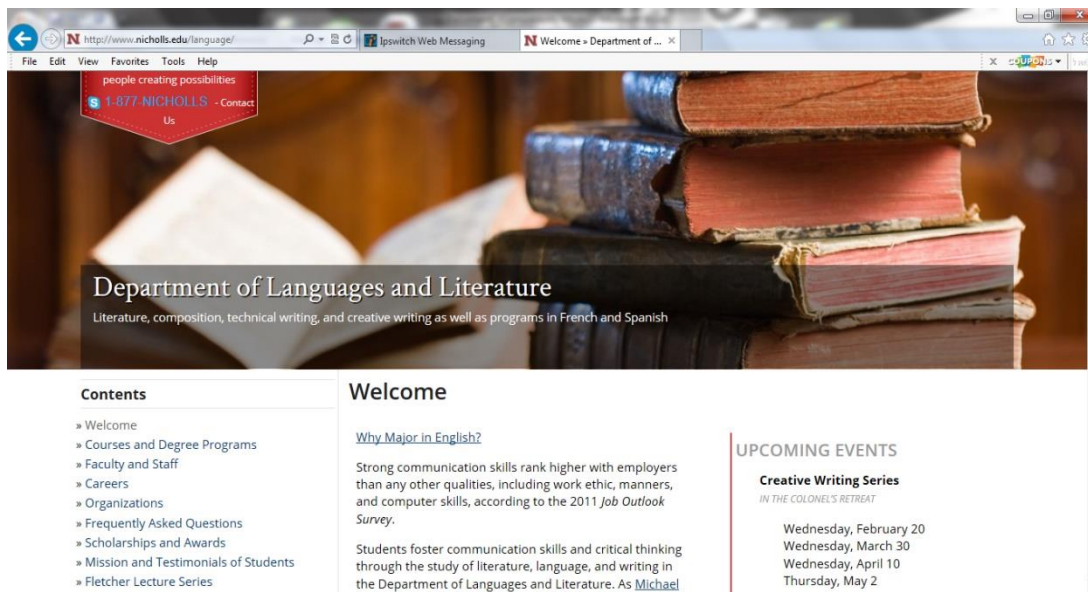


Figure 2. The Department of Languages and Literature at Nicholls State University.

Figure 3 also shows a web page that contains graphics and headers in a larger text size. The tab says “Welcome to the Graduate P” so that the reader knows what page they are on.



Figure 3. Louisiana State University’s Graduate page

Task 2. Consider ways to improve the Department of Language & Communication Home Page.

The purpose of The Department of Language & Communication Home Page is to communicate to prospective and existing students what the department can do for them in their careers and in other areas of their lives.

We found several positive features on this page. The page contains a clear heading welcoming users to the website. The heading stands out because the font size is large and it is a different color than the rest of the text on the page. There is a picture of Dr. McFarland, the department head, located at the bottom of the page. This allows users to be able to connect the name to a face. There is a link embedded in the university name and logo found at the top, left-hand side of the page, providing a way for users to easily navigate to the university's home page. A search bar is located in the upper, right-hand corner of the page. This allows users to conduct specific searches to locate information quickly. Useful contact information is located at the bottom of the page.

We also found the page lacking in several ways. The page is text heavy. It contains several long paragraphs that contain distracting jargon. While there is a side bar menu of department pages, it is not well organized or visually pleasing. The page is lacking a section or calendar for upcoming dates. These problems make the page boring and unappealing to users.

The following pages contain screenshots of the Department of Language & Communications page and two successful pages from academic websites.

Figure 1 shows that Northwestern State University's Department of Language & Communication page does not contain large text and an events section. We can also see that the paragraphs are long.

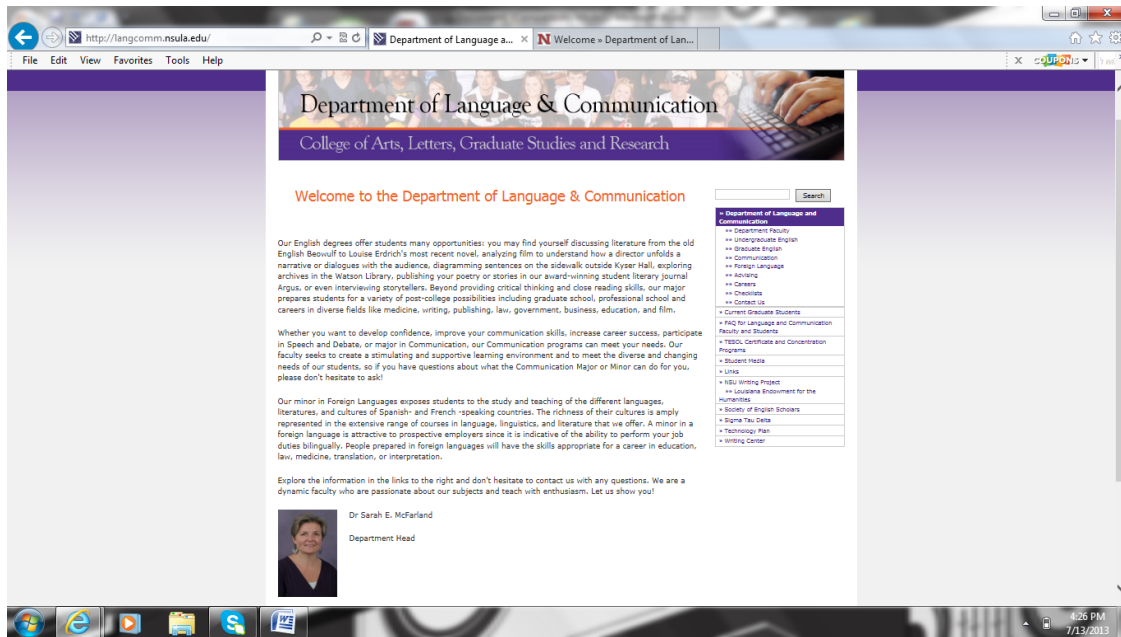


Figure 1. Northwestern State University's Department of Language & Communication page.

Figure 2 shows a webpage that contains larger text and an events section. It also has a visually appealing side bar menu. This page also has a scrolling marquee of pictures with descriptions.



Figure 2. The Illinois State University Department of English page.

Figure 3 shows a webpage that contains appropriate paragraph lengths.

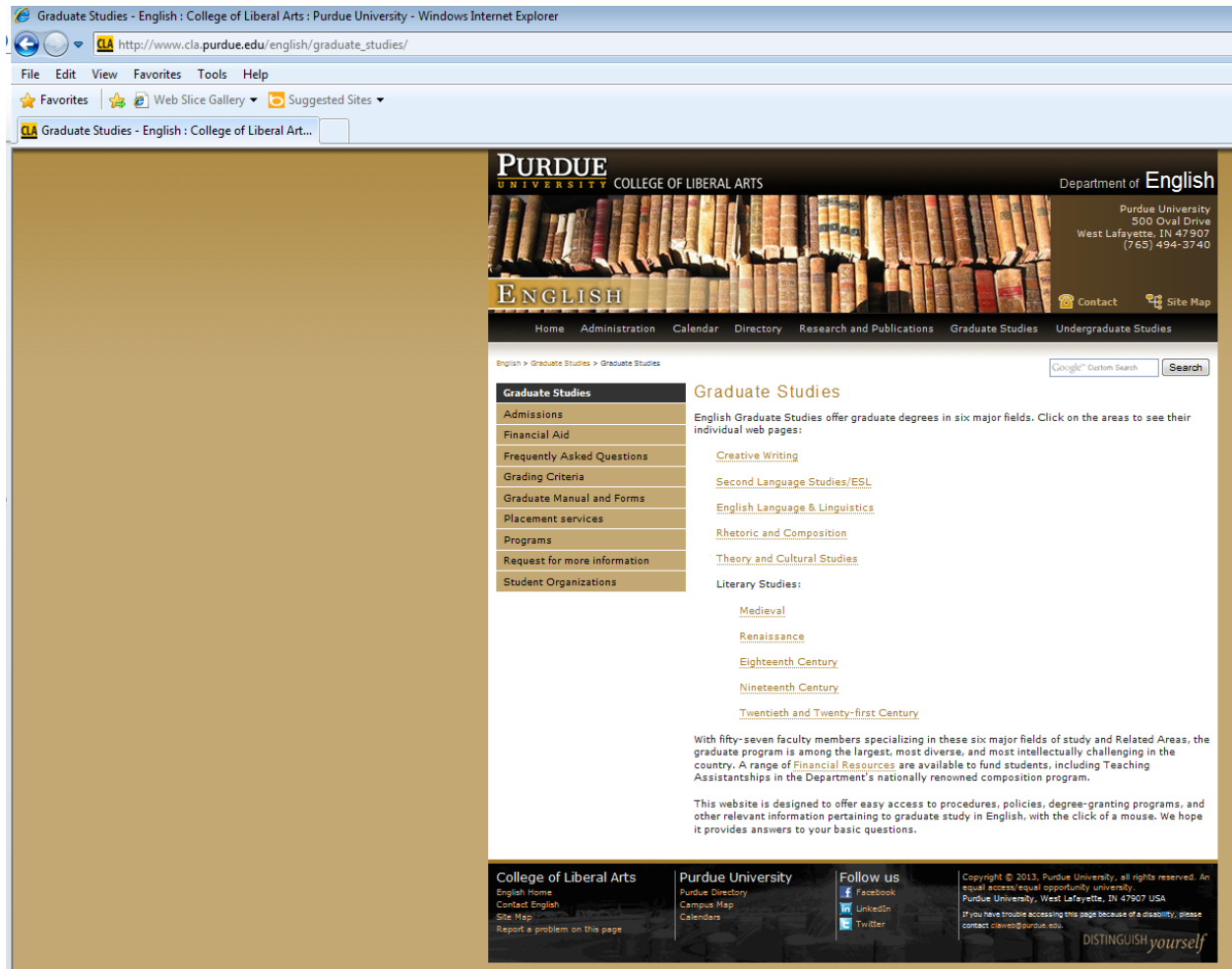


Figure 3. Purdue University's College of Liberal Arts in Graduate Studies page.

Conclusions

We concluded that if our recommendations are followed, both the Department of Language and Communications home page and the Current Graduate Students page will be greatly improved. With the new Department of Language and Communications home page layout, users will find a page more visually appealing and the links on the right-hand side make for a page which is more user-friendly. The recommended format will create an interest in the page, where a current or prospective student will want to utilize the page more and seek out information, rather than quickly skipping past the page.

With the recommendations for the Current Graduate Students page utilized, users will find a page which contains more information than what is currently available. Because the new page will feature information which is clearly labeled and neatly organized, current graduate students will be able to more easily access the information necessary for their success at Northwestern State University of Louisiana. Because the links on the right-hand side of the page are a larger and the same as the Department of Language and Communications home page, users will be able to easily follow the links and will have a familiarity with the pages and department as a whole.

Recommendations

We have several recommendations for the improvement of the Current Graduate Students page.

1. It would be beneficial to add a banner to the page in order to increase consistency between the pages in the department website.
2. A larger text size for the attachment names and headers is also recommended to aid users who may have difficulty reading the small text that is currently being used.
3. The spacing between the links on the page should be made more consistent, and the link groupings should be divided into chunks in order to make the organization more obvious.
4. The font size of the headings needs to be enlarged in order to clearly separate them from the link titles.
5. Finally, the tab for the page needs to be changed from “Argus” to “Current Grad Students” in order to avoid confusion.

We also have several recommendations for the improvement of “The Department of Language & Communication” homepage.


1. The font size of both the paragraphs and links need to be made larger in order to help those who have difficulty reading the small text.
2. Shorter or fewer paragraphs would also improve the readability of the page.
3. The sidebar of navigational links should be reorganized for clarity.
4. We recommend a scrolling marquee containing pictures with brief descriptions in order to make the page seem more personal.
5. This page needs the addition of a news and an events section to keep students informed.
6. Finally, it would be useful if a calendar of events was added to the page.

References

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Appendix A: Redesign of Current Graduate Students Page

This is a mock-up of the new Current Graduate Students page. We created the design based on our evaluations of the original page and the recommendations for improvements.



Department of Language & Communication

College of Arts, Letters, Graduate Studies and Research

Home >> Current Graduate Student Resources

Current Graduate Student Resources

Guidelines	Samples	Department Faculty
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How to plan your degree program – Milestones by semester Deadlines for submission of Thesis Proposals, Thesis, and Papers-in-lieu of Thesis Comprehensive Examinations – required of all Papers-in-lieu students General Guidelines for Thesis, Research Projects, and Field Studies – Office of Graduate Studies and Research Guidelines for submitting final thesis copies to graduate school (pages 13 – 15 of Graduate Catalog) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sample thesis signature page Completed signature page Sample thesis title page Sample copyright page Sample abstract pages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Literature Linguistics Folklife Sample thesis proposals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Literature Linguistics Folklife 	Programs Undergraduate English Graduate English Communications Foreign Language TESOL Resources Advising Careers Checklists Writing Center FAQ Current Graduate Students Student Media NSU Writing Project Society of English Scholars

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Appendix B: Proposed Redesign of the Department of Language and Communication Home Page

This is a mock-up of the new Current Graduate Students page. We created the design based on our evaluations of the original page and the recommendations for improvements.

Department of Language & Communication
College of Arts, Letters, Graduate Studies and Research

Welcome to the Department of Language & Communication

Events

News

A new, revised message from Dr. McFarland would be placed in this box.

Brief information and/or links would be placed here.

Department Faculty

Programs

- Undergraduate English
- Graduate English
- Communications
- Foreign Language
- TESOL

Resources

- Advising
- Careers
- Checklists
- Writing Center
- FAQ

Current Graduate Students

Student Media

NSU Writing Project

Society of English Scholars

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