

HIGHLIGHTING SCHOOL OF EDUCATION SUCCESSES TO BUILD COMMUNITY

By

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Abstract

The project is a WordPress site to showcase faculty and students. This site is a companion piece to the redesigned University of Alaska Fairbanks School of Education website. It is intended to provide a visual resource to be used by faculty and staff to promote the uniqueness of current and recent developments in the School of Education. The site should serve as a space where staff and faculty may promote opportunities for current and recent graduates. It will also include graduate students' experiences via research, projects, career stories and testimonials provided by students. These materials will be linked in from the School of Education website under the proposed title of Showcase.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

The School of Education (SOE) website needs to be a vehicle to (a) increase interest in programs in order to generate more enrollments; (b) improve student satisfaction to impact retention; (c) generate community, internal and external, interest in and awareness of faculty and graduate student research and activities. By using a showcase to highlight the recent work being done by faculty and students, SOE has the opportunity to:

- Create a space that potential applicants can explore.
- Display faculty expertise.
- Highlight current graduate student work.
- Advertise current research and opportunities to the community.

Website viewers are more likely to take action when presented with an opportunity for personal development (Lieberman, 2016). A website needs to paint a picture where the prospect can see opportunities and experiences to which they relate (Lieberman, 2016). It is hard to know what a viewer wants to see. The website needs a mix of elements that appeals to different types of viewers.

Staff, expertise and time are primary factors in keeping a website up-to-date. Shein (2015) reports two main challenges as cost and mindset. University, department or program sites, are primarily committee-driven (Shein, 2015). Finances are problematic, resulting in internal staff maintaining websites versus building new ones (Shein, 2015).

Rationale

Websites are a primary source for information about a department, the faculty and the programs. Students need a community and the sense of community to help them feel connected. Connectedness helps them succeed. Department websites need to promote the research and

innovative activities of their staff. When I began my project work it was difficult to find information I was looking for on the SOE website. I proposed the idea of recreating the website using WordPress and received approval to move forward.

During the preliminary stages of the project the SOE website was completely updated. This impacted the project scope.

Base considerations for my project are to improve student connection and thus retention; to highlight career-driving elements of what the faculty and graduate students of SOE are doing, and to create a space where faculty and students may build community.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Website Audience

The University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) School of Education website should serve the needs of current students, staff, and the surrounding community. It is important to not cater just to possible recruits. Moloney (2016) writes that website improvements may “come at the expense of user experience among certain demographics” (para. 27). Potential audiences for a school websites include: prospective students, current students, parents, staff, the community, alumni, the press and other partners. The internal audience is all of the University of Alaska.

Every university website has many users. It is necessary to present a clear message, ease-of-use, navigation and tools to help viewers reach their goal. Potential students are looking at a website to determine what it would be like to attend that institution (para. 29). If there is content designed for current students it demonstrates the university cares about more than just new recruits.

Build Community.

Building community creates a sense of belonging. Generate interest for the department programs and goals as soon as a visitor comes to the website. Luo (2010) suggests this benefits current students. “The advent of social networks has provided a solution... the difficulty in community building and peer socializing due to the lack of face-to-face interactions” (p. 96). On the showcase pages SOE staff and faculty highlight student research, projects, career choices and testimonials. Student and faculty contributions to this area may serve to strengthen the sense of community (Moloney, 2016). Asking for content and presenting that content prominently on the department website indicates it is relevant to SOE.

Drouin and Vartanian (2010) explain a sense of community is derived when the learning environment “fosters interaction and social learning has been deemed an essential feature of the higher education experience for over 20 years” (p.148). Additionally, *Promoting Community for Online Learners in Special Education* focused on the need for community among learners. (West, Jones, Semon, 2012) Creating a platform where student testimonials are presented may assist in building community and thus retention of current students.

West (2010) makes the point that a student needs to learn how to apply their online social technology knowledge to being an online learner. Help your student contribute and build a successful online community; it allows the student to feel empowered (p. 69). *A Student’s Guide to Strengthening an Online Community* contains steps on instructor interaction with the student encouraging the student to interact with peers. Communication of this nature will benefit the student in the class and beyond. Building a cohort, and communicating with others reinforces the learning process.

Impact Retention.

In the online education environment, students lack connection (Leong, 2011, p. 5). This feeling of isolation has been shown to increase dropout rate. When students are taking the majority of their coursework in the online arena, the connections they have with departmental staff and professors, as well as the professional community, are essential “for retention of current learners and referrals of prospective students (Glazer & Wanstreet, 2011, p. 60).

Optimize Content

Today’s younger visitor considers every page a landing page (Hoover, 2015, para. 15). It is important to make all pages easy to read through the use of simple construction, bullets, visual elements, and eye catching headlines (“CRO for Higher Education,” 2016, para. 6). Users read very little on a website (Nielsen, 2013). Using worthless words—those with little or no connection to the most common search terms—is a waste.

A visitor may not have come to a SOE page through any other UAF or UA page, but straight from a search engine. Add information like university rankings and graduate career statistics to draw interest (Moloney, 2016).

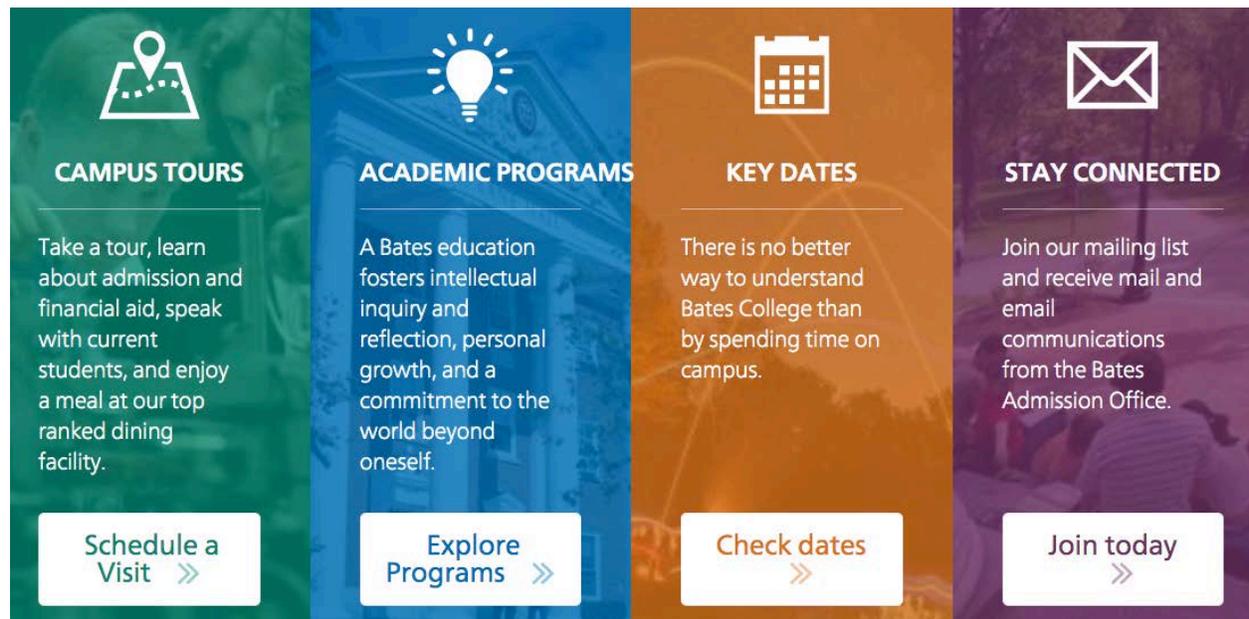
Figure 2.1 Bates College Landing Page Calls-to-action

Figure 2.1. Bates College landing page includes vibrant images with buttons to serve as calls-to-action for different types of visitors. The headings are easy to read. The icons have meaning. The buttons are large enough to easily touch. This screenshot is an image of a portion of the Bates College landing page (2016). Retrieved from <https://www.bates.edu> an older image was represented in the *Declutter Your Digital Space* article as example seven.

Remove Excess.

Web designers and content owners need to balance design elements and content. In particular the very eye-catching things which can be done quite easily with newer content management systems like Drupal and WordPress have some clients asking for flashy elements that may be counterintuitive to the goal of the web site. Case in point: moving banners. In Notre Dame's website testing 84% of clicks, out of 28,928 clicks, were on the very first feature. The story in the first position was clicked. The rest of the clicks were distributed at ~4% each to the other four stories in the rotating banner (Runyon, E., 2013, para. 5). Users experience banner blindness (Laja, 2012, para. 10). Laja has compiled research on conversion rates of rotating offers from optimization experts. Essentially, users eyes slide off of the pretty pictures. They are

quickly searching for content important to them. This means they can and do miss the content they are looking for even when it is the first slide in the carousel (Laja, 2012, para 22).

Turn Visitors into Leads.

Ensure the SOE site displays the products and services provided and how an interested person takes the next step through more than one type of call to action. The conversion trinity is made up of relevance, value and different types of options—a call to action. Relevance is whether the line or *scent* of the path the viewer was following—assuming they landed on your page from a search is maintained. The page is relevant if the content looks like what the viewer expected when performing the search. Value describes whether the visitor can clearly see that the page contains the solution or offer in clear terms. A web page needs different types of options and the content of the page should have generated enough confidence or interest in the viewer to take the next step (Eisenberg, 2011). Include several different types of offers to entice viewers to engage.

Support lead nurturing.

Adding a postgraduate section will raise awareness of the full spectrum of courses and degree programs offered by the SOE (para. 30). If the department resists to *selling* services or considering students customers, work on lead nurturing. Thus “lead nurturing cultivates a relationship with the prospect through a process of education, informing and engagement.” Lead nurturing takes a viewer through a series of steps: educate, inform, engage and then convert (“What is Lead Nurturing,” 2016). The website needs to engage the internal audience. It is important to share successes, and better from a marketing standpoint to share students’ successes (Eisenberg, 2011).

Increase student success.

We can lower stress in our existing students by making valuable information to their program, and the next steps in their process, easier to find. Leong (2011) details a few factors impacting student satisfaction in his research into how social presence and cognitive absorption in the online learning environment (p. 5). The researcher demonstrates the connections between the factors, social presence, cognitive absorption and student satisfaction. SOE should use the website to improve retention by enhancing student satisfaction.

Recent research regarding social networking explores student's expecting "their careers to benefit from the social ties they make during their times as members of learning communities (Kazmer, 2006)" (Luo, 2010, p. 86). Social communication may be stifled by instructors in favor of focusing on the content of the class. Luo suggests that social networks provide a solution to difficulty of having peer communication and creating a community because of missing face-to-face interaction (p. 96). Providing a showcase area for current and recent graduates provides students an opportunity to learn about their cohort. Modifying the SOE website to include highlights on graduate students may help students build a peerage to might leverage to find a job or advance their career.

Conversion

A university department website has to be about converting visitors to clients, students, future staff. Website pages should have the information internal staff plus information and appeal to draw in the external customer. Often department designs are built by committee or from a template approved by another entity. The designer is not aware of the departments' key features and has received little content from individuals who work with or for the department. Promotion and creating exciting material that reaches the customer is difficult in this setting.

Changing website development to balance department requirements and what clients want to see on multiple types of devices is a big challenge (Shein, 2015). Simple actions get lost; website users want to find a project deadline or email address (para. 39).

Conversion Rate.

Conversion rate optimization is the process of increasing the performance of your existing web pages, through content and design refinement and testing, to increase leads and actions from your site traffic. Conversion follows a three or four step pattern. For example, *the conversion trinity* consists of relevance, value, and call-to-action. See it represented on the New York Public Library updated site. The bullets are easy to read. The heading is clear. The viewer knows what to do and is shown an example of email news updates—a low-risk offer—from a thumbnail sample that links to a larger view representing a no-risk offer. I've annotated Eisenberg's third figure to contain the arrows and descriptors: Relevance, Call-to-action, and Value.

Figure 2.2 Relevance, Value, and Call-to-action elements

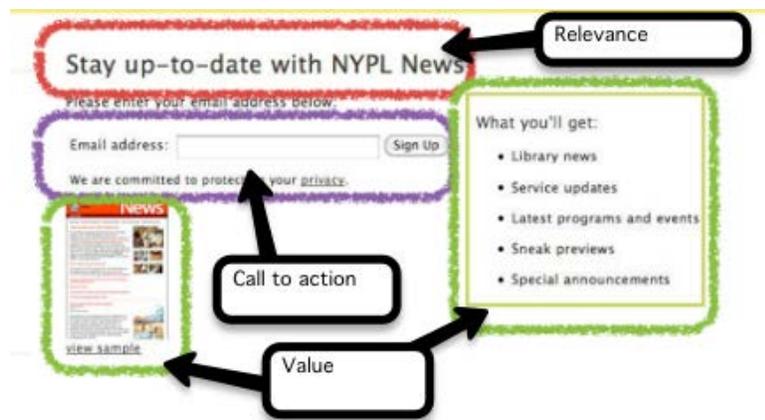


Figure 2.2. An example annotated to point out specific features designed to improve conversion. Black arrows and text added by author to a screenshot (Eisenberg, 2011).

It is important to arrange your content in small sections easy to scan to increase users engagement. Today's internet users scan pages versus reading them (Moloney, 2016).

Relevance and value.

Demonstrating to the viewer you have content of interest to them without it being overwhelming is key. Different things are overwhelming to different people. Instead, we can focus on what people like, which may generate a contact or a lead, and what they don't like, which may cause them to leave the site. The brand new SOE site is lighter, brighter, and makes finding relevant information easier. Parents and students look at several school websites. If a site is not easy to navigate and scan, the viewer leaves (Lieberman, 2016). It is important to arrange for SOE's website to attest to the uniqueness of programs and expertise of faculty. In addition to looking at the language in that light, it devise actions visitors do to show interest. A clear easy to read message may double conversion rates (Lieberman, 2016).

Call-to-action offers.

Viewers are skeptical. Some are simply curious and surfing around. You could potentially have a customer or new student in the curious set if you provide low-stakes, easy to agree to, offers. For example, Liberman (2016) suggests "educational offers for the top, middle and bottom of the funnel" on a website. This *funnel* refers top of mind awareness, then interest, desire, and finally action. Different types of calls-to-action will appeal to people in various states of the funnel. Monahan (2014) recommended a flyer comparing all programs as an addition to the SOE main web page (p. 82).

Website Usability

Changing behaviors cause resulting changes in how web pages are built. A large portion of our intended audience, the prospective student, starts looking for information via a Google

search. If a student searches for content and comes to a SOE page that does not contain it, it must be easy for the visitor to get to the right page. Buttons need to be clear. Choices, the next step in the process, need to be very visible, easy to read, and large enough to click on. Design choices that remove underlines from links are poor choices (Martin, 2007).

User Devices.

Mobile devices have impact: the way users navigate websites has fundamentally changed (NiemanLab, 2012). Smart phones were used in 2012 by 55% of adult owners to access websites. In 2016 that number increased; 92% of U.S. individuals in the 18-34 age-range own a smart phone; 99% of them reported using their phone to access the internet (Poushter, 2016, para. 9). Younger viewers are more likely to be accessing a page with a phone (NiemanLab, 2012). UAF's median age is 25 ("UAF facts and figures," 2015). The target audience for new and current students means mobile design is crucial

Accessibility.

Accessibility refers to a person's ability to view content presented by the web-browser. In our environment, we think first of seeing-impaired students. It is important to determine if a person can access, see, and interact with the content using their device. The product you build must be visible and usable to the greatest number of potential clients. This means making sure your site works with mobile devices as well as with screen readers.

Hunt (2016) wrote guidelines for accessibility to help content creators build materials for anyone to access (para. 4). Do not use color to emphasize text. Screen readers do not differentiate between color, bold, italics, underlining or strike-through markup to text. Whoever writes the content must do so in a straightforward manner. Whenever using images utilize both the alt and description attributes depending upon how you want the screen reader to treat the

image. It is possible to use an empty alt attribute `` causing screen readers skip over the image. (Valk, 2016, para. 6)

The British Columbia Open Textbook Accessibility is an excellent source for information on how to best describe your photos and whether or not to have them. Tables and charts on the SOE website need to have thorough descriptions and high contrast (BCcampus, 2016). Web Accessibility in Mind webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/ goes into specific contrast details.

Responsive Web Design.

Focus on the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of your site. Financially, departments save money by “making sites ‘future friendly,’ meaning they won’t have to be rebuilt to perform well on any new devices that come on the market” (Shein, 2015). Responsive Web Design (RWD) takes into consideration the large number of viewers who interact with websites using a phone or tablet device. RWD applies the use of standards, for example the definition of sizes of specific devices, in order to display page content to fit the user’s needs. In addition to determining the type of device the content can be displayed differently depending upon capability as well (Wetzel, 2015, para. 5). Examples of this include the CSS3 media query `speech` for use by screen readers. Not paying attention to the changing face of web development can be costly (Scoboria, 2016, para. 4) Mobile versions of websites or mobile-friendly code improves Google search engine ranking.

Responsive WordPress themes put in breakpoints in the cascading style sheet (CSS) code to handle different types of mobile devices; sites load well on phones and tablets because media queries are applied as the browser window becomes smaller (Leverenz, 2014, para. 9.)

The teen and young adult audience that most university departments consider the primary audience is lost if web pages are not built to work well on mobile devices (Shein, 2015). Mobile

users expect sites to load fast or faster than if using a desktop machine (“Mobile First,” 2016, para.11). 74% of mobile users abandon a page after five seconds of load time. The showcase site is built using a mobile-friendly, responsive theme.

Princeton Partners studied 200 public and private schools in 2014. Seventy percent did not have mobile-friendly sites. The viewer with a mobile device makes up more than seven in 10 students while half of the prospective students’ parents use phones and tablets to view websites. “This is an audience you cannot afford to ostracize (para. 3). UAF does not have adequate web support or design staff who can help individual departments rebuild their sites to be mobile-friendly.

Summary

Working with students to show their research and to gather testimonials and real-world snapshots to share with visitors is the most controllable (monitoring what happens on the site) and easiest way to move forward.

Chapter 3 Methods

Statement of Bias

When preparing to create my project I looked for ways to identify possible bias within my approach to collecting information from faculty and students. I dislike passive voice. I lean toward visual content. To offset these potential biases I chose to use some of everything provided from each person who responded. I reviewed content from students and faculty for the showcase pages for recent, visual, easy-to-read material. The language needed to be quoted or paraphrased to make sense to the general audience.

Jane Monahan, Graduate Advisor, chose the recipients; students, from that pool, will self-select whether they wish to respond to the survey, this is nonprobability sampling (Creswell, 2012, p. 145). A byproduct of this was completely avoiding selection bias.

The use of closed-ended questions for the majority of both the student and faculty surveys should limit the introduction of bias via word-choice.

IRB Review

Dr. Roehl and Gretchen Hundertmak were contacted to share the instruments and ask if an IRB review was needed. Detailed in the email was the need for recipients to provide an email address if they wished to be contacted as no personally identifiable information would be automatically collected. Email response (Appendix A) from the Office of Research Integrity including the statement, “this is not ‘research’ as defined by law therefore it doesn’t need IRB review” (Hundertmark, G., personal communication, April 25, 2016).

Collect Content

In April of 2016, the draft survey instruments were sent electronically to the project committee for review. After receiving feedback I modified both the student and faculty surveys to be shorter and more specific, and included an open-ended question in the student survey plus several in the faculty survey. The instrument was revised in April 2016 and sent out for review again. In May 2016, both survey instruments for faculty and student participation for the showcase were sent out. While waiting for responses, the initial framework of the proposed site was built.

Student Survey.

The Google form lead to an email or voice contact inquiry for additional materials: photographs, testimonial about the program, abstract or specifics on research, a story to share

regarding how participating in SOE graduate programs helped either build a peerage or assist in job hunting. As Luo (2010) wrote student interactions evolve, become or build, into their professional network. The SOE website is not designed to have the social interaction aspect that Twitter and Facebook do. What may happen—if the questions were asked of students and the materials gathered—is a space where students may point to work they are doing or have recently done. Thus the addition of a showcase or highlight area for student research and career or job stories.

Content of the survey instrument, “Student Contributions for SOE Website”

<http://goo.gl/forms/jtK6uBuvX3> and introduction sent via email (Appendix C).

Google forms were used to create the survey. It is easy to use and the university community is familiar with it. The student survey was designed with primarily closed questions. One open-ended question was included. At first I thought to gather feedback from those students with whom I took classes.

Audience.

The SOE Graduate Advisor chose the student recipients; to set expectations and generate interest in filling out the survey instrument Jane Monahan (May 19, 2016) requested a concise explanation to include in the email message with the link to the survey (Appendix D). All current faculty would receive the faculty survey.

Faculty Survey.

The product was described to faculty as a graphic-rich, community building, informative, promotional section of the upcoming School of Education website (Appendix D). It is also online <https://goo.gl/forms/mjsWbQTOCopKbE4B2>.

Survey Responses and Interaction.

Of the approximately 120 students the survey was sent to six responses were returned. Each student who responded with a valid email was invited to provide information for the showcase pages. A videoconference was set up in order to interact with one of the students who elected to participate in content creation. Email exchanges served for communication with another. One person did not include an email address; another student's email was nonfunctioning. Follow up with those individual was not possible. The two remaining respondents received two emails.

In May two faculty returned the faculty survey. Both individuals were contacted and given access to shared Google folders in order to provide materials. One individual asked for an in-person follow-up to the survey. I arrived and performed an impromptu interview drawing responses that allowed that faculty member to understand the types of materials to put into the shared drive. The individuals who chose to respond provided a great deal of usable content. The success of this project does not rely upon curating my knowledge but analyzing materials provided, distilling contents and sharing.

Chapter 4 Description of the Application Project

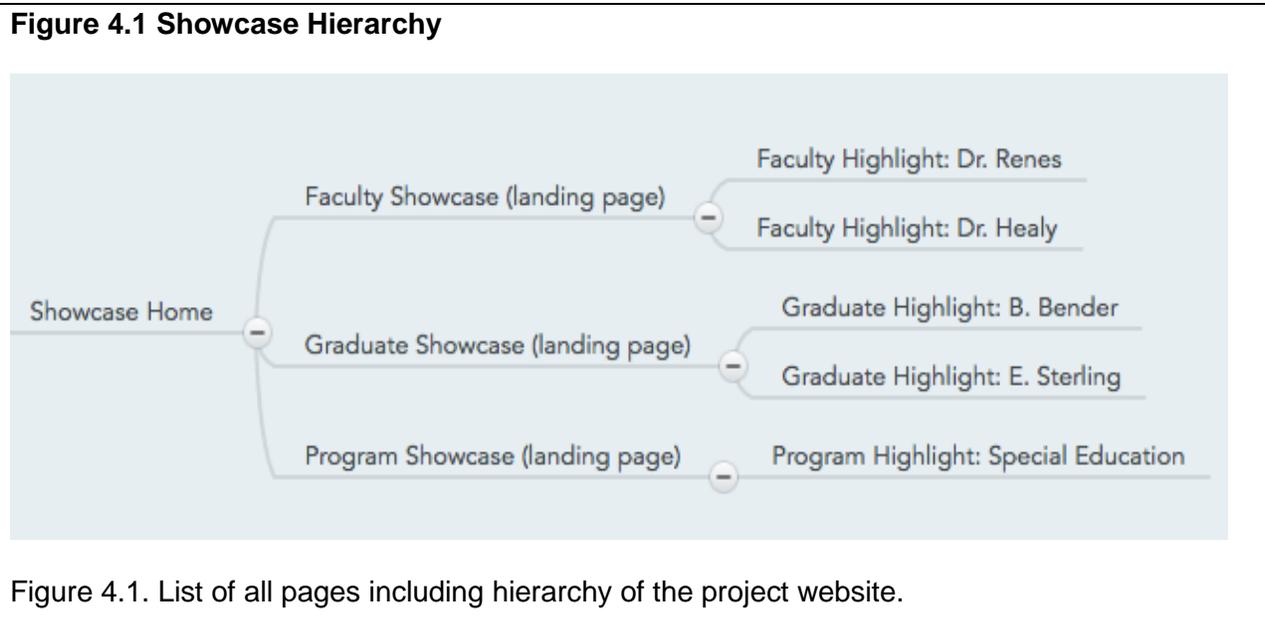
The showcase project is designed to: (a) highlight current and recent Faculty and Graduate student achievements. We need prospective students to see and experience what we do. (b) Provide current faculty to have a unified space to showcase their work and their students' accomplishments. We need future faculty to be able to see that UAF can be their new home. (c) Demonstrate and acknowledge how we interact with the community.

The focus of this accompanying paper is how to help convert site visitors into leads; understand and check for both mobile/device accessibility and the accessible use of the website, and to create a space where students and faculty could work to build community.

Scope

The scope of this project changed when the SOE site was scheduled for complete revision using the Roxen content management system. The resulting showcase site is designed to promote current research and activities by faculty and graduates in order to engage the website visitor. This engagement is designed to further the visitors’ interest in SOE. Staff and faculty can easily update the showcase with current information.

The pages within the showcase are Showcase Home, Faculty Showcase, Graduate Showcase, and Program Showcase. Under the Faculty and Graduate showcase pages are four full highlight pages, two on faculty and two on graduate students.



See the finalized scope mind map and a link to original scope (Appendix B).

Development Steps

Basic steps taken prior to collecting the content for the web pages included drafting what the site should look like. This includes creating wireframes, sketches and diagrams of sample pages; testing out sample pages within WordPress. The Catch Box theme was chosen because of the responsive themes it most closely resembled what was needed. Evaluating WordPress themes for how closely they approximate the look and feel of the new SOE Roxen layout took a considerable amount of design work.

Drafting and discussing the survey instruments happened in Spring 2016. Planning and implementing ways to facilitate the site being kept up-to-date easily occurred while waiting for content materials. Once respondents began to share content curating and adding posts to test the layout of the pages began. After most of the available content was reviewed additional gathering of success stories, class materials and recent research took place. Once pages were in place distilling materials provided by the students and faculty into smaller nuggets and writing post excerpts ensued.

Essentially the most time spent near the end of the project development was in tailoring the theme at onid-project.community.uaf.edu in preparation of putting the final product at soe.community.uaf.edu once it was approved by faculty for release.

Posts Refresh Page Sections.

Several of the pages rely upon posts. Posts are categorized into topics. Those topics are displayed in specific areas. When a new post is made the author chooses a category that the post content fits into for the material to display on one of the site pages.

On the main page, a section pulls from the most recent posts tagged with the category *Showcase Front Page Bottom*. When the viewer scrolls further down the page a collection of six

posts are drawn from the most recent entries in the following categories: announcements, graduates, showcase front page bottom and student research. The faculty showcase landing page has two post sections drawn from the categories expertise, faculty research, publications, and thank you. Posts are displayed on the right-hand side drawn from. Five posts are shown in a slider across the bottom.

The majority of the rest of the page contains interactive sections that pull information from posts in two ways. The first is a grid layout set to two posts from the *Faculty Showcase* category. The draft wireframe is at <https://wireframe.cc/rOvMKH>. The fully annotated wireframe for the main page is in the appendix and available online at <http://screencast.com/t/NTRajg5hzc>

The second part of this page is a posts slider, also called a carousel that draws content from the following categories: Expertise, Faculty Research, Publications, and Thank you. At present, the number of posts is limited to five. Peep Laja of ConversionXL states that carousels don't work for two reasons, "Human eye reacts to movement (and will miss the important stuff) ..." and "too many messages equals no message." (Laja, 2012, para. 22) Laja backs up the info with quotes from six conversion experts who have performed tests on websites with sliding content.

The middle section of the Faculty showcase with the post slider has material that should be prominently shown elsewhere. The content is placed lower than the faculty showcase items because it is of lower importance (Laja, 2012).

Faculty Showcase Webpage.

Designed to highlight features which the faculty feel represent the best SOE is accomplishing and undertaking at present, this page is the landing page which contains a collection of materials drawn together primarily through a series of posts. The top of the page is

a banner. Unfortunately, as much as we like banners, their conversion rates are very low. I put the banner at the top of the pages to match the look of the main SOE Roxen site.

Faculty highlights.

These page layouts may be duplicated and edited, or a person may use the template which is marked “pending review” with the title *Faculty Highlight: Add Name*. This page uses the full width disable sidebar template. At present, there are only two showcase entries (A and B). When more faculty see the materials they may wish to participate. At that time, I will build up to three additional faculty highlight pages. Wireframe at <https://wireframe.cc/i2WGst> (Appendix E).

Summary

The aim is to establish an easy to maintain area where SOE faculty and students could build community; provide valuable feedback and input into how to convert visitors to the website into leads; create sample posts highlighting recent research, faculty and student successes through recent/current, easy-to-read web posts to allow visitors to see what students and faculty are doing; to shine a light on website accessibility both from a device standpoint and user capability. Visitors need to be able to view the resources before they can be inspired to take action.

Navigation

Most university sites focus on potential students in order to gain new leads. The *showcase* is designed to be for internal and external audiences. Once final edits are made on the showcase per suggestions from committee and audience members during defense, Putt Clark of OIT who created the UAF SOE new site inside of the Roxen system will add the showcase menu item as the last in the navigation.

Training

UAF eLearning & Distance Education offers open labs; any faculty member could come to one of the labs and request one-on-one assistance with learning how to 1) log into the WordPress community site and 2) create posts. It will be important for faculty and staff to know how to attach a category to a post.

Limitations.

These factors include (a) available personnel, (b) training, (c) current information
Available Personnel - Faculty may be resistant to creating posts for the showcase pages. Select staff and faculty will need to agree to create materials on a weekly or monthly basis.

Chapter 5 Discussion and Recommendations

The strength of the showcase page will increase with use. Faculty could use the pages by recommending or sharing recent research posts and stories demonstrating SOE is the place to be. Students could use the site to share excitement about the program they are in, accomplishments, how a class or the program is helping them with their career and what research or project they are completing or just finished. Both faculty and student content will peak interest from the SOE future external client. It will make the website a richer space causing more leads.

Discussion

Staff, expertise and time are all factors in keeping a website up-to-date. The website needs to have additional information provided in a timely manner—timely to recent events—and routinely. Routine additions will keep the website fresh. While I have built the infrastructure in such a way as to make the main page pull from post-types it will be important to create posts on a weekly basis. The WordPress interface is fairly easy to use. Anyone with a UA ID and

username can get an account to update the soe.community.uaf.edu showcase pages. The need to be able to showcase new items on the website easily and quickly.

Recommendations and Future Steps

Add more content.

The faculty instrument should be sent out again when the Showcase link is live on the recently redesigned SOE site. Two faculty responded to the May 2016 survey. Sending the survey out again with links to the faculty showcase landing and highlight pages should garner additional interest and thus more materials. There is a template saved as draft in the WordPress dashboard. Individuals with administrative access can clone any page or post and edit the clone to develop additional content.

The website needs to have current information provided routinely to keep it fresh. It will be important to create posts on a weekly basis. This task can be assigned to different programs. Anyone with a UA ID and a username added to the system may receive access to update the showcase web pages.

Add more/different calls-to-action.

The SOE site and showcase pages should have no-risk offers, low-risk offers, and links to speak with an advisor. Use no-risk, low-risk, and direct business offers. When adding calls-to-action, make sure they are *above the fold*. Locate these important action items in the top third of the page. Review each page and determine how to add a call-to-action. Vary the types of calls-to-action. Currently, the SOE homepage at uaf.edu/soe includes two offers, “View video testimonials,” and “Give to SOE.”

Two specific examples which could work for the SOE website include, “See the first year experience” for the Master of Education in Online Innovation and Design. This is no risk

because it is a download, it asks the viewer for nothing. See an example of what this might look like, or speak with UAF eLearning about using this PDF:

<https://elearning.uaf.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/ONIDExperience.pdf>

Figure 5.1 UAF eLearning Call-to-action



Figure 5.1. UAF eLearning includes a PDF download about the ONID program (2016). Retrieved from <https://elearning.uaf.edu/master-of-education-in-online-innovation-and-design/>.

Use a poll for another form of low-risk action: “Download sample costs.” When the button is clicked ask for an email address to send a spreadsheet. To do this ask three students to agree and wipe their names, but a full list of books and fees, etc. would be valuable.

The direct offer is one that a viewer clicks on when they already know they want to pursue a relationship with you. They’ve made their choice. These direct offers can take a variety of approaches like ‘sign up for our newsletter’ or ‘have a student advisor contact you.’

Add class material samples.

Appearance is an indicator (Fadeyev, 2009) of a product's usability. The *aesthetic-usability effect* suggests users judge site content based on what it looks like. Share examples of what a class looks like with students by creating monthly posts to content faculty store online in an open environment.

Perform an internal review of SOE website.

Members of SOE, a group of individuals, need to do a full review. Each person has different skills sets and methods they use to peruse a site. A list of tasks that several people agree to undertake would aid the SOE in increasing accessibility, usability, and conversion rates.

The most basic checks include spelling, link checking—does it go where you expect. Checks for accessibility include: are the alt tags for every picture present? Do they add value? Are graphs annotated? If color is used, is it used for a purpose and with high contrast?

A straightforward check of how the website flows can be made by using Safari's Responsive Design Mode (Tanous, 2016). Some of the smaller text—for use in navigation—does not meet WCAG 2.0 level AA requirements for contrast in smaller text. The navigation may be made slightly larger, or the CSS for the text can be changed to increase the contrast.

Create a benchmark. Review the brand new site for accessibility issues and problems with using different platforms/mobile devices. Look for the specific calls-to-actions and the low-risk offers. Review the Google Analytics for the site. Focus on time spent on the site and bounce-rate.

Main Site Modifications.

Some materials represented in the uaf.edu/soe navigation should be represented either on the main page or under a *Programs* section in the about us area. Not everyone would know to click on the word academics in the navigation. Details of programs and courses available may be

organized in a difficult to understand manner (Moloney, 2016). The Nielsen Norman Group conducted a study where 48% of prospective students did not know a program was available from a specific university. “Offering an indexed list of all your programs and courses, and making it easy to find is a crucial first step to making your website less confusing for prospective students” (para. 5).

Visitors only click on what makes sense or describes the goal they came to find (Nielsen, 2013, para.13). Punch up the SOE website heading titles. Make the call-to-action bigger, cleaner, and higher up on the page.

Check for accessibility issues.

The table above below not represent a full review of all of SOE’s website. These are elements uncovered while reviewing portions of the new pages. Search engines use databases to rank pages; alt text on images is part of search engine optimization, but more importantly without alt text “blind and visually impaired people ... won’t know what the image is for” (“Image SEO: Alt tag and title tag optimization • Yoast,” 2015, para. 5).

Table 5.1. *Potential Accessibility Issues*

Page	Responsiveness	Accessibility	Calls-to-action
http://uaf.edu/soe		Missing ALT tag /soe/MarcotteStudents2.jpeg" alt="" give.png Give to SOE image is missing ALT NCATE accredited institution logo	“Give to SOE” in sidebar “View video testimonials” <i>Near bottom of page</i>
uaf.edu/soe/videos		Fireweed	
uaf.edu/soe/about-us	iPad in portrait has conflict issues, in landscape view, the images do not overlap	Dr. Steve Atwater beach_break.jpg	
uaf.edu/soe/academics		<u>/soe/images/iriscloseup.jpg</u> <u>/soe/images/emma_shish_ken</u> <u>_girls.jpg</u>	

Fix/modify CSS for layout.

Some elements on the new site overlap with others when viewing them in the Chrome web browser and Safari Responsive Design mode. Simplify the layout or alter the CSS to eliminate the overlap on smaller screens.

Figure 5.2. Navigation Buttons Overlap

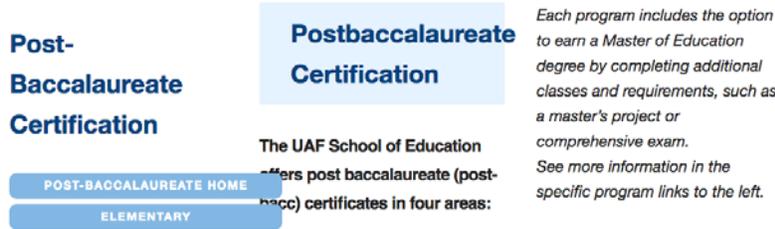


Figure 5.2. Screenshot of uaf.edu/soe/academics/post_baccalaureate_certification page shown with the browser window shrunk.

Figure 5.3. Navigation Buttons Overlap

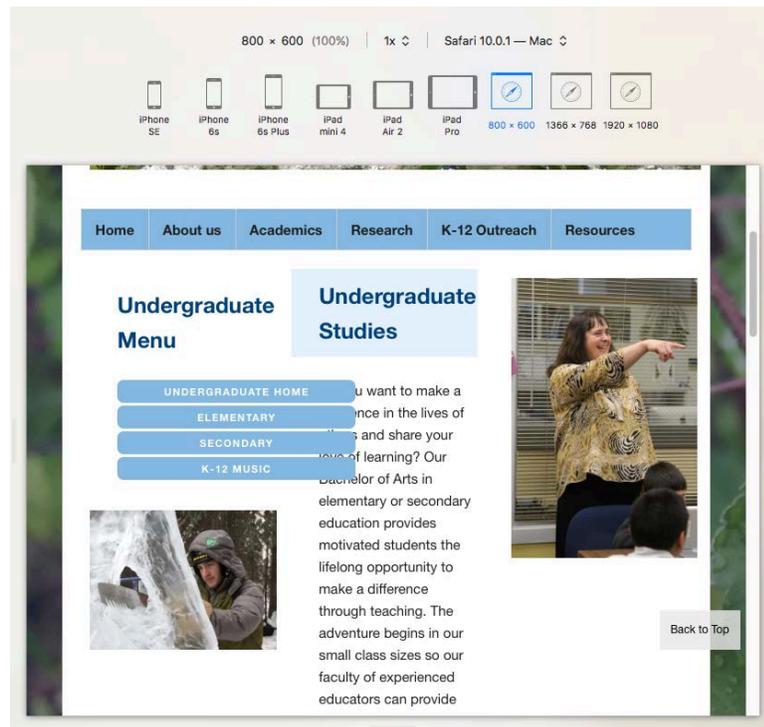


Figure 5.3. A view using Safari's Responsive Design Mode of the Undergraduates page uaf.edu/soe/academics/under_grad. The layout was changed to show what the content would look like on an 800 x 600 display at 100%.

Plans for Dissemination

Discussion with committee members suggests the faculty survey for the showcase site should be sent out via email to the current staff again. It may also be included in a post on the showcase site to ask faculty for research, publications, and recent events to contribute to the new site.

Information on how a post is made and how a faculty or graduate showcase page can be cloned to create new pages will be provided to the department via screencasts.

Conclusion

There is value in raising student and faculty participation in the creation of the SOE website and this associated series of showcase pages especially from the standpoint of promoting services and successes as well as retaining students and faculty.

Final Reflection

This site was created to match up with the brand new SOE site going into effect. It is important to note that the success of the full site depends upon more changes down the road. As already mentioned, the new site is very easy to read. The content is laid out in an easy to navigate manner. The site lacks both quantities of calls-to-action elements and differing types ("12 Steps to a better Converting Optimized Landing Page," 2016) that can be implemented after the launch.

During analysis of materials and implementation of project work, I found I focused more tightly on conversion because of extensive marketing and website design experience. This report includes commentary "reflecting on their own role in the study and how their background, gender, and history shape the account that they report" (Creswell, 2012, p. 480).

Generating materials, gaining access to digital resources and discussing with people what and how they might share successes via a website largely depended upon my ability to communicate with others. Making key connections is, at present, the largest element besides sheer effort to bring this product into being.

As a student, I needed to interact with my class cohort, my peers, to do my best work. Palloff & Pratt's (2009) "Building Online Learning Communities" best describes what I discovered and felt. "Online there is a greater possibility for a sense of loss among learners—loss of contact, loss of connection, and a resultant sense of isolation. Consequently, attention should be paid to the intentional development of presence" (p. 31). This product is a partial response to those feelings. Furthermore, it draws upon my experience as a web designer and adjunct faculty. I wish to help people succeed.

Communication among and between students helps a student succeed both with the current subject matter and with the program as a whole. Choosing to be an online student means learning to deliberately and consciously build connections with other students. I hope that this product may be used to help students and faculty connect.

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Figure B.1. Finalized Scope

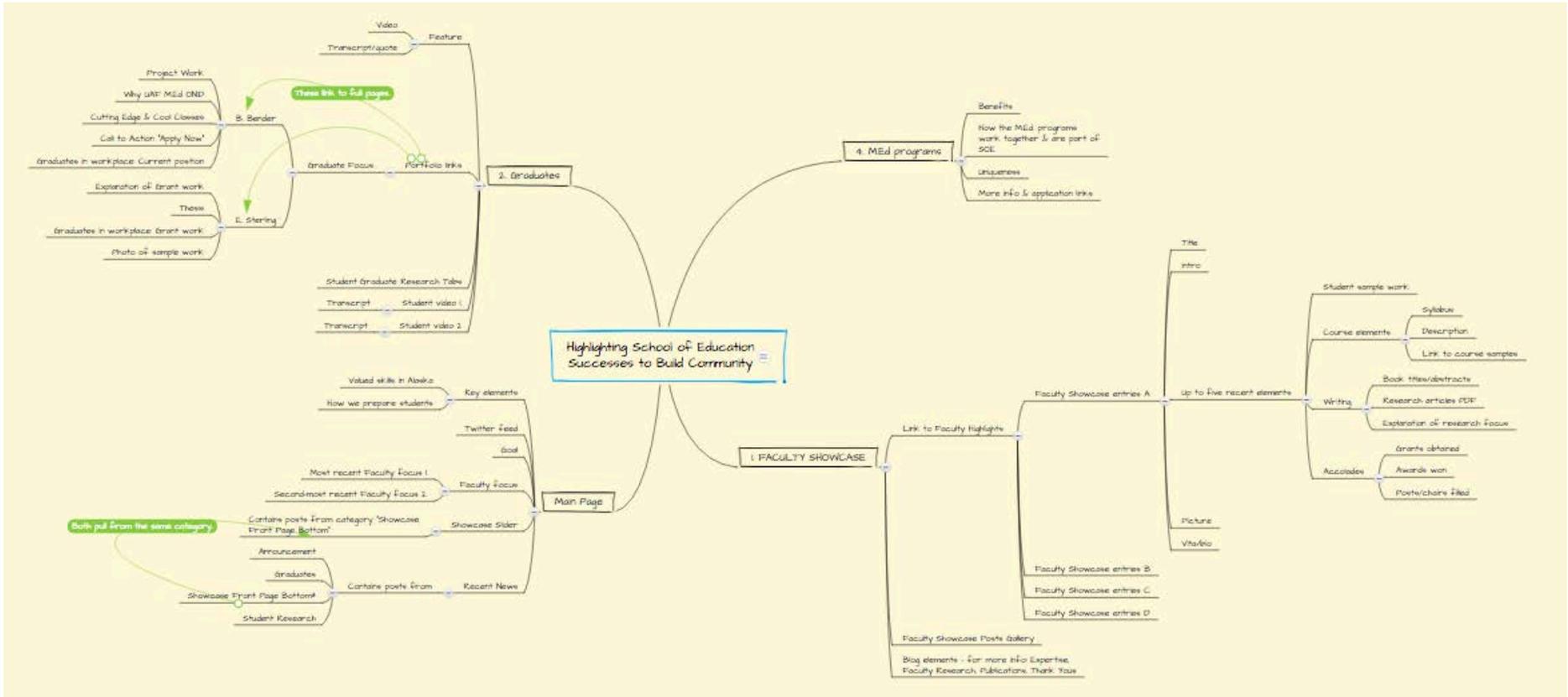


Figure B.2. Detail Showcase Landing Page Content

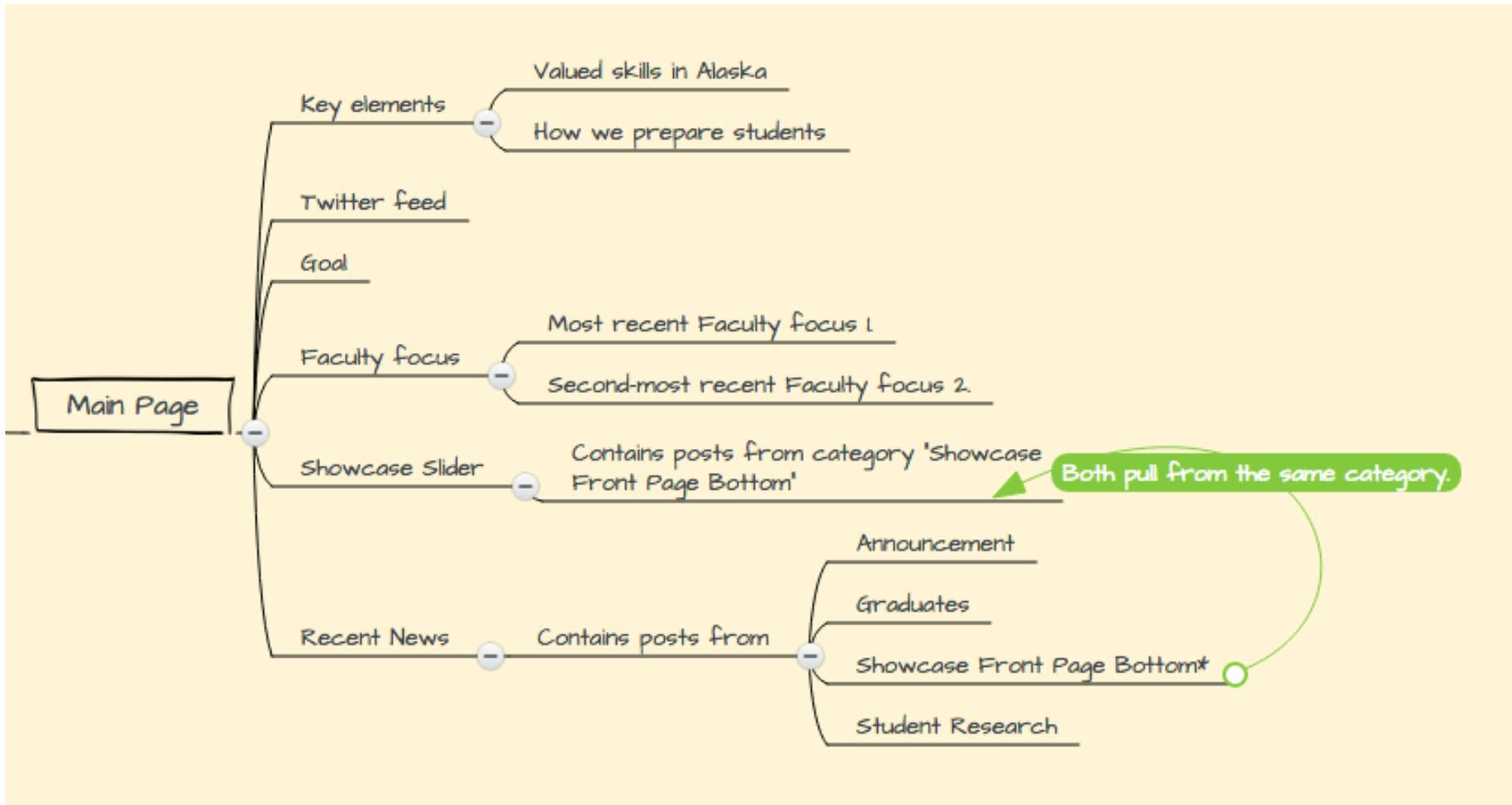


Figure B.3. Detail Faculty Landing Page

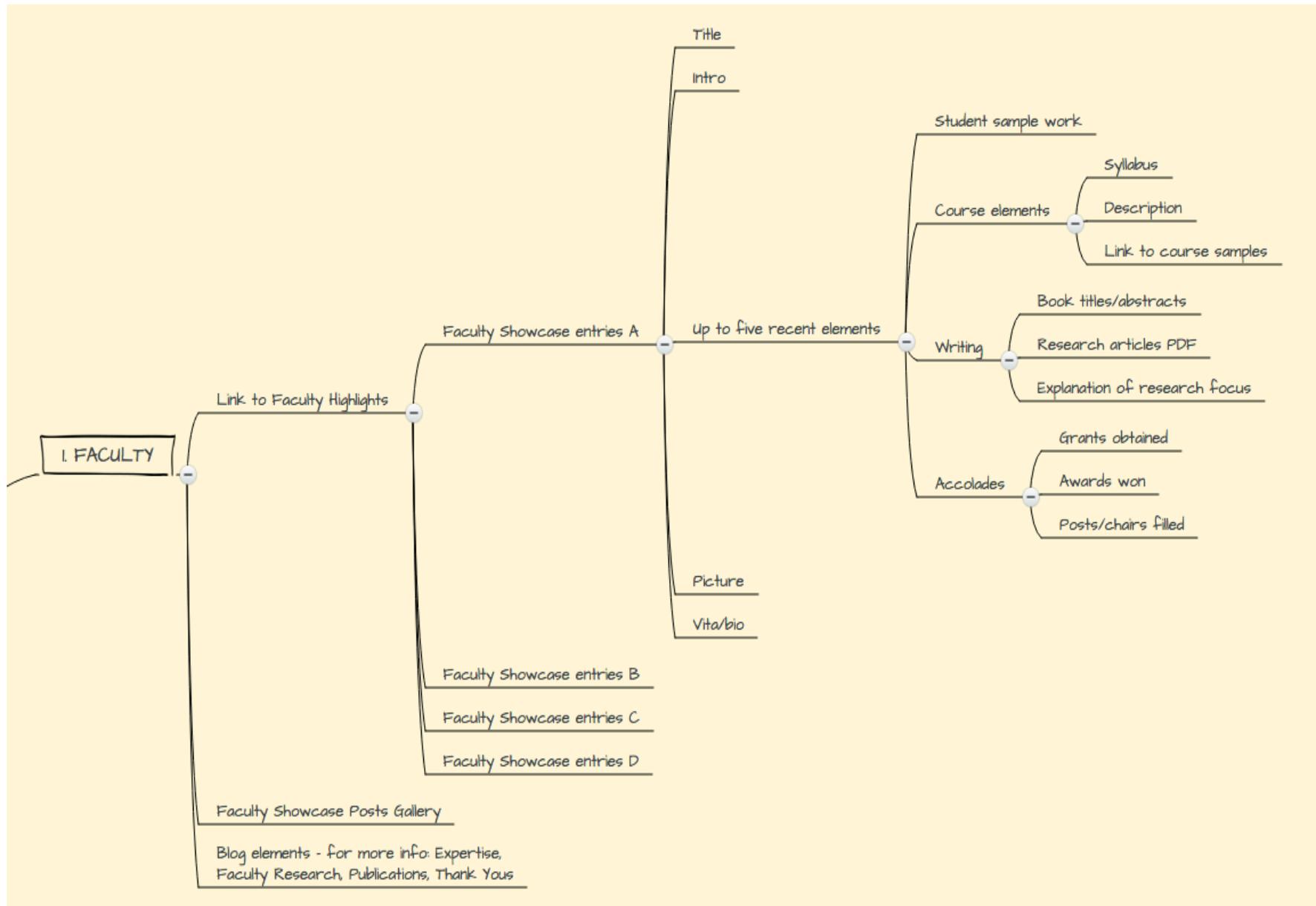
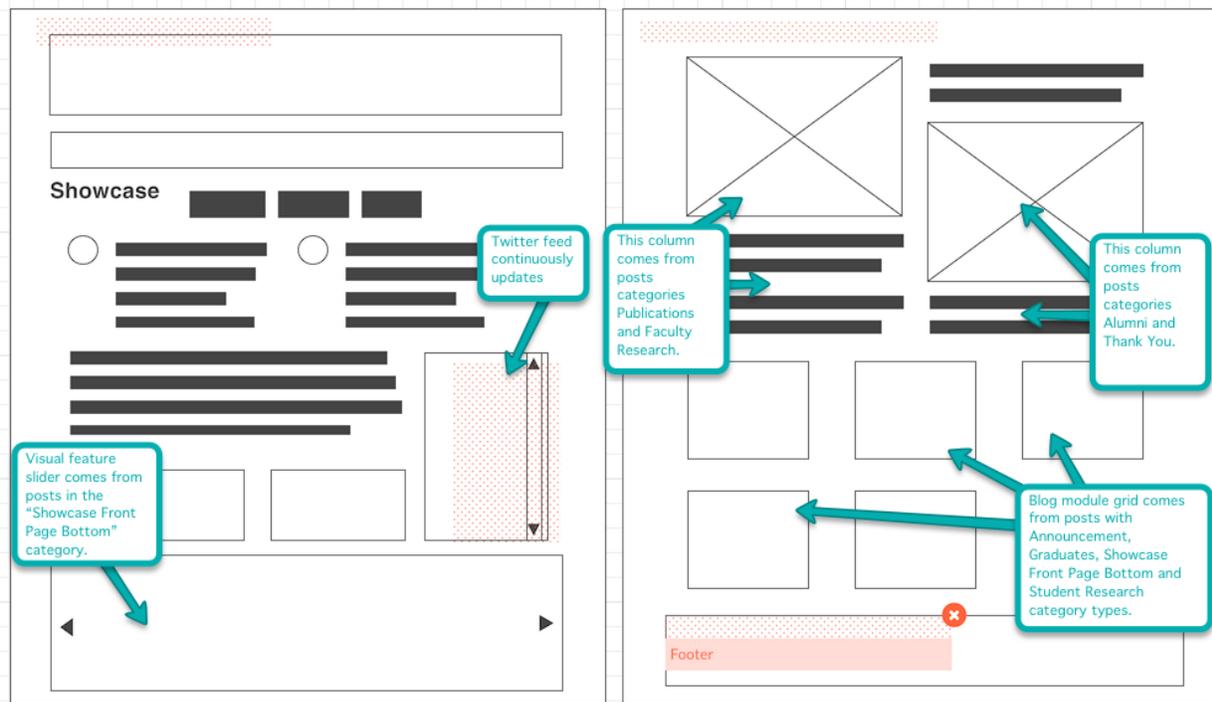


Figure B.4. Main Landing Page Wireframe

Appendix C: Surveys

Survey Audience

"Current M. Ed. in Education students, excluding the new people we have admitted for summer/fall 2016 because they are brand new.

From the last few years -- Graduated M. Ed. in Education, M. Ed. in Special Education, Graduate Licensure in Special Education and M. Ed. in Counseling students. About 120 students total.

I didn't send to current Counseling and Special Education students because the list is so large. If you don't get the kind of response you are looking for, I will send to them next.

This would add about 80 students." (Monahan, May 20, 2016)

Survey Introduction.

“Fellow students and recent graduates, I am working on completing my M.Ed. ONID project. I would absolutely love to include materials you consider valuable to current and future SOE students as part of my master's research project.

The project is a WordPress site to showcase recently developed classes and research by the SOE faculty. I want to include your voice by including research, projects, career stories and testimonials from you. These materials will be linked in from the UAF School of Education website under the proposed title of "Portfolio." Anticipated time to complete the student section: July 2016.’ ” (McMahan, May 19, 2016)

Student Survey

Figure C.1. Student Survey

Student Contributions for SOE Website

We are developing a site that will showcase recently developed classes and recent research work by the SOE faculty. We would also like to showcase research, projects, career stories and testimonials by SOE current students and recent graduates. These materials will be linked in from the UAF School of Education website under the proposed title of "Portfolio." Anticipated time to complete the student section: July 2016.

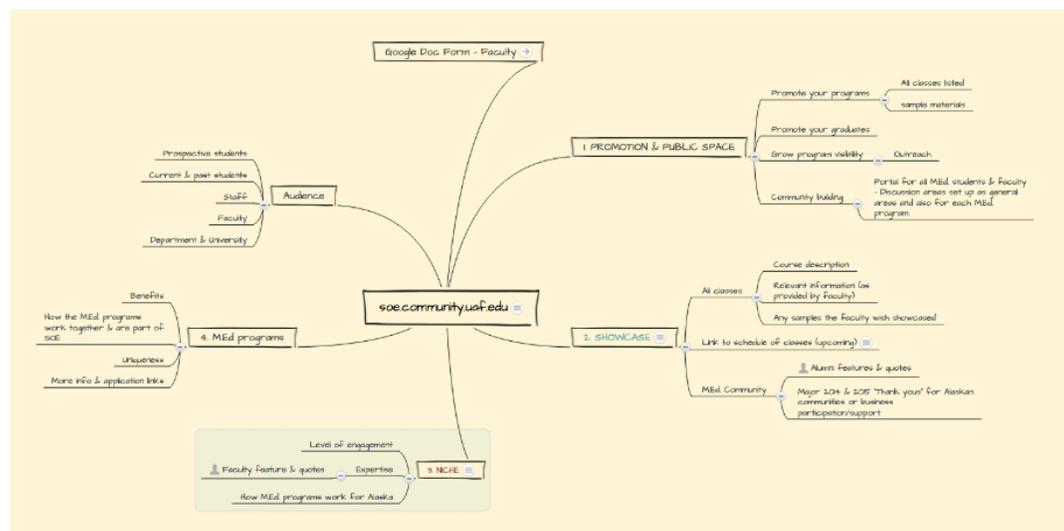
Numbers below (IE 2. Showcase) refer to areas of a proposed website for the School of Education Masters Programs. See more at: <https://www.mindmeister.com/503467112?t=FyCShtTeR9>

No personally identifiable information is collected automatically via this form. Therefore, if you wish to be contacted you must specifically provide your email address at the end of the form. Thank you.

Janene McMahan
 (907) 388-5466
vjmcmah@alaska.edu

* Required

Project scope



A. Are you a current or recent-past SOE student? *

If no, thank you for your time; please submit the survey.

Yes

No

B. Are you interested in having your story and/or research showcased on a site for the School of Education?

We are developing a site that will showcase recently developed classes, and recent research work by the SOE faculty. We would also like to showcase current students and recent graduates. If you answer yes, you will be contacted so that I may gather the information you'd like to share. Please provide email before submitting this form.

Yes

No

Graduate showcase

Practicing What You Learn
All of our graduates have the opportunity to apply the skills they are learning in the classroom.

[Share your story!](#)

The Faraday Rotation Effect See Your Project Here

The Faraday Rotation Effect: An investigation of Remote Control Laboratories in physics education
Dan LaSota, UAF School of Education

ABSTRACT Hands-on lab experience is a critical part of physics education. But what does hands-on mean? At the intersection of solid lab technique, best practices in online education and good pedagogical design principles are Remote Controlled Laboratories (RCLs). Remote Control Laboratories are an important

C. (2. Showcase:) Alumni/current student feature & quotes

Would you like to be showcased as a recent alumni or current student? If yes, I will contact you for specifics; please provide email before submitting this form.

- Yes
- No

D. (3. Niche:) Work for Alaska

Do you have a great example to share regarding how being part of the M.Ed. program helped you with your current career or recent job search? If yes, I will contact you for specifics; please provide email before submitting this form.

- Yes
- No

E. (4. M.Ed. Programs:) Testimonial - Do you have information on how you feel the M.Ed programs work together as part of School of Education?

If you would like to provide a write up or description for this area? If you answer yes, you will be contacted so that I may gather the information you'd like to share. Please provide email before submitting this form.

- Yes
- No

F. After reviewing this proposed site, do you have recommendations?

Proposed site. Visit <https://www.mindmeister.com/503467112?t=FyCShtTeR9> to drill down and zoom in.

Your answer

Student Results

Table C.1 *Student Survey Results*

Response	Time	A. Current Student? *	B. Story or Research	C. Show-case	D. Assisted with Career or Job	E. Program Story	F. / G. Recommendations Comments	H. Email Contact
01	5/20/2016 16:39:02	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Left blank	<i>Not shown in this paper</i>
02	5/23/2016 12:39:18	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Left blank	<i>Not shown in this paper</i>
03	5/23/2016 17:25:29	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Left blank	<i>Not shown in this paper</i>
04	5/26/2016 12:53:27	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Left blank	<i>Not shown in this paper</i>
05	6/2/2016 5:45:20	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Left blank	<i>Not shown in this paper</i>
06	6/8/2016 22:36:35	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Left blank	<i>Not shown in this paper</i>

* Required

Table C.2 *Student Survey Follow-up*

Response	Contact	Date	Results
01	Not at that email		
02	Email sent 7/01	Follow-up on 8/13	
03	Email sent 7/01	Follow-up on 8/13	Materials received
04	Email sent 7/01	Follow-up on 8/13	
05	Email sent 7/01	Conference call	Materials received
06	No email provided		

Figure C.2. Faculty Survey

Faculty Contributions for SOE Website Portfolio

This survey is designed to determine the faculty who wish to provide materials for a graphic-rich, community building, informative, promotional section of the upcoming School of Education website. Anticipated time to complete: August 2016.

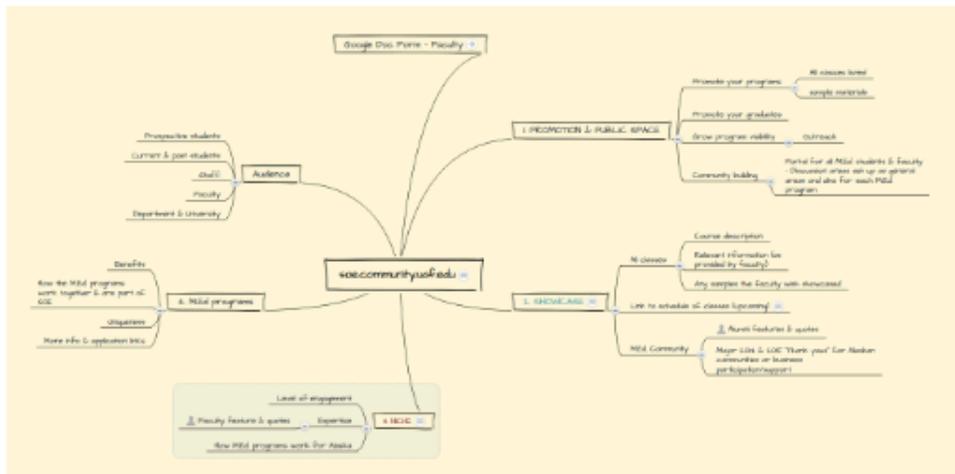
Taking advantage of the strengths of WordPress to promote and provide additional information about the School of Education graduate programs means additional materials are needed in addition to what will be available via the Roxen pages. The proposed materials are: sample class materials, projects or research write-ups for a showcase, short write-ups featuring faculty, students, or alumni, as well as material designed for the community to see how we believe our programs are unique while supporting our graduates and the communities from which they hail.

See the interactive mindmap at: <https://www.mindmeister.com/503467112?t=FyCShtTeR9>

No personally identifiable information is collected automatically via this form. If you wish to be contacted you must specifically provide your email address at the end of this form. Thank you.

Janene McMahan
 (907) 388-5466
vjmcmah@alaska.edu

Project scope - mind map



Course materials

Are your course materials available on the web? You may have a Google Site, a WordPress site, a Canvas site, etc. where some or all of your course content resides.

- Yes
- No

Link to your site

Would you like your course materials site linked in on the courses page? This would allow any visitor to the website to follow your link and see the materials you share on the web. If so, provide the URL to your materials here:

Your answer _____

Sample materials

If you do not have a website where people may already see your course, do you wish to provide example class materials? Also answer yes if you want an entry and a link to where your course materials already reside. If you answer yes, you will be contacted so that I may gather the information you'd like to share. Short sample materials will be grouped with other course and/or instructor sample materials. Longer samples may result in a showcase page. Please provide your email address at the bottom before submitting this form.

- Yes
- No

Showcase

Would you like a showcase page? This could be details of an ongoing project, publications, research, or program related activity (or longer class sample materials). If you answer yes, you will be contacted so that I may set up a specific showcase page for you. You may wish to say yes to provide a list of articles you have published around a topic you are invested in. Please provide your email address at the bottom before submitting this form.

- Yes
- No

Faculty feature

Would you like to be featured on the site? Please provide your email address at the bottom before submitting this form.

- Yes
- No

Graduate feature

Do you have an outstanding graduate you'd like to showcase? If you answer yes, I will contact you to determine how best to showcase or promote the individual you have in mind. We will need their express permission and at least one photo or graphic to support their entry. Please provide your email address at the bottom before submitting this form.

- Yes
- No

Alumni feature

Do you have an alumni you wish to showcase? If you answer yes, I will contact you to determine how best to showcase or promote the individual you have in mind. We will need their express permission. Please provide your email address at the bottom before submitting this form.

- Yes
- No

Working together

Do you have stories or illustrations on how M.Ed programs work together as part of School of Education? Your explanation could help community members, prospective students/parents of students understand the role each area plays and how programs work together to support the whole of SOE. Please provide your email address at the bottom before submitting this form.

- Yes
- No

Uniqueness

How We Excel in "Example" Area Do you have a great example to share regarding how your course(s) contribute to establishing the school of education as a leader in a specific area? Please provide your email address at the bottom before submitting this form.

- Yes
- No

Short stories

Do you have a great example to share regarding how M.Ed. programs help Alaska, support the community or promote our graduates? Please provide your email address at the bottom before submitting this form.

- Yes
- No

Discussion

Do you want a discussion page to pose questions to your students? You need to update the page after each semester, or ask open ended questions intending to leave comments in place or delete them periodically. If you answer yes, I will email you. Please provide your email address at the bottom before submitting this form.

- Yes
- No

Thank You

2015-2016: Write a "thank you," acknowledging an Alaskan communities or business for inclusion on the site. If you wish to have time to compose it, put in "I have a thank you," and provide your email address at the bottom before submitting this form and I will contact you for "thank you" specifics.

Your answer

Comments

Your comments and feedback are essential to the success of this project. If you ask a question, you need to provide your email below. Quick responses to questions may be had by emailing Janene McMahan at vjmcmah@alaska.edu.

Your answer

Email

Provide your email address if you wish to be contacted in response to a "yes" for any question above. This form does not automatically capture your UA username or id.

Your answer

SUBMIT

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

Table C.3. Faculty Survey Results

Number	Time	Show-case	Working Together	Uniqueness	Short Stories	Faculty Feature	Sample Materials	Graduate Feature	Thank You	Alumni Feature	Link to Your Site	Username, Email and Comments
01	5/19/2016 14:46:38	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No*	Yes	Yes	I have a thank you.	No	edse612.community.uaf.edu	<i>Not shown in this paper</i>
02	5/20/2016 6:11:57	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No*	No	No	I have a thank you.	No		<i>Not shown in this paper</i>

Appendix D: Showcase Website Screenshots – Faculty Highlights

Dr. Susan Renes

School of Education – Counseling Department

The School of Education Faculty

We are made up of unique people with diverse educational backgrounds. Our faculty have expertise ranging across multiple disciplines, and they bring their area of specialty to enhance what we have to offer our students and Alaska.

The faculty featured here will be followed by more.

Indigenous Voice, Service Learning

Book Author

A Journey Through Schizophrenia

Include the book chapter, or not? Can link it in on the left

Amplifying Indigenous Voices

It is not too hard to recognize that educational institutions, to a large degree, determine the process of engagement with learning and engagement with the learners. It should come as no surprise that unrepresented students might be tentative about actively participating in this process when their previous experiences with other schools or other social institutions might not have been positive. What underrepresented students are often asked to do, whether it is recognized or not, is leave their true identities — their true voices — at the door.

"Anytime teachers develop a pedagogy, they are concurrently constructing a political vision. The two acts are inseparable" (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 9). As institutions and teachers, the way we set up our classrooms either makes space for students or ignores their identities.

Syllabus

The top of my syllabus reads, "When groups of people who share a social and cultural context work together to learn, a culture or community of learning develops with everyone's participation supporting a collective effort to learn something new. The shared objective, combined with the diversity of expertise offered by each member of the group and sharing what is learned while learning how to learn, all play a significant role in a learning community."

The specific actions I take in the classroom include decreasing teacher power and increasing student voice, asking for both academic and personal reflection, and asking for participation in open dialogue to share these academic and personal reflections. My hope is that these actions in the classroom lead to action taken outside the classroom once class is over and the semester is done. To me, this is simply education at its best.

Sample Class Materials

See a sample syllabus from the fall 2016 semester for Foundations of Guidance and Counseling.



See [more class materials](#) at Dr. Renes' Google Site.

COURSE DESCRIPTION "The Foundations of Counseling course is designed to provide students with sufficient knowledge to begin the Counseling program. The course provides an overview of the professional, ethical, legal, theoretical, and practical aspects of professional counseling for both clinical mental health and school counseling. The historical development of the counseling profession is explored, as well as the roles, responsibilities, and training required for a variety of counseling specialties. Students are asked to examine personal motives for entering the counseling field and to explore professional goals. The prerequisites for this course are admittance to the counseling program or permission of the instructor."



Faculty Highlight

With Service Learning student cement their skills and the community benefits. People make connections.



Student Sample Work: Service Learning

Recycling – Public Service Announcement (PSA)
 ▶ 00:00 ◀ 00:00

Fairbanks Rescue Mission – PSA
 ▶ 00:00 ◀ 00:00

Articles

"Whether our students are sitting in the room with us as we teach, sitting in their home listening, participating by video-conference, or answering discussion questions on an online platform, technology can play a pivotal role in student learning. In this article we discuss technology in higher education, specifically its role in hybrid or online formats. As Renard (2005) so eloquently stated, "No generation has ever had to wait so little time for so much information" (p. 44). Presented here is a discussion of the types of students who benefit from distance learning, the factors that prompt instructors to engage in distance learning, and what instructors should know about distance education before they begin teaching with this kind of delivery."

Susan Renes & Anthony Strange (2010) Using Technology to Enhance Higher Education, Springer Science+Business Media, Innov High Educ DOI 10.1007/s10755-101-9167-3

Attached: Renes, Strange Using technology to enhance higher education

Articles

"In his book *Elegy for Iris*, John Bayley (2000) describes his life with his wife, Iris Murdoch, a successful author. In this article, the authors relate the life experiences of John and Iris to the relevant literature on lifespan development. Iris's symptoms of Alzheimer disease and deteriorating brain function are described, and the personal experiences of Bayley and the article's first author set the stage to suggest the importance of psychoeducation for family members and caregivers."

Mike Healey & Susan Renes (2014) Lessons From Iris: Perspectives on Aging, *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 9:1, 135-145, DOI: 10.1080/15401383.2013.854191 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2013.854191>

Attached: Healey, Renes Lessons from Iris

Dr. Joanne Healy

School of Education – Special Education

Helping an Undergraduate Researcher on Her Road to Success

URSA Research Day Group Shot

Here I am with undergraduate researcher, Elizabeth Smith, Robot, WEE, and UAF's Nanook. Wee really grabbed everyone's attention and Elizabeth spoke with several Deans, students, and faculty. Her research for the Fall 2015, Sharing With Robots: Using Wee, a NAO Robot, to Measure Joint Attention showed positive results. She was awarded the School of Education's Dean's Choice award to be a finalist for Research Day. Based on this project Elizabeth wrote another research project Sharing With Robots: Collaboration and Joint Effort with NAO did another study in the spring 2016.

We are currently working on further data analysis and writing articles.



Class Materials – Curriculum & Strategies I: Low Incidence



Dr. Healy chooses to add elements of the *open classroom* to many of her online courses. This means she puts some or all of her course materials online and encourages students to interact online in an arena that will have many eyes reviewing it. What does this do for the student? Causes him or her to increase his or her level of written communication. It prepares the student for working in an environment where many staff, faculty, parents, students, etc. will read what they write.

See [class materials](#) at Dr. Joanne Healy's WordPress site for EDSE 612.

Class Materials – Curriculum & Strategies I: Low Incidence

View one assignment rubric for an EDSE 612 course—taken for the Special Education Certification and/or the M. Ed. Program. The assignment description is,

"Assignment Assistive Technology

Project: You will utilize at least 5 different assistive technologies (AT) available in the University Park computer lab or on site Assistive Technology when working with students in your fieldwork setting. You will create a YouTube video demonstrating how to use each of the devices including how to customize it for a particular student. You will also submit a written report describing the activity you engage in with the student using an AT device, why you chose the device to differentiate the learning, the effectiveness of the device, how to improve the experience and the outcomes you observed, provide a how to use the AT for parents, recommendation for other AT devices, and mastery the written report will demonstrate the use of written English conventions. How will you use this technology to help a student transition to adulthood?"



The rubric carefully describes the CEC Standards which this assessment helps students achieve through realistic practice and application.



2014 Autism Society Volunteer of the Year

Dr. Joanne Healy, Assistant Professor of Special Education, is the **2014 National Autism Society Volunteer of the Year**. The award is presented to an individual volunteer whose work has positively influenced the lives of individuals, parents, and professionals addressing autism in his or her community or nationally. Dr. Healy was selected for her dedication and work over the last 5 years with the Affiliate's Society Assembly, which makes strategic recommendations to the Board. Denise Swan Carusoe, a National Autism Society Board Member, nominated Dr. Healy.



ASA Advocacy in D.C.

I had the opportunity to lobby Alaska legislators to advocate for those affected by autism and their families. The Autism Society provided a lobbyist training and as an organization we visited with Senators and Representatives. What an empowering experience! It was a great way to meet leaders in the autism field from every state. We shared our expertise on: restraint and seclusion, supporting insurance for early intervention for children with ASD, portability of vocational benefits from one state to another, and how to educate employers to the benefits of hiring someone with ASD.