

ASSETT

Arts and Sciences Support of Education Through Technology

University of Colorado at Boulder

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ASSETT Survey Series
Departmental Websites
Full Report
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Mission statement
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Departmental Website Survey Executive Summary

The "Departmental Website" survey was designed to find out what students want to see on departmental websites. ASSETT issued this survey in October of 2008 to the entire campus using buff bulletins and flyers to recruit participants. Students were asked to choose the *top 3-5 most important* things a Department needs to have on its website from a randomized list of 17 options.

The primary finding of this survey is that department websites should provide current and up to date course information. Students consider most important information regarding (1) required courses for the major, (2) courses taught in current and next semesters (beyond that if possible), and (3) course syllabi.

Second to course information, undergraduate students want information on department websites about careers related to the major. They also want information on internships. This indicates that students want more career services information on departmental websites. Within Arts & Sciences, career related information is especially important to social science majors.

Graduate students have different preferences than undergraduates. They prefer more information on faculty research and information about the graduate program. However, they also would like to see course information on department websites.

Respondent Data

937 CU students responded to the survey. Class standing distribution was as follows: Freshman, 26% or 243 responses; Sophomore, 17% or 157 responses; Junior, 19% or 177 responses; Senior, 19% or 180 responses; and Graduate Student, 19% or 180 responses. The average reported credit hours per semester were 13.5. The median age of students was 20 years. The average age of students was 21.2 years.

Distribution of respondents by Arts & Sciences area was as follows: Arts & Humanities, 126 responses; Natural Sciences, 255 responses; and Social Sciences, 172 responses.

Survey Results

Responses clearly identify a top 3 items as important for department websites. This table displays the frequencies with which respondents selected the top 3 survey items.

Item	N	Percentage
List of required courses for the major	715	79%
Listing of courses for current and next semester	512	56%
Course syllabi	473	52%

Across all areas in the Arts & Sciences and across all class standings, student responses were consistent, with no significant differences among the divisions. Only the Social Sciences had a fourth selection close to the top 3. The Social Sciences chose 'descriptions of careers related to the major' as an important item to have on a departmental website. Of the 17 items, the least selected item across areas was faculty honors and awards.

Survey Description

The “Departmental Website” survey was designed to find out what students want to see on departmental websites. The need for this information came to our attention after initial interviews with departments in Fall 2008. Most departments in the College of Arts & Sciences mentioned becoming more aware of the importance of a useful website for their students and prospective students. ASSETT issued this survey in October of 2008 to the entire campus using buff bulletins and flyers to recruit participants. The survey was delivered online. Survey participants were offered a chance to win a \$100 gift certificate from the CU Bookstore.

The survey asked for the following basic information from students: major, class standing, credit hours usually taken, age, amount of time spent online, and their typical use of laptops in class. The bulk of the survey consisted of one question that listed 17 items that might be found on a departmental website. The items were randomized for each respondent to eliminate item order bias. Students were asked to choose the *top 3-5 most important* things a Department needs to have on its website from this list:

- Overview and description the department and the major
- Description of careers related to the major
- List of guest speakers and public lectures
- News about the department (current events)
- Information about student clubs and organizations in the department
- Listing of courses for current and next semester
- Course syllabi
- Location of the main Department office
- Office locations for faculty, teaching assistants, and/or research labs
- Location of department courses offered this semester
- Description of faculty research and teaching
- Faculty awards and honors
- List of required courses for the major
- Forms for internships
- Information about working with faculty on their research projects
- Information about graduation ceremonies
- Graduate school information

Respondent Data

937 CU students responded to the survey. Class standing distribution:

Freshman	26%	243
Sophomore	17%	157
Junior	19%	177
Senior	19%	180
Graduate Student	19%	180

Table 1

The average reported credit hours per semester was 13.5. The median age of students was 20 years. The average age of students was 21.2 years. Students reported their major as an open ended response:

N	Reported Major (converted to major codes where applicable)	N	Reported Major (converted to major codes where applicable)
65	PSYCH	16	ECEN
53	"None"	14	CHEN, FILM, HIST, MCEN
41	Business	13	ACCT, ARCH
37	OPNO	11	Engineering, MKTG, ITP
35	IPHY	11	ASTR
31	IAFS, JOUR, MCDB	10	CSCI, EVEN, ARTS
28	ANTH	9	FNCE, MATH, PHIL, AREN
26	EBIO	8	LAWS, MUSC, SLHS
25	LING	7	ENVD, GEOL
24	COMM, ENGL	6	Advertising, EDUC, MA-SLP
23	ENVS	5	ARTH, CHEM, MBA
21	MCDB	4	APPM, GEOG, SPAN, THTR
20	ASEN	3	ATOC, CHIN, CLAS, Creative Writing, ETHN, JPNS, WMST
19	CVEN	2	Biology, FREN, HUMN, MGMT
18	PHYS, POLSCI, SOC	1	Acting, ASIA, COML, Design Studies, Educational Tech, Engineering Physics, ITAL, Pharmacy, RLST, Structural Engineering
17	ECON		

Table 2

Distribution of respondents by Arts & Sciences area:

Arts & Humanities (AH):	126
Natural Sciences (NS):	255
Social Sciences (SS):	172

Table 3

Survey Results

Responses clearly identify a top 3 items as important for department websites. Table 4 displays the frequencies with which each survey item was selected by respondents.

Item	N	Percentage
List of required courses for the major	715	79%
Listing of courses for current and next semester	512	56%
Course syllabi	473	52%
Description of careers related to the major	372	41%
Office locations for faculty, teaching assistants, and/or research labs	348	38%
Overview and description the department and the major	314	35%
Forms for internships	297	33%
Description of faculty research and teaching	247	27%
Graduate school information	239	26%
Location of the main Department office	236	26%
Information about student clubs and organizations in the department	229	25%
Information about working with faculty on their research projects	201	22%
News about the department (current events)	184	20%
List of guest speakers and public lectures	164	18%
Location of department courses offered this semester	102	11%
Information about graduation ceremonies	32	4%
Faculty awards and honors	27	3%

Table 4

Top 3-5 by Class Standing:

Freshman, Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors all selected the same item the most often.

Item	% of students selecting the Item				
	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Graduate
List of required major courses	84	83	80	83	62
List of Current/Next semester courses	52	50	57	63	60
Syllabi	65	54	50	48	
Description of careers	50	43	42	46	
Office locations of faculty, etc.			34	42	41
Internship Forms	40	40	34		
Description of Faculty Research					69
Department Information					42

Table 5

Graduate students have slightly different preferences for websites, though the number one item overall, list of required courses for the major, was a close second choice. Interestingly, for freshman through seniors, items relating to course information were the 3 most important items. Another interesting finding shows that description of careers is an important website item for all undergraduates.

Top 3-5 by Online Presence:

The survey asked students how often they were online. Students could answer Hardly, Sometimes, Pretty Often, and Constantly. Generally, time online did not affect items selected as important.

Item	% of students selecting the Item Response when responding: <i>Online</i> _____			
	Hardly Ever (N= 7)	Sometimes (N= 59)	Pretty Often (N= 503)	Constantly (N= 371)
List of required major courses		73	80	78
List of Current/Next semester courses	57	51	58	56
Syllabi	71	49	49	56
Internship Forms	57			

Table 6

Top 3-5 by Area in A & S:

Across all areas in the Arts & Sciences, student responses were consistent, with no significant differences among the divisions. Only the Social Sciences had a fourth selection close to the top 3. Of the 17 items, the least selected item across areas was **faculty honors and awards**.

Item	% of students selecting the Item		
	Arts & Humanities (N=126)	Natural Sciences (N=255)	Social Sciences (N=172)
List of required major courses	77	76	75
List of Current/Next semester courses	68	76	59
Syllabi	45	45	46
Description of careers			44
Faculty honors and awards	2	3	1

Table 7

Additional Findings

Other Items for Dept. Websites:

Respondents were given an opportunity to comment on the main question listing the 17 items. Specifically, we asked what we may have forgotten. The majority of these open-ended responses indicated that these were also important items:

- Contact information for faculty and staff (N= 10)
- More robust course information (2-5 years out; include description) (N=7)

Laptop Use in Class:

We asked how much students used laptops in classes. Interestingly, even though most students (93%) reported being online pretty often or constantly, most students reported that they never use a laptop in class.

Laptop use in class:

Never	Sometimes	Usually	Always
47% (N=444)	39% (N=368)	9% (N=84)	5% (N=44)

Table 8

Respondents were also asked to *comment* on how often they use laptops in class. Some important themes emerged from these comments:

- Use of laptops in class depends on the size and format of the class (how fast instructor speaks; if instructor uses powerpoint)
- Laptops, though quicker to take notes on, are admittedly distracting for some students

Fantastic & Rotten Websites:

We asked students, in an open ended question, to tell us whether there is a CU department that they think has a fantastic or a rotten website. Interestingly, of the 5 departments most commonly identified as having a rotten website (Business, Art & Art History, English, Physics, EBIO), each also was identified at least once as having a fantastic website. Of the 5 department most commonly identified as having a fantastic website (Business, Psych, MCDB, IPHY, Physics), each also was identified at least once as having a rotten website.

The Business website was identified most often (N=22) as fantastic and the most often as rotten (N=8). Physics displayed a similar bimodal pattern. It was identified as fantastic 12 times and as rotten 7 times.

Overall, there was more agreement about the fantastic websites than the most rotten ones. Nearly all respondents who identified the websites of either Psychology, MCDB, or IPHY, characterized them as fantastic.

Interpretation

Department websites should provide current and up to date course information. This is the primary finding of this study: students consider most important information regarding (1) required courses for the major, (2) courses taught in current and next semesters (beyond that if possible), and (3) course syllabi.

This finding has several implications for the development and maintenance of department websites. Providing current courses and syllabi listed each semester requires a more dynamic website that is more regularly kept up to date. This is probably a desired feature by students because it is important to students to plan their schedules in advance. In addition to planning their schedules, students want to know what to expect of the class by examining the syllabi. This may require faculty and instructors to prepare syllabi in advance of the semester it is listed. Having syllabi listed on *department* websites is not the same as have a syllabi available on a *course* website. This difference may be interpreted as students wanting access to syllabi besides those courses in which they are immediately enrolled.

Graduate students have different preferences than undergraduates. They prefer more information on faculty research and information about the graduate program. However, they also would like to see course information on department websites.

Second to course information, undergraduate students want information on department websites about careers related to the major. They also want information on internships. This indicates that students want more career services information on departmental websites. Within Arts & Sciences, career related information is especially important to social science majors.

The least important item overall was faculty awards and honors. This finding may come as a surprise. Though this is not an important item for current students, this does not mean it is unimportant to other stakeholders (alumni, prospective students). This raises an issue for departments to consider when developing their websites. Who are the audiences for the website and how do they meet potentially different informational needs of those diverse audiences?

Finally, the most basic information for a departmental website was not selected as most important by students. The overview of the department and major, for example, was rarely selected. This could be interpreted as an expectation about the baseline information that should be on a website. Basic descriptions of the major and contact information are expected on any website.

Students expect that departments have websites and that they can go the website for as their single source for information. As important sources of information, departmental websites should be organized so that information is displayed in a clear manner and can be quickly located. Results of this survey suggest that departments can make their websites better by including course and career information.