Content Strategy Plan for UNT CLASS

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Executive Summary

Some patterns on the CLASS website were noticed during the content audit that can hurt search engine optimization (SEO) and lead to a negative user experience. In order to address these deficiencies, the following goals have been determined: use the source code effectively; simplify navigation; do some spring cleaning; hire a content strategist and graphic designer; and create a research tab.

Three distinct target audiences visit the UNT CLASS website, each of whom have different wants and needs: prospective students and faculty who need persuasion; current students and faculty who want information; and alumni/donors who want inspiration.

The content audit spotlighted some patterns on the CLASS website that can be detrimental to search engine optimization and user experience: no meta descriptions and poor usage of structured data in the source code; confusing and difficult navigation; outdated, unused content; over-reliance on PDF content; outdated layout; and no centralized research tab.

Three user observations using think-aloud protocols were conducted. Search engine results were unsuccessful in answering the prompt, "you want to understand what kinds of research professors in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences at UNT are doing," and each user was also unable to find the information on class.unt.edu or research.unt.edu. In addition, website usability was rated very low while their expectations of how usability should be were rated very high. Based on the previously stated goals, recommendations include:

1. *Use the source code effectively*: Use title tags, meta descriptions, anchor text, and other structured data in the source code correctly to increase website's visibility in search results and draw in targeted visitors.
2. *Simplify navigation*: Reorganize the content into simpler categories, redesign the home page to link to important topics, and use a reorganized hover dropdown menu:
3. *Do some spring cleaning*: Convert PDFs with current content into another content type that can be indexed by search engines more effectively.
4. *Hire a content strategist*: Use a professional who knows analytics and target content rather than just create it.
5. *Hire a graphic designer*: Have a graphic designer work with the content strategist to create visually appealing pages which convey information in an intuitive way and bring the website up to standard incorporating the use of multimedia content types.
6. *Create a RESEARCH tab*: Once the coding is improved, navigation is simplified, old web pages are documents are purged, and content strategy and design is initiated, launching an optimized research tab will allow CLASS to realize some of its goals laid out in the Research Road Map:

Introduction

This semester's project in TECM 3550: Content Strategy is to analyze the University of North Texas [College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences (UNT CLASS)](#) website and recommend improvements. While the focus of this report is to recommend improvements to the website as a whole, I will also suggest ways to incorporate the goals of the Research Roadmap.

First, I will describe the content goals and audience for the website, and how I hope to improve and focus the site. Next, I will discuss the review that was done of the current site that helped create the goals for your site, which included stakeholder interviews, data analytics, competitor analysis, a content audit, and usability testing.

From there, I will detail the recommendations to improve usability and user experience on the UNT CLASS website. Finally, I include sample content models and a sample editorial calendar for your new UNT CLASS website. I believe that each of these recommendations will improve usability on its own, but they are interrelated and will be most effective if implemented together.

Content Goals

Some patterns on the CLASS website were noticed during the content audit that can hurt search engine optimization and lead to a negative user experience. In order to address these deficiencies, the following goals have been determined:

1. **Use the source code effectively**
   Use title tags, meta descriptions, anchor text, and other structured data in the source code correctly to increase website's visibility in search results and draw in targeted visitors.
2. **Simplify navigation**
   Reorganize the content into simpler categories, redesign the home page to link to important topics, and use a reorganized hover dropdown menu:
3. **Do some spring cleaning**
   Convert PDFs with current content into another content type that can be indexed by search engines more effectively.
4. **Hire a content strategist**
   Use a professional who knows analytics and target content rather than just create it.
5. **Hire a graphic designer**
   Have a graphic designer work with the content strategist to create visually appealing pages which convey information in an intuitive way and bring the website up to standard incorporating the use of multimedia content types.
6. **Create a RESEARCH tab**
   Once the coding is improved, navigation is simplified, old web pages are documents are purged, and content strategy and design is initiated, launching an optimized research tab will allow CLASS to realize some of its goals laid out in the Research Road Map.

Audience

Based on the methodologies described in the next section, I have identified three distinct target audiences, each of whom have different wants and needs when it comes to class.unt.edu:

1. **Prospective students and faculty:** these users want to know why they should choose UNT. They want content that will persuade them to apply and inspire them to choose UNT.
2. **Current students and faculty:** these users want to know how to do something at UNT. They want content that will educate them.
3. **Alumni/donors:** these users want to know that UNT is living up to their expectations. They want content that will entertain them and persuade them to support the school.

It is crucial to know your audience. One way to do that is through personas, which are archetypal representations of an average user. To that end, meet Dr. Maggie Stewart, a prospective faculty member. Maggie has been an assistant professor of Sociology for ten years. She loves teaching but wants more research opportunities. She has decided to search for jobs at R1 research universities. But she is more than just her career, and her needs reflect that. Dr. Stewart:

- is a minority female professor in mid-career
- is research-focused
- needs work-life balance
- has a non-traditional family
- wants to live in a non-judgmental, welcoming community
- is concerned about the safety of the community and quality of the local school districts

As you can see, it is important that potential applicants (student and faculty) not only get an idea of what academic and research opportunities are available, but also understand the culture of the university, the college, and the surrounding area. You can learn more about Dr. Stewart in Appendix A.

Review of Current Content

Objective 1: Determine CLASS's current website strategy.
To do this, our class interviewed a variety of stakeholders, reviewed the class.unt.edu data on Google Analytics, and completed competitor analyses and a content audit of the current class.unt.edu site.

The content audit spotlighted some patterns on the CLASS website that can be detrimental to search engine optimization and user experience. I will go over each pattern in more detail in my recommendations:

1. No meta descriptions and poor usage of structured data in the source code
2. Confusing and difficult navigation
3. Outdated content that isn't linked to anything
4. Over-reliance on PDF content that can't be crawled and indexed effectively
5. Outdated layout with no regard to current website design trends
6. No centralized research tab

Objective 2: Determine the usability of the UNT CLASS website to find information on faculty research.

To do this I completed three user observations using think-aloud protocols and the prompt "you want to understand what kinds of research professors in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences at UNT are doing." I concluded each test with a brief Q&A session. A summary of the users and findings follows.

- *Susan, 78, female, college graduate, retired computer programmer.* Susan is computer literate but not up to date on technology. She knows how to use search engines and navigate web pages.
- *Josh, 51, male, college graduate, data analyst, retired Navy.* Josh is technically savvy and computer literate. He works with computers every day and has no problems finding and using information online.
- *Bella, 18, female, high school senior, attending college in the fall (not UNT).* Bella grew up with computers and the internet as an integral part of her life. She is very adept at finding and using information from online sources.

Search engine results

Each user initially used a search engine to begin their task. Search terms included:

- "University of North Texas liberal arts"
- "Research at University of North Texas"
- "What types of research are professors at University of North Texas College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences conducting"
- "UNT research college liberal arts social sciences."

None of these search terms were successful. Results linked to UNT's university-wide research page, other college's research pages, and CLASS's home page.

UNT CLASS results

Susan and Josh's organic search results brought them to research.unt.edu. Susan did not realize that this was a university-wide page and not CLASS-specific. The page has a listing of stories about the research being done at UNT, but she did not see any regarding CLASS. Josh noticed the search bar (Susan missed it), but filtering by CLASS showed 0 results. Bella's organic search results brought her to class.unt.edu. She looked through the menu for research, finding only small bits of information, but nothing that satisfied the prompt. She concluded that CLASS is not doing any real research; and that UNT is a Tier 1 research university based on other college's research programs.

User takeaways

I asked each user to think of one major takeaway from the test, all of which touched on the lack of access to research information and its perceived unimportance. Susan said, "*For all the bragging UNT does about their research, it should be front and center on every college's website home page.*" Josh said, "*If CLASS is doing research, there is no way for someone not directly involved with CLASS to find out about that research.*" Finally, Bella said, "*It looks like either the college does no research at all, or that it's research is so insignificant that no one cares enough to publicize it.*"

Objective 3. Determine the usability of the UNT CLASS website as a whole.

At the end of each user test, I asked them to answer questions using a scale of 1-10 (1 being very bad/unlikely, 10 being very good/likely). As seen in Figure 1, across the board, usability was rated very low while their expectations of how usability should be were rated very high. That is a large gap to close.

Figure 1: Usability of class.unt.edu - actual vs. expected
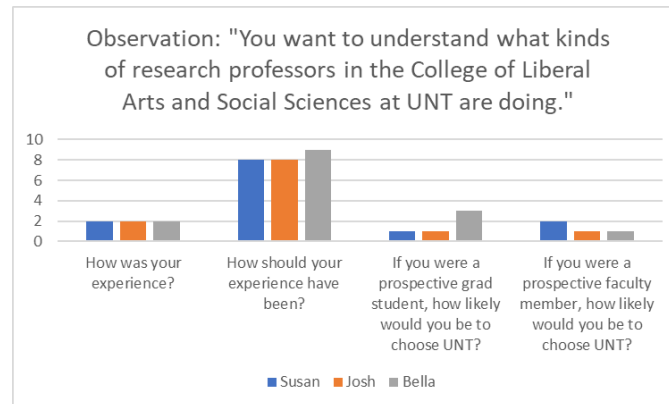
During the user testing, Susan's top three frustrations were 1) not knowing where she was on the site in order to get back there easily next time, 2) not being able to easily differentiate between being on the CLASS site and the university site, 3) and no uniformity of content design other than headers and footers.

Josh's biggest frustration is the complete lack of research information in CLASS, especially when the other schools have great content. He would like to see dedicated research pages, as well as better use of marketing to highlight and promote research.

Bella says that if UNT CLASS is doing research, there should be a link on the main menu for their research program, or at the very least a Research News section on their home page.

Recommendations

We believe the following content strategy recommendations will improve the UNT CLASS website's usability and user experience from many angles. Each of these recommendations will improve usability on its own, but they are interrelated and will be most effective if implemented together.

1. **Use the source code effectively**

   Correct use of source code not only makes it easier to design and maintain a website, but it also impacts SEO results. Use title tags, meta descriptions, anchor text, and other structured data in the source code correctly to increase website's visibility in search results and draw in targeted visitors.

   Once visitors arrive at the website, they need to easily find the information they need.

2. **Simplify navigation**
   Many stakeholders mentioned confusing and complicated navigation in their interviews: excessive clicks, confusing categories, and duplicate content. Reorganize the content into simpler categories, redesign the home page to link to important topics, and use a reorganized hover dropdown menu:

   - *Departments:* Social Sciences; Humanities; Communications, Media & Performance
   - *Programs:* Major, Minor, Certificate, and Graduate programs
   - *Advising:* Appointments, Requirements, GPA Calculator, Resources
   - *Research:* Undergraduate/Graduate/Faculty; search, news & events; funding
   - *News & Events:* Carousel-style content
   - *Resources:* About us, faculty pages, forms, FAQs.
   - *Donate:* Slightly different/bigger to catch the eye but still fit in the tab design

   Reorganizing the navigation tab is not easy due to the amount of content currently hosted.

3. **Do some spring cleaning**
   Several web pages and files are outdated or unlinked, and there is a large amount of PDF files. Archive and/or delete old content to provide a "clean slate" and allow easier categorization of content. Convert PDFs with current content into another content type that can be indexed by search engines more effectively.

   Once you manage the content, you need to organize and present it effectively.

4. **Hire a content strategist**
   A professional content strategist can work within the University's standards and requirements to create a website that is engaging, on-trend, up-to-date, user-friendly, and a great recruitment and donor tool. Use a professional who knows analytics and target content rather than just create it.

   Content strategy builds on other changes to make a website functional.

5. **Hire a graphic designer**
   Even the best website content strategy can fail to get through to its audience if a consistent and user-friendly design is not implemented in conjunction with the other new changes. Have a graphic designer work with the content strategist to create visually appealing pages which convey information in an intuitive way and bring the website up to standard incorporating the use of multimedia content types.

   These improvements bring us to our ultimate goal: quality research content.

6. **Create a RESEARCH tab**
   Adding a centralized RESEARCH tab can't effectively be implemented without first tackling the other recommendations. Once the coding is improved, navigation is simplified, old web pages are documents are purged, and content strategy and design is initiated, launching an optimized research tab will allow CLASS to realize some of its goals laid out in the Research Road Map.

<div align="center">

Sample Content Models

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Content model #1: Research News Carousel

One type of content you should consider for your new Research home page is a News carousel that can be easily updated to highlight new and exciting research projects.

Description of content types
- *Feature Photo:* Photo that embodies the idea of the news story, e.g., headshot for a story about a researcher; wetlands for a story about wetland recovery research, etc.
- *Department:* CLASS Department that sponsored research or employs researcher.
- *Department Link:* Link to department home page.
- *Content Title:* Descriptive but concise. Do not exceed 60 characters.
- *Content Summary:* Brief summary of the news story; first few lines of text if summative. Do not exceed 250 characters.
- *Content Link:* Link to content.

Sample content

- *Feature Photo:*
- *Department:*   Technical Communication
- *Department Link:*   https://techcomm.unt.edu
- *Content Title:*   When Your Boss Says, "You Need to Sound More Professional"
- *Content Summary:*   A study of the relationship between business writer attributions and word- or sentence-level style features often emphasized by advocates of plain style.
- *Content Link:*   https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/23294884211025735

Wireframe

Content Model #2: Departments Home Page

Updating the design of each menu item's home page is one way to incorporate content strategy and graphic design to present a current, attractive, and informative site for your users. Using a tile format will also allow users to easily view content on many devices.
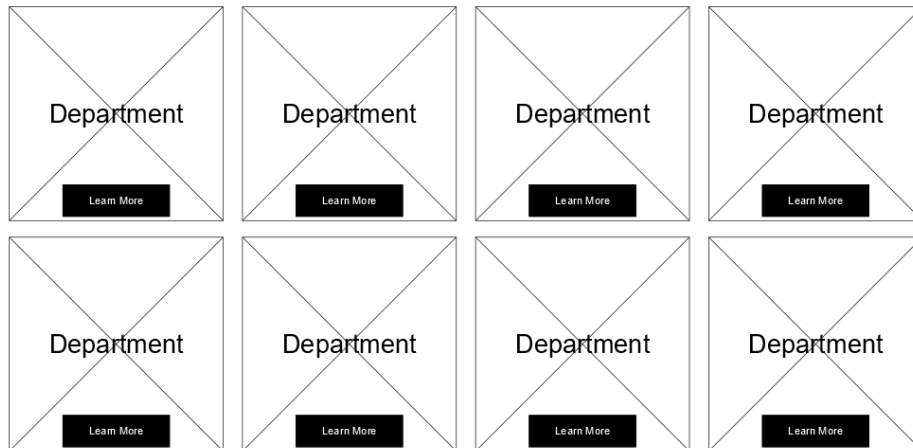
Description of content types

- *Feature Photo:* Photo that embodies the department.
- *Department Name:* CLASS department name.
- *Learn More:* Button
- *Department Link:* Link to department home page.

Sample content

- *Feature Photo:*
- *Department Name:*   Technical Communication

- *Learn More:*
- *Department Link:*   https://techcomm.unt.edu

Wireframe

Sample Editorial Calendar

Daily
- Check submission email account for new comments, submissions, etc.
  - Send new content ideas to task list
  - Create, edit, and publish time-sensitive news & event content
- Create, edit, and revise this week's tasks from editorial calendar

Weekly
- Monday: Review and revise editorial calendar with new tasks
- Monday: Check analytics, audience activity, or other sources of data
- Tuesday: Schedule news & event content through next Tuesday
- Friday: Inventory next week's new content
  - Be sure to add expiration dates for timely content

Monthly
- Check content inventory for expired content and remove
- Send out email to faculty & staff soliciting content

Annually
- Professional development
- Audit content
- Review and revise content goals
- Create or revise audience personas
- Create or revise content models

Event-Specific

Semester
- 2-3 weeks before start of semester: Create "new semester is starting" content
- 1-2 weeks before start of semester: Publish "new semester is starting" content
- 1-2 weeks before start of semester: Create "first week of semester" content
- Week 1 of semester: Publish "first week of semester" content
- 2 weeks before mid-semester break: Create "mid-semester break" content
- 1 week before and during mid-semester break: Publish "mid-semester break" content
- 1-2 weeks before finals week: Create "finals week" content
- Finals week: Publish "finals week" content

Registration
- 5-6 weeks prior to *first* registration session: Create "general registration" content
- 4 weeks prior to *first* registration session: Publish "general registration" content
- 2-3 weeks prior to *each* registration session: Create "specific registration" content
- 1 week prior to *each* registration session: Publish "specific registration" content

Graduation
- Five to six weeks prior to *first* graduation: Create "general graduation" content
- Four weeks prior to *first* graduation: Publish "general graduation" content
- Two to three weeks prior to *CLASS* graduation: Create "specific graduation" content
- One week prior to *CLASS* graduation: Publish "specific graduation" content

Appendix A - User Persona

Dr. Maggie Stewart

"I love fiercely, whether it's my career, my family, or myself."

Age: 42

Occupation: Assistant Professor of Sociology

Location: San Diego, CA

Biography

Maggie has been an assistant professor of Sociology for ten years. She loves teaching but wants more research opportunities. She has decided to search for jobs at R1 research universities.

Maggie is married with two high school-aged children. Work-life balance is very important to her. She enjoys baking, true crime podcasts, and working out at her local Ninja gym.

Devices Used
- smartphone
- tablet
- laptop
- desktop

Goals/Needs
- Full-time Assistant Professorship with tenure track
- Research support and opportunities
- Excellent organizational culture
- Highly-rated school district
- Nearby outdoor activities

Pain Points/Frustrations
- Maggie knows UNT is on the list of R1 universities, but that's it. She never hears about it in professional circles, so expectations are low.
- Plus, it's in Texas which she fears may be too conservative for her and her non-traditional family.
- She expects to be disappointed in what she finds but is checking the website for jobs and area information anyway.

Behavior
- Maggie is internet savvy but not technical—she is a user, not a builder.
- She lives on her phone and uses mobile apps whenever possible.
- She only uses her laptop or desktop when it's more convenient (lots of typing, needs a larger screen, bad mobile interface, etc.).
- She is careful on social media because of her profession as an educator. She is very aware of her digital footprint.
- She is slow at making decisions. She thinks through all variables and considers all facts before making choices.