

Developing an Advisor's Web Page

Beatrice Wellborn, Appalachian State University

A Web page provides an indispensable resource to advisees. Advisors may include content unique to the needs of their specific advisee populations, and the hyperactive linkages contained on a page can lead to other important academic and job-related resources. This article provides suggestions about how to start Web page development and where one may find examples of advising related sites. A brief outline of possible content is suggested.

Every seasoned advisor knows that a great deal of information must be exchanged in a one-half hour developmental advising session. By offering a Web page, the academic advisor can say: "Relax, the routine information we are going to discuss is written down. When you leave here you can go home and look it up." The advising home page places a library of advising resources at advisees' fingertips.

How to Create a Web Page

Web pages are created by using HyperText Markup Language (HTML). HTML generators or editors, which come in software packages such as Front Page 98 for Windows (1998), can be used to create Web pages. Tutorials are also available on the Internet. See, for example, <http://www.ncsa.uiuc.edu/General/Internet/WWW/HTMLPrimer.html>.

Many colleges and universities offer training programs in HTML and Web page construction. If time is at a premium, Web page design can be contracted to other staff. In fact, many students possess the required skills. However, a working knowledge of HTML will allow advisors better control of Web page content including the ability to make immediate updates and changes when needed.

Conventional texts are also available. For those who prefer to work from print, see "Building and Maintaining an Academic Web Service, Part II: The Individual's Viewpoint" by Roy Tennant (1997).

An advisor's Web page usually consists of numerous screens that provide ready access to data. Decisions regarding selected information, design and layout features, and topic organization are critical for a successful presentation. Web

pages that are poorly sequenced, include page after page of blocked text, are difficult to follow or boring are likely to see limited use. For a comprehensive source on Web page construction see the Yale Center for Advanced Instructional Media WWW Style Manual (<http://info.med.yale.edu/caim/manual/index.html>).

Linkages

Rather than duplicate information already available on another Web page, an advisor can create an easy-to-use link to an existing Internet address. The advisee need only click the mouse cursor on the appropriate, well-labeled link portion of the screen and the resources are available to him or her instantly.

Links offer an excellent opportunity for advisors to customize their Web sites. For example, the advisor of undecided students may provide links to pages that describe offered majors, while the pre-med advisor can link to sites that offer information about medical school preparedness seminars. Advising experience provides the best guidance in deciding what linkages to establish as well as what pages an advisor should develop.

A probable linkage for most advisors' Web pages will be that of their home institutions. This in turn, will likely be linked to the home pages of various campus services and departments (academic support, counseling, health, career and employment, etc.). Linkages can also be established to sites that address specific needs of the advisee population or to FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) pages. For example, the author's Web page can be linked to a series of sites designed to be of particular help to freshmen; see <http://www.appstate.edu/~wellbrnbl/box.html>.

When asked, advisees can provide excellent guidance in the creation of Web pages. During orientation, I asked each new freshman and transfer student to indicate one or two pressing questions. Their responses were used as guides for addition to or revision of FAQ pages.

Advisors should critically review all potential Web links. No external quality control exists on World Wide Web postings. Therefore, the currency, accuracy, and relevance of each link should be initially and periodically checked by the Web page author.

A Basic Outline for An Advisor's Web Page

A content outline for an advisor's Web page might look something like the following.

1. General information. The opening page should highlight the material available therein. Some home page topics include links to the following sites:

- the homepage of the advisor's institution
- the advisor's division homepage
- NACADA (<http://www.ksu.edu/nacada>)
- Academic Advising Resources on the Internet: <http://volvo.gslis.utexas.edu/~acadres/>

Faculty resource guides from several different schools are listed here. For a specific example, see <http://ben.franklin.uga.edu/saga/content2.htm>

2. Community-building links. Building community within a university setting consists, in part, of creating opportunities for students to connect with one another. For example, links to sites that present the following may be appropriate:

- summer reading programs for incoming freshmen; see <http://www1.appstate.edu/orgs/srp/>
- groups for students with similar academic interests; see <http://www1.appstate.edu/dept/fig/index.htm>
- residential programs; see <http://porter.appstate.edu/wcis/>

3. A page with links for new freshmen. Topics might include

- living accommodations: meal plans, residence halls, bus routes, parking, and campus post office boxes (see www.appstate.edu/~wellbrnbl/new.html)
- computer information: how to get a campus computer password, co-curricular transcripts, and beginning an electronic portfolio (see <http://www.appstate.edu/~wellbrnbl/otherwebsites.html>)

- academic and financial information: financial aid, library access, how to get textbooks, and student employment

4. A page for transfer students. Include information such as

- course comparisons; see <http://www.nnc.edu/transferguide>
- links to common transfer institutions; see <http://osu.orst.edu/admissions/traadm/traadm/htm>
- help with course selection; see <http://www.itransfer.org>

5. Procedural information. Every school is different and so are their academic policies and procedures. Topics for these links might highlight

- how to turn in forms electronically
- proficiency testing dates throughout the semester
- how and when to report for testing
- how to graduate in four years; see http://www.appstate.edu/www_docs/gstudies/tensteps.html

6. Degree requirements. Advisors may wish to establish links to existing sites, such as the homepage of the institution, that cover the following topics:

- core curriculum
- curriculum guides
- checksheets

7. Information for undecided students. The page could cite the following:

- a description of university services designed to help students select an academic major
- a list of majors
- a link to checksheets or curriculum guides for different majors

- *Advising Related Web Sites* from the NACADA home page; see <http://www.ksu.edu/nacada/choice5/info.html>
 - Academic Advising Resources on the Internet; see <http://volvo.gslis.utexas.edu/~acadres/>
 - *the Occupational Outlook Handbook*; see <http://stats.bls.gov/ocohome.htm>
 - College Board's Career Search; see <http://www.collegeboard.org/career/bin/career.pl>
 - the Web site of the career development center
 - links for special populations, such as Organizations Encouraging Women in Science and Engineering; see <http://www2.nas.edu/cwse/>
8. A FAQ page. Advisors often hear the same questions posed year after year. The following issues and many more can be addressed on a Web page:
- how to take course work at another school
 - how to access the course availability list during pre-registration
 - how to turn in forms for classes repeated
- For an example of a FAQ page divided by subject matter see <http://clla.tamu.edu/oua/advising/FAQ/faq.htm>
9. Other Web sites. The possibilities are endless, but can be tailored to suit advisees by listing pages that address
- general university information
 - community information
 - extracurricular activities
 - volunteer projects

10. An E-mail link. The HTML markup for making one's E-mail address an active link is `<a href = "mailto:your user name and address">email</a>`. A specific example looks like `<a href = "mailto:wellbrnbl@appstate.edu">email</a>`.

Conclusion

Advisors will need to learn new skills to work on a Web page. And some time will need to be set aside for answering electronic mail and for updating existing pages and links. However, the Web page offers a dynamic way to reach students, and to institution administrators, it offers a tangible presentation of the important role of academic advisors.

References

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Author's Notes

Beatrice L. Wellborn is a full-time professional academic advisor in the General Studies Academic Advising Center at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. She attended Mars Hill College and graduated with a teaching degree in 1968. She received her Master's degree in counseling from Appalachian State University in 1975. She has spent the past 28 years in teaching, counseling, and advising students. To contact her about this article E-mail Wellbrnbl@conrad.appstate.edu