

September 5, 2014
WRIT 221
Clayton Adcock
Logan Esch
Trevor Mee
Travis Royer
Tanner Whitlock

Montana State University Website Critique

Webdesign fashion is always changing. What was a modern website ten years ago now belongs to be put on display in the Museum of the Rockies. MSU decided that the old website was not “new” and “relevant” enough for 2014 and changed three crucial pages: MSU’s homepage, the student page and the faculty and staff page. These new pages are hard to locate with this new format. MSU even decided to include a “help” page to inform everyone of the new changes and help ease the transition.

The new landing pages on the MSU website are all about updating the look of the pages to make them feel up to date while pushing access to the systems most users would need to the side.

There are 13,671 students that are attending Montana State University. Of these students, 12,054 are undergraduates, with varying diversities, ages, and career goals. A resource that everyone who is attending MSU needs to access is the Montana State University website, which contains D2L, Student Email, and MyInfo. These resources are very valuable to every student at MSU. Because of this I feel that the students at MSU should have a bigger presence on the MSU website. For example, if a current student were to visit Montana.edu and try to look for any of these resources, they would expect a painless task which would involve quickly clicking on any of the said resources without hesitation. Of the 13,671 students that are

attending Montana State University, 1,617 of them are graduate students, who have jobs being TA's, SA's and research assistants . These people also need quick access to their resources without a hiccup. If MSU really wanted to stay relevant and exciting, they could easily create an app which consists all of these functions in one. This could eliminate the need for the students section and the faculty and staff section because most people either have a smartphone or other device which allows quick access to applications. Of course, the students and faculty and staff sections could not be completely eliminated from the website, but instead they could tuck them into the upper left hand corner and create a help page to find them.

One of the most important sections of the MSU website is the homepage. It's the page where the url, montana.edu, will take a person and it's the first thing anyone on the website will see. Given that the majority of users are students attending Montana State University, it would make sense that the site would cater first to their needs. The original MSU website had a row of options at the bottom of the homepage that did just that. These options provided quick and easy access to some of the most important pages for students, such as, Desire2Learn and MyInfo. However on the new page these exceptionally significant links are obscured. If a person were to look for either D2L or MyInfo on the MSU website they would have to already know where it was located because of it's removal from the homepage. While it is only one link away, returning students, who are the majority of users and who were used to the old site, wouldn't know that these links are now under the current students page. This problem could be circumvented fairly easily with the search bar at the top of the page if it were implemented correctly. There are many places on the homepage which could support easier access to any of these resources. Instead of throwing students into the upper left hand corner, like an after

thought, they could have included a students section next to admissions with its own drop bar with D2L, Myinfo and Student email accessible without hesitation. However, like so many things with the new homepage this too is severely flawed. If a person were to search for MyInfo in the search bar, the link from there would just take them back to the homepage, where MyInfo is not located. There are dozens of idioms that can be used in this situation but for the sake of putting it as clearly as possible, change for the sake of change is not a good thing. The MSU website should be a site first and foremost for the students.

The faculty and staff webpage is yet another example of the new pages trading utility for style. The page has been cluttered with links to news articles ranging from graduate students receiving scholarships to freshman convocation. Why would a faculty member need that information? The announcements section may be a little more useful. It contains information about things like fitness center memberships and a new voicemail system; information staff of the university may care about. However is this information valuable enough to bombard users with every time they need to access the critical systems needed to do their jobs? I feel information of this nature would be better served in something like an email where users can view it once and then get it out of the way. The same can be said for the Today @ MSU section. The schedule of upcoming events may be slightly useful to some users. Certainly not everyone is interested in seeing "Rising Urban Chickens" (their spelling), and not when they need access to tools to do their job. At the bottom of the new webpage are the links that faculty and staff would actually use ranging from class roles to benefits. It is insightful that these links lost prominence at the top of the page to pictures and news that most people don't need every

day. The changes made to the faculty page are a paradigm for the rest of the site: more hip style, less utility.

To its credit the new website does look nice and shiny, it just feels like what the average user needs has been swept to the side in exchange for instagram photos. Let us hope that when the glamor wears off the web designers remember the engineering adage that form follows function.