Web Development at Montana Tech, 2007 – 2012
by Melissa Holmes

This document describes the evolution of web development and the Montana Tech website during my employment as Montana Tech's "webmaster" 2007 – 2012. Screenshots were acquired from The Wayback Machine Internet Archive https://web.archive.org/

Summer, 2007

I began my journey as Montana Tech's Webmaster in June of 2007. Web content was mostly static with a few tools developed in-house by the IT office. Dreamweaver templates were used for development and website files were published directly to a web server hosted on the Montana Tech campus. Web editing was performed by departments, usually the administrative assistant. The web developer position included a lot of coordination and training.

The screenshot below shows the website when I began. It was my starting point, and I didn't design any of it. The homepage was static and consisted of a bunch of links. The three photos had a hover effect achieved using css, JavaScript, and two images for each photo. The Google Search widget was used. The photos were changed infrequently, but news and events were updated multiple times per week.
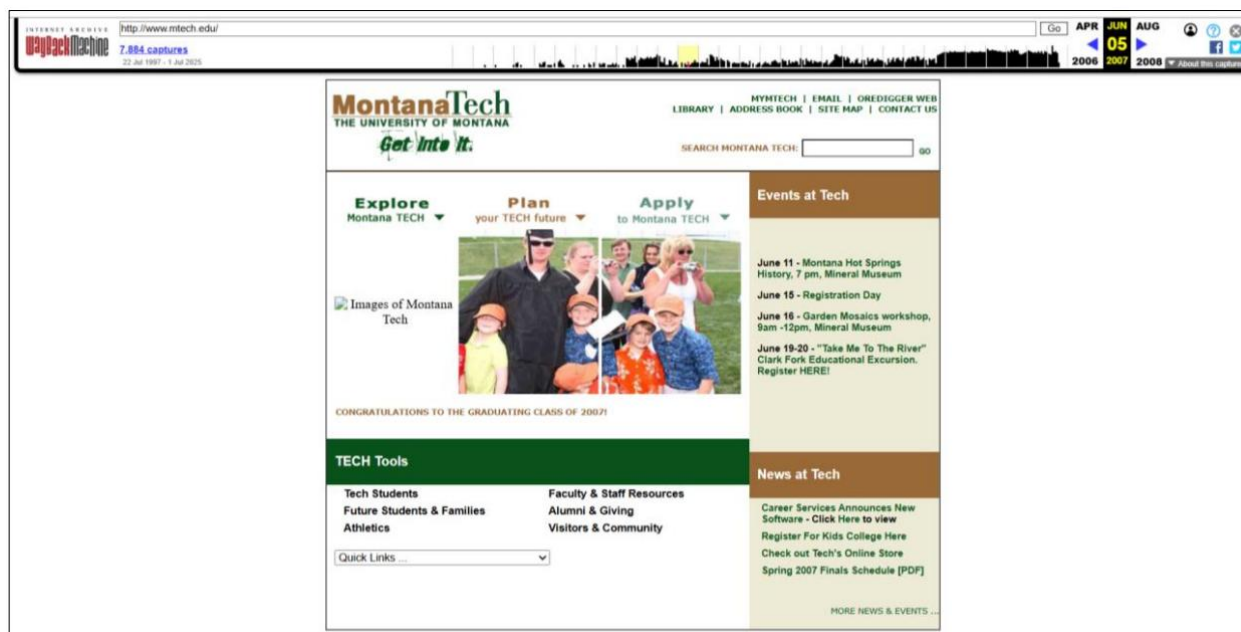

Figure 1: Montana Tech Website, June 2007. The starting point.

2007 - 2008

The first round of aesthetic changes happened during my first year. The basic layout and information architecture remained the same, but I added a gradient background, styled the containers with tabs and rounded corners, and changed the color scheme a bit. These changes occurred incrementally, and were mostly completed on my own with little approval or direction. The changes were small, and overall feedback was none to positive.

During the same time period, we made a number of behind-the-scenes changes, such as an employee directory that was updated "automatically" from databases; and some changes to the file system that allowed greater flexibility of permissions when various employees edited the site. We employed two student bloggers (Viewpoints) experimentally and linked to their blogs from the homepage.

The web developer position was moved from the Information Technology Department into the Marketing & Public Relations Department during this time period, and social media was being considered but not actively used. There was a loosely-formed web "committee" but not much of a strategy. Web development was experimental and subject to the whims of stakeholders with influence.
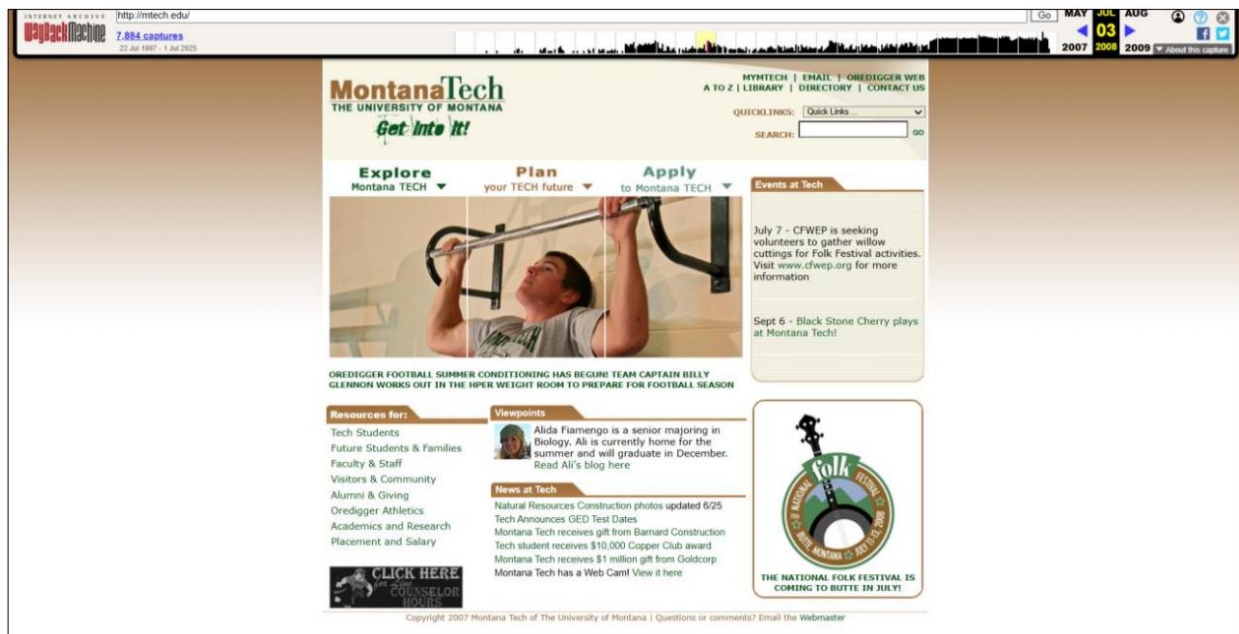

Figure 2: Montana Tech Website July, 2008. Tabs, colors and rounded corners.

January, 2009

An ad-hoc website redesign committee was formed in the latter half of 2008, and a new site design was launched on the first day of Spring semester in 2009. The first rendition of this site is below. Feedback was varied and bipolar; people either loved it or hated it. The four photos in the bottom center had an animation effect, achieved using Adobe Flash.

Content was mostly static and development was still happening in Dreamweaver but we were embedding content for more streamlined development: we used Blogger for announcements (see the icon) and Flickr for photo galleries; and embedded feeds in our webpages. This version of the site allowed the user to choose a copper or green stylesheet (see the top right corner) which I thought was extremely cool and nobody else cared about. It was removed fairly quickly.

This time period was quite experimental as we attempted to use quickly-changing social media technologies and strategies to engage our audience.
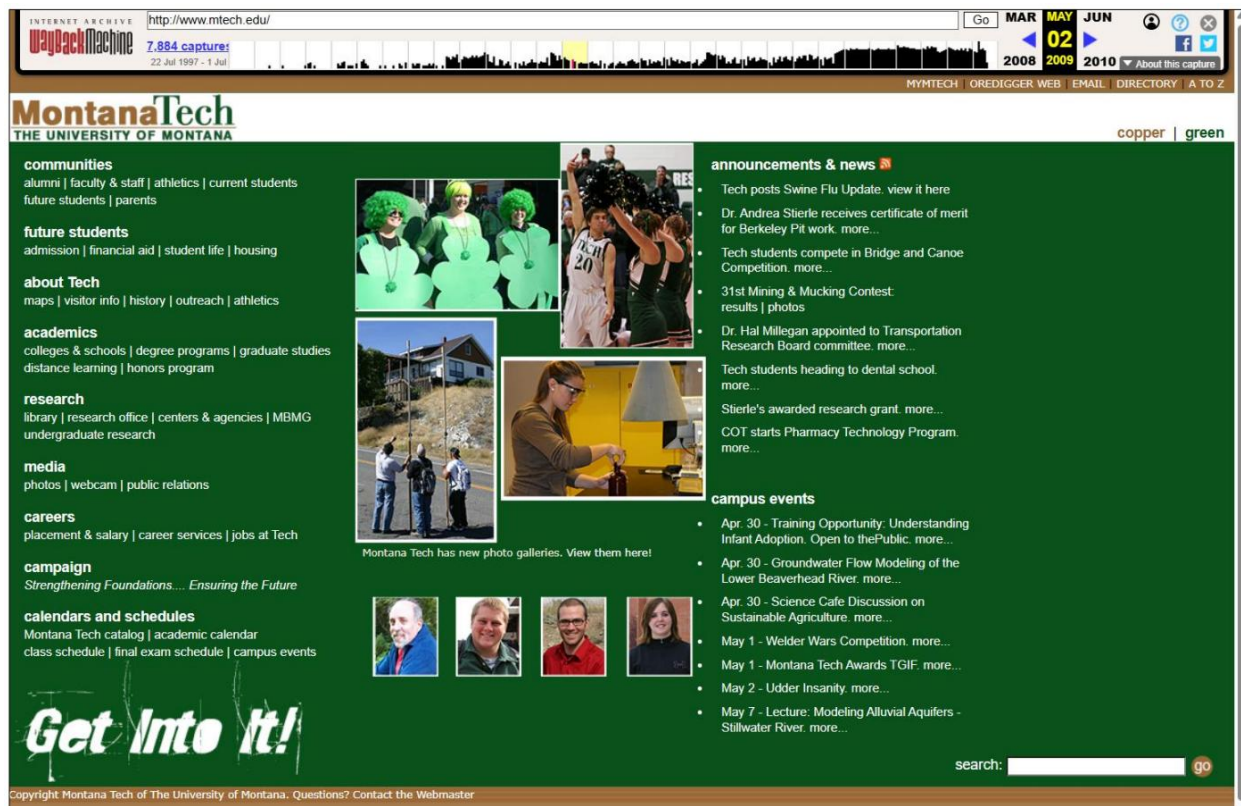

Figure 3: Montana Tech Website January 2009

Summer 2010

By Summer of 2010, I had made several aesthetic changes to the homepage that improved it considerably (in my opinion!) Headings and whitespace were added, and the left column of links was reduced in width. The photo fades into the left column, and the Adobe Flash features were removed. We started employing student and staff bloggers (Viewpoints) and

later, vloggers. This homepage (Figure 4, below) is still incredibly cluttered, but less so than the version before it.
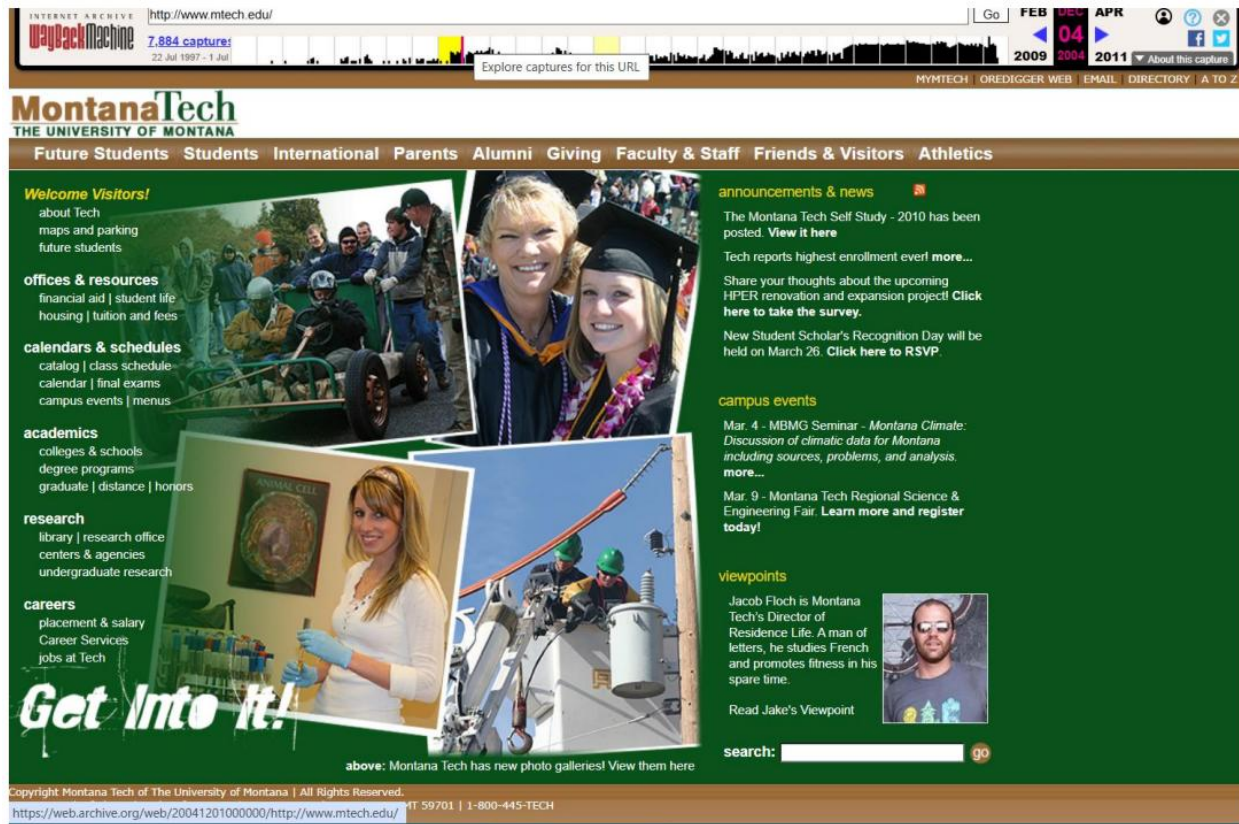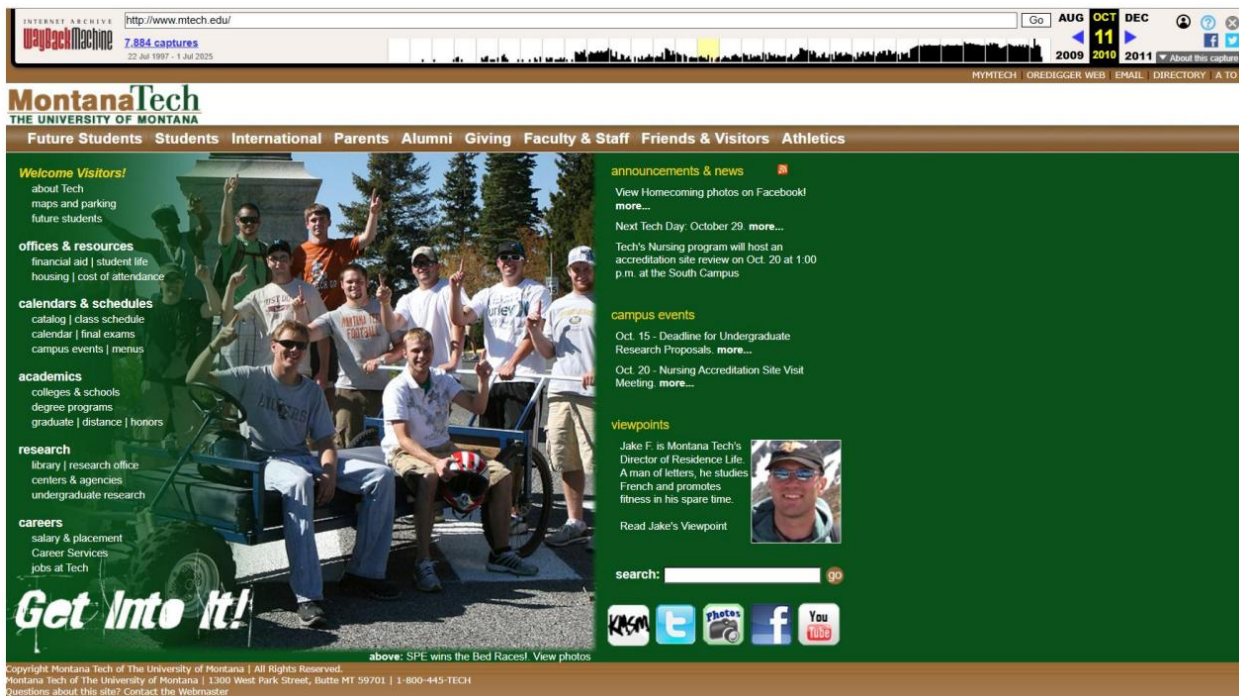

Figure 4: Montana Tech Website, August 2010

Figure 5: October 2010. We had several bloggers that were "randomly" displayed on the homepage, and more social media icons.

2011-2012, and beyond

In 2011, Montana Tech began working on a marketing strategy that included the website and social media presence. Consultants were hired to assist with brand, strategy and materials. External products including an alumni relations system and typical university tools (registration system, etc.) were being integrated into the website. We began using the Cascade CMS, and I did the work of transferring the current web content into that system.

Cascade is still used today at Montana Tech. In order to take the website to the next level, a website design company was employed to create the next version of Montana Tech's website. A group of expert designers designed the site and implemented the initial version in Cascade. After that, the web developer made changes. Web editing was no longer distributed among departments and was instead completed by a small group of people.