IA and Content Recommendations:

Current Issues & General Strategies

This document is meant to accompany our page-by-page IA and content recommendations presented in a wireframe format using an online tool called Jumpchart.

As you click through the wireframes, you'll find a link at the top of most pages. This references the corresponding page on the current Saint Mary’s site. If we suggest a NEW page, we will identify it as such and provide content recommendations for it. Most pages have explanations for any changes to the IA we are proposing and Content Recommendations if appropriate.

The notes below refer to information architecture (IA) and content strategies to be applied throughout the entire site. In addition to these, White Whale has delivered an IA and content best practices document (Best Practices-IA & Content .doc) that outlines our strategies for organizing and presenting Web content.

General Site Content Notes & Recommendations

In conducting a thorough review of the top 2-4 tiers of the Saint Mary’s site, we’ve discovered a few issues needing particular attention.

Show, don’t tell
As our strategic recommendations make clear, we highly encourage you to adopt a show rather than tell approach to Web communications. The majority of the text on the Saint Mary’s site simply describes the topic at hand, rather than using real life examples to validate it and put it in context. These static descriptions do not actively engage site visitors. This is in part a function of the site’s currently static approach to content management: once there are new tools for managing dynamic content, it’ll be easier to tell stories. But it will be a big culture shift for Saint Mary’s, and it’s best to start preparing early.

Ideally, the SMC website will be a means of beginning and continuing relationships with your various constituencies. To do this, it needs to provide engaging content that accurately reflects the Saint Mary’s community.
way to achieve that is to expose your readers to the community in the most unfiltered way possible.

As the content on the new site takes shape, we recommend you constantly seek out creative ways to incorporate video, audio, candid photography, blogs, Twitter feeds, and stories generated by the community itself. We know SMC doesn’t currently produce an abundance of this type of material, but as the new site takes shape, we hope you will start to develop this type of content.

Even the style and tone of the writing on a page can be edited to add a more personalized and friendly feel. Examples that feature current activities can help break up the blocks of text. Effectively showing SMC will require more first-person accounts, relatively unfiltered / non-“manicured” portrayals of a whole range of campus activities -- from serious academic endeavors to frivolous student fun.

**Navigation and content should not reflect SMC’s organizational chart**

This is a point we make in our Best Practices document, but we’d like to reiterate it here. The navigation and content of the top-level site pages should present information under general categories rather than reflect the administrative offices within a section.

This is particularly an issue in the Student Life area of the site. Examples:

- **Student Life > Community Life** - [http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/student-life/community-life/index.html](http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/student-life/community-life/index.html) - One would expect to find information about community life in general, but instead the content here is about the Office of Community Life, its mission and programs. Community Life can and should run this section of the site, and info about the Office should be here, but not as the leading content.

- **Student Life > For International Students** - [http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/student-life/for-international-students/index.html](http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/student-life/for-international-students/index.html) - One would expect to find a general introductory resource page for international students here but instead it is a homepage for the Center for International Programs, which also has another page devoted to it in this navigation - [http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/student-life/for-international-students/center-for-international-programs/index.html](http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/student-life/for-international-students/center-for-international-programs/index.html)

**Each page on the site should have unique content and purpose**

There are a few different issues here. The first is more a product of the old design with the descriptions of sub-pages taking up a significant portion of the content area. Though many top-level pages should serve as gateways to detailed information deeper in the site, when a page has virtually no information other than the thumbnail image, sub-page link title, and short descriptor of the
sub-page content, it begins to make a negative impression on an external visitor.

Examples:

- Lasallian Approach - [http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/lasallian-approach/](http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/lasallian-approach/)
  (This page has more unique content – good content – but ends up being burdened with navigation that takes up too much of the page.)

As we transition to the new site, pages as described above will need greater attention and new writing – especially those that are higher up in the navigation.

Second, we’ve discovered a number of pages that are little more than a list of links that lead to content elsewhere in the site. Examples:


As part of your review process, ask yourself: Does this information exist elsewhere on the site? And related, is there someone else on campus more directly in charge of this information that I should be coordinating with? If the answer is yes, then briefly mention the information on the main page and link to the primary source page for that content. This step helps cut down on the size of the site and ensures that each page has a unique purpose.

Finally, we’ve also discovered many pages with very little content. If there are no more than a few sentences on a page, consider consolidating the content with other like-information. Our detailed recommendations in the wireframe offer suggestions for those pages that are now in the top levels of the current site, but each content manager should review their area of the site for this issue.