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INTRODUCTION:

THE SAINT MARY’S REDesign

We have every reason to be extremely optimistic about the outcome of the Saint Mary’s redesign project.

Saint Mary’s is a great school— considering location, quality of academics, values, and school spirit, it’s probably one of the best all-around schools in the United States. Its student body is engaged and articulate; there’s a healthy relationship between IT and communications; the campus is picturesque, the weather’s great. The school is led by a band of socially engaged and widely beloved Brothers and a team of thoughtful and sensitive administrators. If the goal of a redesign is to present an authentic and accurate (if aspirational) picture of an institution, then we’ve got a great head start. There are very few angles from which Saint Mary’s doesn’t look outstanding.

This presents you, and the vendor you’ve chosen to work with on your Web site redesign, with an enormously exciting opportunity to do things that haven’t been done before on the higher ed Web, and to project a sense of confidence befitting one of the world’s great institutions of higher education.

The purpose of this document is to suggest some steps along that road. We have been listening to Saint Mary’s carefully, and now intend to present a few ideas from an objective position. Although graphic designs tend to attract most of the attention, the ideas and documents that form their foundation are just as important— perhaps more. And the work of creating them is a crucially important part of our creative process.

Our goal— and the entire goal of this process— is to create something that will last, that’s sustainable, and that feels like an authentic product of the SMC community. We hope that what we have to say resonates with anyone connected in any way to your site redesign.

In formulating these recommendations, we have chosen to focus on proposals of two types. First, anything requiring immediate action is noted here; some of the ideas we propose will take work on SMC’s end, and we’d like to get you started right away. Secondly, we have tried in some cases to produce proposals whose content is contentious and arguable. There are some big questions to be answered in the course of this project; we’re trying to ask them early on, and provoke discussion and debate about these key points, before we get too far into the design phase of the project.

A final note: We have written this document with the intent of making it available to the entire Saint Mary’s community, at the discretion of your committee. We ask, however, that this document not be circulated outside SMC.

Now let’s get started!
RECOMMENDATION 1:

ONE SAINT MARY’S, NOT THREE

Some of the strategic documents associated with Saint Mary’s last Web design (and the messaging guidelines behind it) discuss a triad of identity components: Catholic, Lasallian, Liberal Arts. While we understand the reasoning behind this division, we think it works against SMC’s best interests.

By dividing SMC’s identity into three separate yet related parts, we may be avoiding some tough (but fruitful and interesting) conversations about the core institution itself. What makes Saint Mary’s compelling (to us, at least) isn’t something that we can separate that way. The role played in the academic process by SMC’s religious foundation; the Lasallian concept of education as a form of social justice in itself; the particular emphasis on voluntary service as part of the student experience; the fact that SMC’s athletes talk their way through the Great Books just like everyone else; the discussion of literature and philosophy around a table that itself reflects the lack of hierarchy in the Lasallian practice of Catholicism: these to us are the cornerstones of Saint Mary’s College.

To consider Lasallian identity separately from the liberal arts, or Catholicism separately from the Lasallians, strains the imagination. But a thriving community of scholars, founded in a particularly academic and service-oriented branch of the Catholic religious tradition, is easy to understand. That’s what we hope the new SMC Web site will represent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. On the current site, “About SMC” is an afterthought. It’s a link in the footer, and the resulting page has just a couple of paragraphs of text, with sublinks for a grab bag of SMC-related pages. We argue that “About SMC” should be the most important and meaningful section of the site: the place where SMC’s unique identity and culture are hashed out and presented to the public. The redesign process can facilitate those conversations, and we’ll look forward to representing them visually, but the final word on what SMC is about can only come from your own community.

2. The site design shouldn’t mask SMC’s religious identity. Saint Mary’s students come from all walks of life and all religious backgrounds, but all the students we’ve met—none of them Catholic, yet—came to SMC at least in part because of its religious values. As Brother Ron put it in our meeting: “We accept people of all faiths because we’re Catholic.” That is a very powerful message, and one that your new site ought to send.
3. The role of the Christian Brothers in student life can be presented with personality and warmth. The Brothers themselves tend to be beloved members of the community, and their prominent campus profile is, to some degree, an anachronism. In this buzzy Web 3.0 future-driven world we live in, it’s refreshing and compelling to see students and Brothers working in small groups, or sharing meals, or in conversation during Theology on Tap. It speaks to an earlier time in American education, and (we believe) reinforces some of the core elements of the liberal arts tradition. We’d like to see more Brothers depicted on the site.

4. For a college to communicate clearly and powerfully, it should have a sense of what it is not as well as what it is. Although Saint Mary’s is open to prospective students of all faiths (or no faith at all), we have the sense that students that are actively hostile to religious traditions wouldn’t enjoy the Saint Mary’s experience. The Saint Mary’s logo has at its heart the book and the cross; the institution does as well. It’s in everyone’s best interest to present SMC’s Lasallian Catholic foundation as it actually is.

5. It’s important to define “Lasallian” for some of the site’s audiences. But it’s not necessarily that important. We very much like the casual approach taken in some of your admissions materials (“We’re a Lasallian college— google it”). That won’t be enough for the new site, but we would like to suggest that the issue of defining “Lasallian” can to some degree be offset by showing Saint Mary’s values in action via student life, news stories, and the curriculum.
The content of the current Saint Mary’s site is managed by means of a technical process that gives the impression of a high degree of administrative oversight. This impression is incorrect.

To make a change to your content on the current site, you edit your page via Contribute and submit it; it’s then “approved” (by Mike Jung in Communications) and goes live. In our meetings on campus, we heard this process referred to several times as one of “moderation.” Some staff expressed frustration that their work is moderated, suggesting that they could be trusted to accomplish their goals without administrative oversight. They already are!

The fact is that nobody we’ve met in Communications seems to want to moderate the SMC site’s Web content to any significant degree. The current “approval” model is only a technical detail—essentially, a flaw in the Web communications process—and the new CMS will correct it. The content managers of the new Saint Mary’s site will have control over the content they manage; in other words, the site’s content will belong to its content managers, who will have the freedom and power to make their own decision.

This power does imply a degree of responsibility. We heard one staff member say that she’d submitted a page with typos, and after it had been “moderated” and had gone live, it still had the typos! While this particular staffer was engaged enough to locate and correct these errors, we suspect there may be content managers in the SMC community who rely too much on a moderation process that doesn’t really exist. In our experience, content creators whose work is heavily moderated tend to lack a sense of accountability for their content; on the new site, it will be important for these folks to understand that there will be little if any “firewall” between their work and the public eye.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The new CMS should be the only way to edit content on the new site. This will simplify the training, support and documentation processes immensely.

2. The management of content for the Saint Mary’s site should be opt-in; nobody who doesn’t want to maintain Web pages should be forced to. For the new Saint Mary’s site to be effective, its managers and editors must be engaged and motivated. They should enjoy using computers, and see their Web pages as an opportunity to serve their (external and internal) audiences.

3. Stakeholders on campus who don’t want to manage Web content should have options for getting changes made. They should be able to request content changes via an online form, and track the status of those changes. And it should be possible to enrich their sites with content feeds that update automatically (for example, showing a feed of appropriately tagged Saint Mary’s events or news items).
4. Everyone who manages a section of the Saint Mary’s site should be identified with the pages they manage. Some institutions name the individuals responsible for page content in the footer of the page; that’s an interesting idea that we might explore, but whether we do or not, there should be a clear understanding of who manages content at SMC. Every page should be associated with a name (or a few names)— if not the administratively responsible individual, then someone in Communications or CATS.

5. Every page that is easily accessible from the Saint Mary’s home page, and every page that’s considered a primary entry point into the site, should communicate effectively on behalf of the entire institution. This means that the pathways to information should be clear, the writing should be crisp and engaging, and the general branding and messaging should reinforce Saint Mary’s institutional priorities.

6. It should be the job of Saint Mary’s Communications staff to keep an eye on all the pages that are considered primary points of entry. They should be able to offer their services to content managers who need help keeping up with the flow of information at SMC; for example, they might help populate home page feature stories for departments that are too busy with the academic cycle to keep up their pages.

7. It should be understood that the core responsibility for Web content is with individual content managers. There’s a difference between content management and communications (more on that below); it may take occasional collaboration between the former and the latter to make the site’s content engaging and compelling in a sustainable way, especially in the first few months of the transition from a centralized to a distributed content management model.

8. The fact is, everyone’s goals for the new Saint Mary’s site are largely the same. The various sites that make up the world of SMC should reflect the distinctive personalities of the parts of the community they represent, as well as the communications goals of the human beings that manage them; at the same time, because all these sites are part of the same institution, the pages need to reflect the institution’s brand, key messages, and priorities.

These two needs are in no way oppositional: it’s a simple fact that every page of the new site should be informational, clearly navigable, and as interesting and engaging as possible, and that they should all speak on behalf of the same institution. We need the content managers throughout Saint Mary’s to ensure that the information’s correct, the stories authentic, and the news and events current; we need Communications to ensure that the pages communicate effectively, are clearly composed, and represent Saint Mary’s well.
RECOMMENDATION 3:

MORE STORIES FROM MORE PLACES

In our conversations with Saint Mary’s staff to date, we’re trying to talk less about “content” and more about “stories.” Content is largely static, and the process of managing it should be easy and painless. Managing content is essentially an administrative task. Stories are different; they come and go, they reflect where your school is at in the present moment and, collectively, they can reinforce Saint Mary’s key messages in a powerful and effective way.

One of the issues that emerged in conversation is that there are several ways of defining what a story is. In particular, many folks we’ve met have assumed that a news story ought to be about the same thing as a press release—researched, sourced, and written up. There’s certainly a place for those sorts of stories; in-depth feature articles are invaluable on the Web. But small stories are important too—in fact, sometimes a headline and a Web link are enough to tell a story.

Internet geeks like us, who already consume news in fairly bite-sized portions, take this for granted. And so do most of your Web site’s visitors, especially prospective students. But we’ve come to realize that this idea—that a headline and a link can sometimes be enough—can be a little foreign in higher ed news offices, which are used to considering a story as a 400-500 word piece, developed through interviews and rewrites over the course of a week or so, and approved and delivered to a specific publication. But for students who are looking all over the Web, and consuming information from many sources at the same time, short bits of information can communicate a great deal. Small stories can mean a lot to these visitors.

Everyone agrees that the new Saint Mary’s site ought to include more stories, and they should come from more people. But SMC’s communications team is small, and the College is quite large. Your communicators can’t know everything that’s happening at the grass roots, and that activity is what’s going to be most interesting to your community of prospects and peers. So we need to create pathways for stories to travel throughout the community. Self-knowledge is a key to survival in all organisms; what SMC needs, we think, is a way to learn more about itself.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **“What are you working on?”** Saint Mary’s students and faculty should be invited to answer this question as frequently as they like, to help SMC’s communicators see an accurate and dynamic picture of what SMC’s community is exploring on a daily basis.
The Web team should publish the stories it learns about— even short notices— on Twitter. This will expose more stories to the light, and also will create a unified content stream that can be syndicated via RSS and displayed anywhere.

The stories collected in this manner should be available to Communications. When Elizabeth and her staff find something they’d like to pursue, they ought to be able to write up a story on their own. In the meantime, these stories can form a constantly refreshing stream of sidebar items, “Did You Know?”-type content, and blurbs for use throughout the site.

2. The collection of stories should begin long before the new SMC Web site launches. Very early in the design process, we’ll be sharing some ideas about how to introduce the SMC community to a story-gathering process.

3. Saint Mary’s has dozens of student groups, with affinities ranging from the religious to the service-oriented to the downright quirky; these groups can be a great source for storytelling. The prospects that come to the SMC site will bring with them a wide diversity of interests; exposing them to as many of these groups as possible will help them find something to identify with. This might entail providing small grants to student groups to create short videos detailing their mission; it might mean allowing groups to create profile pages, and exposing those pages to prospective students. And the groups themselves will appreciate the greater visibility; organizations like SMC’s Student Senate can help keep club lists current.
RECOMMENDATION 4:

**USE JAN TERM TO DEFINE OPPORTUNITIES**

Institutions of higher education have a tendency to be defined in the public imagination by the curricular features that make them unique. Brown’s associated with the New Curriculum, Chicago with the Common Core, Colorado College with the Block Plan. In Saint Mary’s case, it’s the January Term and the Collegiate Seminar that provide uniquely defining assets. In many ways the Seminar defines a Saint Mary’s education; but Jan Term courses provide a glimpse at the breadth of intellectual opportunities at Saint Mary’s in a way that is immediately tangible.

Jan Term students travel the world, or stay at home investigating the world’s most intractable problems. A Jan Term course list could just about serve all Saint Mary’s marketing needs by itself; we just opened the Jan Term catalog at random to “Ecopoetry / Ecopoetics / (M)other Nature” and “Betting on Your Death.” It’s clear that a great deal of attention goes into the structure and function of Jan Term, as well as the materials that accompany it; we’d like the new Saint Mary’s Web site to benefit from some of that attention as well.

How can we bring SMC’s curriculum to life in a way that feels real to your students and prospects? Our proposal is to create something relatively unique in higher ed (in intent, if not in name): rich, dynamic, collaborative pages on a few of SMC’s interesting courses. Of course, many other courses outside Jan Term are interesting too, and any of these recommendations can apply to any course (including those in the Seminar). We’re only discussing Jan Term here because of its use as a differentiator.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Jan Term courses should be prominently highlighted on the site— for example, a randomly selected course title might appear occasionally in the sidebar of some content pages.

2. We’d like to see unique, personalized pages for many of the Jan Term courses. These pages might include objectives, goals and prerequisites, but also photo galleries of student work; links to bookmarked Web sites that serve as resources for students as well as further reading for any visitors interested in the topic; any relevant RSS feeds, including class-specific Twitter feeds if any exist; links to blogs or other Web content created by students; and so on. The design of a Jan Term course template ought to be connected to its source material, much as the academic departments might have discipline-specific design elements.
3. Wherever possible, creating Web content should be integrated into the curriculum of a Jan Term course. This can be done without adding a lot of additional work; rather, we'd like to see assignments take the form of Web postings (text or images) wherever that’s potentially relevant.

4. The fact that ideas for Jan Term courses can be submitted via a public form is fascinating to us. Can students (or the public) submit ideas? We think that would be very exciting, and would like to see the submission form made more prominent. (It would certainly be fine to let submitters know that the odds of a course being accepted are relatively slim, if that’s the case.)

5. Clearly not every one of the Jan Term courses will include a blogging component, and not every course is offered every year. We think the course profile pages ought to be permanent, though: when a course is in session its content will be dynamic, with posting of assignments, resources, and the like. And when it’s over, the page’s contents can be cleaned up and preserved, so visitors to the page can get a sense of the sorts of arguments, issues, and discoveries that characterized the work of the class.

6. Communications staff, and especially the Web team, should keep an eye on what’s happening in these courses. It's a small enough sample that activity in these courses could be monitored fairly easily. When something interesting arises—a compelling blog post, an interesting assignment, etc.—this ought to be captured and noted for followup by Communications.

7. We know a lot of thought and effort goes into the design and composition of the annual Jan Term print catalog. We recommend that the designers and producers of this lovely and engaging document find ways to consider the Web in their process as well. Should there be a special micro-site announcing the new Jan Term schedule of courses, with a design that reflects the design of the catalog? Should the SMC homepage mirror the look and feel of the catalog for a week or two after its release? There are many interesting ways to imagine the print catalog and the SMC Web in conversation.
RECOMMENDATION 5:
MORE VISIBILITY FOR GRADUATE STUDY

Saint Mary’s undergraduate population is a good source of energy and vitality for the institution, and in some sense they’re the most visible manifestation of the brand. But SMC is more than its undergraduates, and its other audiences should be welcomed (and depicted) throughout the new site.

A healthy program of graduate study can help an institution in many ways. Of course some of these are practical and economic; but in addition, graduate students tend to do very engaged and interesting research projects, which can serve as models for the kind of work that undergrads aspire to do. They contribute to the brand just as much as undergraduates, though in a different way.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Stories can come from anywhere—undergraduate or graduate—and be appreciated by both of these groups. The School of Business provides a great example. The Undergraduate Business page is somewhat lackluster and underwhelming; the Graduate Business page is full of interesting and dynamic information. The latter should enrich the former; the fact is, a School of Business page should be created that depicts both graduate and undergraduate work—this will be beneficial to both populations. The same goes for Education, Liberal Arts, and the professional programs.

2. In some ways, prospective graduate students have the same needs as undergrad prospects. They want quick access to information, as well as a good sense of what life is like at the institution. But for these students, clear presentation of information is even more important. A considerable percentage of your graduate prospective audience really is just interested in direct access to information about programs and opportunities.

3. The imagery and photography on the site might reflect the energy of the undergraduate population—and there will certainly be lots of photos of undergraduates on the site. But there shouldn’t be a perceptible imbalance toward the undergraduate experience.

4. Professional students will tend to inhabit different social media spheres from the prospective undergraduate. Older students are more likely to use LinkedIn, for example. Any social networking components of the site should reflect this.

5. Where appropriate, graduate and undergraduate programs should be listed together. A prospective undergraduate interested in education is likely to be very interested in the School of Education’s graduate offerings, even if she can’t pursue them yet.
RECOMMENDATION 6:

LET THE STUDENTS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES

Most liberal arts colleges are good at producing thoughtful, intelligent young men and women with a variety of interests. Saint Mary’s College—and in particular the Collegiate Seminar program—produces students who are both literate and uncommonly articulate. By virtue of their experience discussing the great books, they’re able to stand up and talk in a way that many students can’t. This has the potential to be an invaluable asset to Saint Mary’s new Web presence; we strongly recommend you explore it.

One of the best things a redesign can do in 2010 is use the unique abilities of its own community. In Saint Mary’s case, this may mean your students’ ability to speak with confidence; if there are a number of SMC students who wouldn’t be uncomfortable talking into a camera, let’s get some cameras and start shooting.

Twenty or thirty (or 100) great student videos would inevitably influence the design of the Saint Mary’s site, in ways we can’t yet predict. A video wall? Video-enhanced search results pages? Faculty profiles featuring videos of students talking about them? Graduate students discussing their programs in deep academic detail? The possibilities are endless, but we’ll need to do some work before we can pursue them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Who’s willing to talk to a camera for five minutes about their experiences at SMC? We should ask this question far and wide, and begin to develop a cast of characters as soon as possible.

2. GaelVision, the Saint Mary’s TV station, makes some great videos. We’d like to meet with them ASAP and discuss how they might contribute.

3. Let’s come up with a general protocol for how these videos are shot, to provide some consistency. Should they be on a white screen, or with the campus in the background? If the videos we gather have some common visual themes, they’ll be easier to use in designs.

4. We can help with some general guidelines for videographers, to capture videos with the most likelihood of providing usable content.

5. Although we’re talking about students here, the same goes for all SMC’s other populations—videos from faculty, staff, alumni, parents, etc. are equally welcome.
RECOMMENDATION 7:

SAINTMARYSCOLLEGE.EDU

Although we hesitate to say it— because it implies a potential maze of bureaucratic to-dos—we believe that the stmarys-ca.edu domain name does a measure of ongoing harm to the institution and its brand. It is hard both to pronounce and to remember, and as often as we’ve been reminded to type “Saint” instead of “St.” when writing your school’s name, it must be persistently annoying to have the latter baked into your Web site address.

Of course, everyone who is part of Saint Mary’s public communications knows this: it’s a URL that can’t be spoken without spelling it out and using the word “hyphen.” That’s why URLs like saintmarysmba.com exist; the MBA program advertises on radio, and to use the official URL would eat up precious seconds of airtime.

Domain names can be changed, and there’s a possible name that is currently unused: saintmaryscollege.edu.

Let’s be very clear about this: If the stmarys-ca.edu domain name can’t be changed without a very lengthy overlap between the old and new URLs, it’s not feasible. EDUCAUSE, the organization that manages .edu domains, states that a six-month overlap is allowed; that’s not enough. With as much print material as is out there with the current URL, you’ll need a long time to transition (if not a permanent overlap). We believe that it may be possible to maintain two domains, but it will likely require some relatively powerful people to make some phone calls.

We strongly recommend that the time be taken to thoroughly investigate this question. “That’s impossible” is the easy answer; we urge you to really find out if that’s true. We suspect that it's not.
RECOMMENDATION 8:

CONTENT MANAGEMENT AND WRITING

We’ve detected a tendency in some institutions of higher education to look to tools and technologies, instead of people, for solutions to existing problems. This is understandable but dangerous.

*Everything good that happens online at Saint Mary’s will be the result of thought and work by human beings.* Ensuring that SMC’s content managers have well defined guidelines and the ability to convey stories and messages clearly is just as important as making sure the CMS performs as advertised.

While the Web site should take advantage of the newest generation of Web 2.0 tools, it’s got to be ready when Web 3.0 and beyond come along. That’s why our focus should always be on the message and the messengers, not simply the technological platform.

What does this mean in a practical sense?

1. No CMS is able to detect whether Web content is well written, helpful, or duplicated elsewhere on the site. SMC’s Web Team should set in place communications processes that will encourage oversight, care, and good writing on the site. These processes should be illustrated in every page of the core SMC site that launches with the redesign; in other words, the redesign should embody its own communications goals. There shouldn’t be any cut-and-pasted pages on the core site, unless they were fantastic to begin with.

2. Most administrators interact with a CMS under mild duress. The dean needs this or that information up on the web yesterday, and attention to detail and language can be the first things to go out the window. We’ve got to make sure the high quality of writing that the Saint Mary’s site launches with remains consistent— and that emergency-response content management is limited to actual emergencies.

3. It may be that additional writing staff are required to accomplish the work necessary to make the Saint Mary’s site properly attractive and informative. If this is the case, White Whale is more than happy to provide writing services, help link SMC directly to writers, or serve as an intermediary between writers and your own content staff. But let’s identify that need sooner rather than later; content writing isn’t something to think about a month before the site launches.

4. Saint Mary’s should consider, early in the process, whether or not to pursue the idea of having your own students provide writing services for the SMC site. They’re certainly smart enough. If there are practical administrative details associated with hiring students (work-study, etc.) then we should begin planning for that right away.
RECOMMENDATION 9:

DOES THE PORTAL SOLVE A PROBLEM?

We understand that Saint Mary’s is currently implementing portal software, and plans to roll it out in the next few months. We’ve also heard that there’s been a great deal of discussion about what the portal is for, whom it serves, and what features it should offer.

This discussion can be productive, and we’re glad it’s underway. And the portal, when launched, will undoubtedly provide benefits to your community. But we’d like to make sure that it actively contributes to the solving of a defined problem— that SMC’s staff understands clearly what and whom it’s for. Portals have a tendency to offer every imaginable tool, to the point of becoming CMSs themselves; many “portals” offer calendaring, blogs, photo galleries, job boards, and more. There’s inevitably a lot of overlap between the functionality of a portal and the functionality of a CMS; left unchecked, this overlap can lead to real confusion over where content management should be done.

We know that the current SMCnet site already suffers from this sort of confusion; there’s a lot of content in SMCnet that would probably be more appropriate for a public (i.e. non-authenticated) audience. We’d like to help you make sure you don’t replace that problem with a new and similar one.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Before releasing the new portal to the public, it should be widely understood what its purpose is. Who is expected to use it on a daily basis? What existing Web resources will it replace? Complete this sentence: “The new Saint Mary’s portal really helps me ______.”

2. For each primary audience of the site, there should be a clear expectation about what their “home base” should be. Many schools have “For Students” and “For Faculty” pages; the natural expectation is that those would serve as dedicated home bases for these audiences. But if the portal is intended to be the go-to page for those groups, then the “For” pages probably shouldn’t be separate from the portal. GaelExpress should be considered in this equation as well: which functions will require GaelExpress, which will require the portal, and what’s the difference?

3. Portal or “gateway” pages tend to be of great interest to prospective students. Because prospects want to get a sense of real student life, they’ll tend to skip what they perceive as “marketing” links and go right to the “administrative” stuff. So pages that cater to current students will always have an audience of prospects; if all their content is behind the password wall of a portal, prospects will react with a degree of disappointment.

4. The creation of news stories and events should only happen in one place— most likely, the core site CMS. If there’s a stream of dynamic content in a portal, it should come from the same tools used to manage public content.
RECOMMENDATION 10:

OPEN THE DOORS TO THE REDESIGN PROCESS

Our shared goal in this project—the redesign of the SMC Web site and the communications channels and structures that power it—is about the process as well as the outcome.

We at White Whale are happy to steer this ship for the next few months. But we want to ensure that we establish a process, a way of working together, that feels healthy and appropriate for Saint Mary’s. We want all voices to be heard, and everyone involved with the project to have a voice and a stake in the final product. Everyone we work with on the site, and everyone we’ve talked to about it, ought to be able to look at stmarys-ca.edu when it launches and think, “that’s my Web site.”

What makes a community stand behind a Web site is the process by which it was made. If Saint Mary’s Web team and White Whale were to huddle up in a room, create something in secret, and then drop it upon the community, people would find reasons to dislike it no matter what it looked like. If their opinions are welcomed—especially early on, and again once a design has been selected—then even those who object will feel good about the process, and will know their feedback was heard.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The core Web redesign committee should include at least one student and one faculty member. Not only will this help buy-in across campus in a political sense; it’ll help us keep a finger on the pulse of two crucially important audiences. And if possible, the committee should persist beyond the launch of the redesigned site, to ensure that its priorities remain sustainable.

2. Although it’s a nice gesture of openness to maintain the public channel via a redesign blog, it won’t do the redesign any good if it’s not heavily trafficked. When the redesign begins to gather momentum (usually after the initial designs are presented, and begin to be released to the public), the blog should become a major center of communications and activity. We should discuss what its role should be, who will contribute content to it, and what benefits it can provide— as soon as possible.

3. The Web team should hold regular office hours and drop-in sessions throughout the redesign process, with or without White Whale staffers in attendance. These sessions should be widely publicized.

4. Above all, the redesign process should be seen by everyone—your team, your community, and us—as the opportunity to rethink the communications processes that drive the Saint Mary’s site. The result of the site redesign should be that your new site is both more communicative and easier to maintain.