

## Research Summary

### Chico State Web Redesign Project

February 2009

#### Background

Initiated in 2008, the Web site Redesign Project is a campus-wide effort to re-envision and redesign the CSU, Chico Web site. The project has a number of goals, including; improving site usability and organization, better meeting the needs of users, better reflecting the brand of the university, creating web pages with a consistent look and feel, and updating the site through the use of evolving technology and best practices in Web site design. The project scope is limited to the campus home page, and a number of top level pages. A set of templates will be developed for campus use. A very ambitious effort, the project is expected to culminate with the launch of a new site in early 2010.

The project is led by a five-member design team that works closely with the CSU, Chico Web Content Committee, Web Management Committee, the Executive Cabinet, Graphics and Web Services, and the campus community to complete the various components of the project.

#### Research Goals

The research and analysis component of the project provides the Design Team with qualitative and quantitative data regarding the CSU, Chico Web site and its users. It also helps the team identify current best practices in web design and evolving technologies that will enable sound decisions with regard to the functionality, architecture, and design features of the new CSU, Chico home page. Critical to the project, research and analysis will be an integral part of each project phase:

1. Project Definition: goals and scope (September 2008)
2. Preliminary Research (October–December 2008)
3. Site Structure, Design, and Testing (February–December 2009)
4. Launch (January 2010)
5. Continuous improvement (On-going after launch)

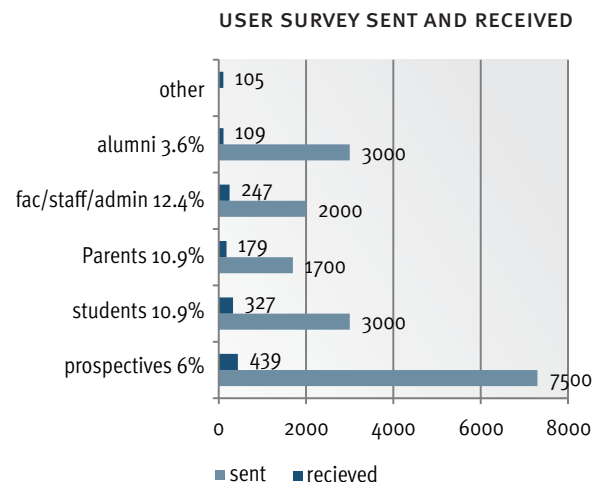
#### Research Methodologies and Findings

The following research methodologies were used during the initial research phase of the project. Detailed information can be downloaded at [http://www.csuchico.edu/ires/plans/webContentComm/documents/Web Redesign.ppt](http://www.csuchico.edu/ires/plans/webContentComm/documents/Web%20Redesign.ppt)

#### User surveys

User Surveys assist with the identification of users' motivations, frustrations, and preferences. Surveys are also a useful tool to create user-centric navigation, site design, and page structure, identify primary, secondary, and tertiary audiences, and define the technical capabilities of users.

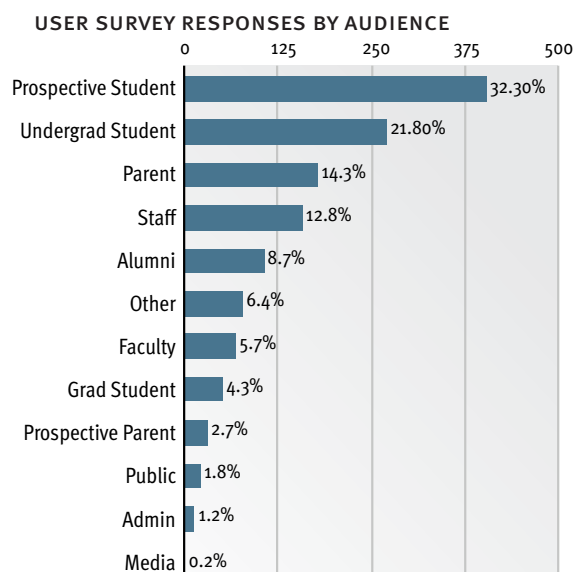
In November and December 2008, the Web Redesign Team developed and disseminated more than 17,000 surveys by e-mail to the following user groups: prospective students, current students, parents of current students, CSU, Chico faculty, staff, administrators, alumni, and corporate partners. The survey link was also released through the media in order to elicit a response within the community. Shown at right is the response rate to e-mail requests sent.



A total of 1,253 responses were received from twelve different user groups as shown in the chart on the right:

**GENERAL FINDINGS:**

- Overall we are doing a good job in providing usable, relevant content to users
- Site navigation was both most and least liked
- People like to use search, but results could be more relevant
- Overall, people feel the design is a bit plain or boring, some felt it was busy or cluttered
- People like photos and want more
- People want more news and events
- Users want more feel for what Chico and the campus is like
- Users want us to maintain the welcoming feeling of the site



USER GROUP	LIKE	DON'T LIKE	WANT
Prospective Students and their parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quick links</li> <li>• Virtual tours</li> <li>• Ease of use</li> <li>• Campus photos</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can't find admissions status</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More info</li> <li>• More photos</li> <li>• More tours</li> </ul>
Current Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using search</li> <li>• News feeds</li> <li>• Ease of use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bookstore site</li> <li>• Logging into portal</li> <li>• Difficult/confusing nav</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less information</li> <li>• Wildcat card balance</li> </ul>
Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using search</li> <li>• News feeds</li> <li>• Ease of use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Busy/cluttered site</li> <li>• Difficult/confusing nav</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic calendar</li> <li>• Financial aid info</li> <li>• Degree reqs</li> </ul>
Alumni	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using search</li> <li>• News feeds</li> <li>• Ease of use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficult/confusing nav</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A-Z</li> </ul>
Faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using search</li> <li>• News feeds</li> <li>• Ease of use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficult/confusing nav</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graduation info</li> <li>• Program info</li> <li>• Virtual tours</li> </ul>
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using search</li> <li>• News feeds</li> <li>• Ease of use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boring/plain design</li> <li>• Difficult/confusing nav</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campus/regional info</li> </ul>

**Browser Statistics**

Browser statistics were collected to provide quantitative data concerning usage patterns for the CSU, Chico site, including the most commonly viewed pages, most common search terms, user characteristics, and specific user behavior. These data will help site architects optimize site design and organization to best serve the needs of users.

Specifically, the Design Team utilized Google Analytics, internal Google search statistics and data gleaned through the click-tracking service Crazy Egg, which allowed the Team to visually track the location and pattern of every click visitors made on selected pages in the site.

GOOGLE ANALYTICS shows how often pages are accessed, the popularity of search terms and user statistics such as the monitor sizes of the users and where our users are accessing the site from. Statistics may vary by month.

**USAGE RANKING OF TOP LEVEL PAGES**

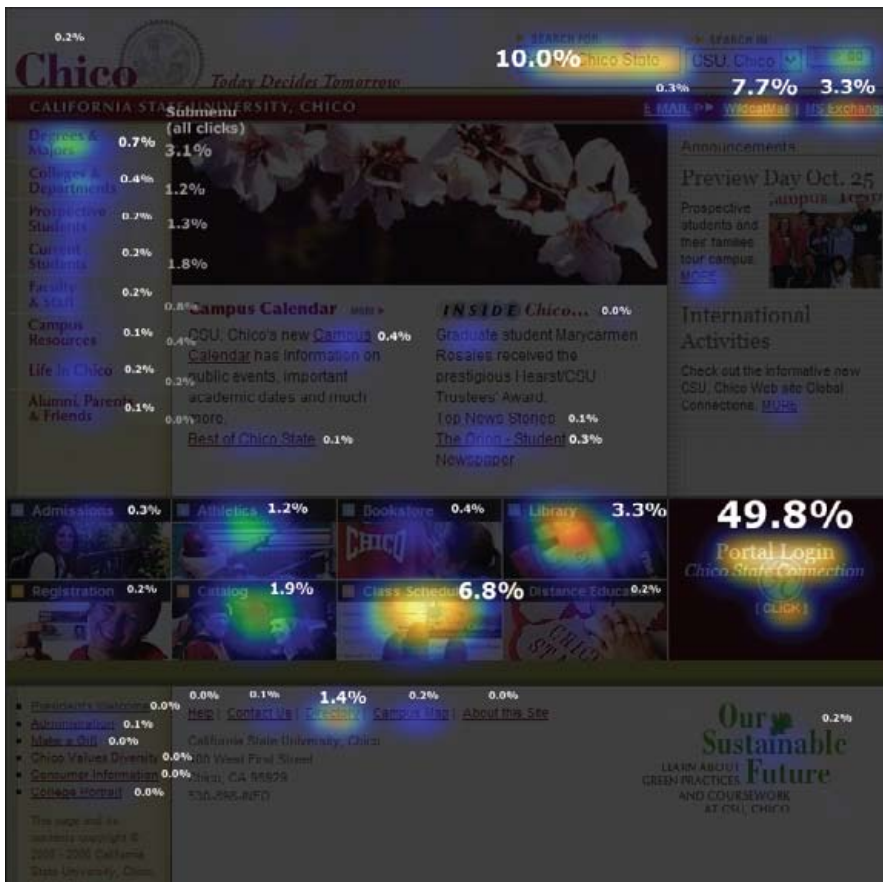
- 1 Home Page
- 7 Colleges & Departments
- 15 Degrees & Majors
- 25 Current Students
- 27 Life in Chico
- 38 Faculty & Staff
- 46 Campus Resources
- 60 Alumni, Parents & Friends

**TOP 10 RANKING PAGES**

- 1 Home Page
- 2 Search - CSU, Chico
- 3 2007-2009 University Catalog
- 4 Directory
- 5 Class Schedule
- 6 Spring 2009 Class Schedule
- 7 2007-2009 University Catalog
- 8 Recreational Sports
- 9 Student Computing
- 10 Colleges & Departments

**TOP 10 SEARCH TERMS**

- 1 campus map
- 2 jobs
- 3 calendar
- 4 transcripts
- 5 career center
- 6 housing
- 7 academic calendar
- 8 health center
- 9 vista (webct)
- 10 tuition/fees



**CRAZY EGG**

This click-tracking service shows both visually and by percentage how often links are used on the home page. Statistics for the month of October is shown below.

- 49.8% Portal
- 10.0% Search
- 7.7% Wildcat mail
- 6.8% Class Schedule
- 3.3% Exchange
- 3.3% Library

The home page has over 90 links and these 6 constitutes over 80% of home page traffic.

- 1.3% Prospective Students
- 0.9% News, Events, Calendar

Of the secondary pages only Colleges and Departments showed heavy usage of links, with all other top level pages ranking search in the top 3 of actions performed.

**GENERAL FINDINGS:**

- Site usage has not changed much over the past 5 years
- The current site content and structure are primarily directed toward internal audiences (e.g., current students)
- Internal audiences are the main users of the site with 79% of visits from an on-campus IP address
- Prospective users are directed to the EM site for which we have no stats
- 50% of clicks on home page were to the Portal
- Other top level pages received only a fraction of the views or clicks received by the home page

**CONCLUSION:** Home and top level pages are not effectively leveraging their prominent location

## Best Practices Research

Best Practices research was conducted to reveal industry standards and best practices regarding the structure, content and organization of higher education Web sites. This research included analysis of university home pages, literature review, and consultations with higher education Web development experts. This research will help site architects and designers to better meet the expectations of users (particularly prospective students) who have experience with other higher education Web sites. It will also allow us to identify areas in which CSU, Chico can exceed expectations and improve on common practices.

### GENERAL FINDINGS:

- Navigation and layout standards are emerging as technology evolves
- Multiple hierarchical navigation structures are the norm (arranged by topic, audience, etc.)
- Most sites are optimized for 1024 pixel wide screens
- Relevant, up-to-date, regularly maintained content is vital to capture users attention, keep sites fresh and competitive. This includes photos, news, events, features, profiles, etc.
- Photographs take up the largest percentage of real estate on home pages
- Photos are tied to a story and captioned with a story teaser
- Stories focus on what makes the school special/different/worthy of attention
- User-controlled navigation is provided for rotating photos/stories
- Professional photography is the norm

### HOME PAGE TRENDS

- More focused
- Marketing to external audiences (prospective students, recruiting faculty and staff)
- News and events
- Branding and image
- While maintaining functionality for internal audiences

## Overall Conclusions

Many things were learned during our research, but the main takeaway points are:

- The top level pages need to do a better job of telling the Chico story and providing relevant information
- We need to do a better job of providing information and resources to external audiences
- Maintaining the site's usefulness to internal audiences is equally important
- Providing up-to-date news, photos, stories and events is important to capturing audience attention

**Further Research** will be conducted as the project progresses, including:

**FOCUS GROUPS** will be conducted during in 2009 to evaluate new visual designs. Focus groups will likely include sessions with the following user groups:

- CSU, Chico faculty, staff, and administrators
- Prospective students
- Current Students
- Parents of current students

**USABILITY TESTING** will be conducted on a site prototype during fall 2009 in order to get direct user feedback on site functionality and the ease of finding information. Usability testing will be conducted with the same user groups as the focus groups (above).