Colorado College
Website redesign

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES:
General IA & Content Recommendations

The notes below refer to information architecture (IA) and content strategies particular to administrative office sites. In addition to these, please refer to the 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 general review of administrative office sites, we've discovered a few issues needing particular attention.

Details, details.

It is often tempting to put a load of detailed information on your homepage or even top-level pages. But not everyone will need all of the content you are providing— some will need certain bits of info, others will be seeking just the basics, and all will appreciate help in finding the particular information they need.

Homepages (and top-level section pages) should be treated as gateways or guides to content deeper in the site. They should be short, succinct, and written in a friendly, welcoming tone. (See specific homepage recommendations below.)

Think about how you might explain a procedure to someone calling your office or what you might ask them in order to figure out the information they need.
Use this knowledge to structure your top-level pages in a way that guides your various audiences to their particular content. If you know a lot of people come to the site looking to get a certain document or bit of information, make it easy for them too by creating a call-out box of "Important" or "Useful" links. And always make use of links within text as part of guiding visitors from the homepage to their destinations.

Finally, remember, regardless of the amount of information you need to provide, heavy blocks of text are hard to read on a computer screen. You may need to make your information more Web friendly (using tips provided in our Best Practices documentation).

Your audience is not exclusively internal.

Some administrative offices may feel that they serve internal audiences exclusively. But many, like health services, public safety, and the registrar, are visited by prospective students curious about the services and offerings of the College. Thus, it is critical to make the content clear, easy to navigate, and not too jargon-y (new students and first-year faculty may not be familiar with the inner workings of the College either).

Office sites should be fun too.

Feel free to allow your personalities to come through! One of the many things that sets CC apart from DU or CU or any larger institution is that you have a small community of staff that truly care and connect with students. The website should reflect the personal touch you provide and the genuine care and concern you have for the CC community. We are not recommending total frivolity though— as an official CC site it must uphold certain standards and always reflect well on the institution.

Some ideas: Feature a staff member each month highlighting what they do on campus and in their free time. Put photos on staff pages and list people's hobbies. Create video clips of people explaining the answers to common questions. The more engaging your site is, the more likely you'll be serving your audiences better which will mean fewer phone calls from confused students/parents/staff/faculty. And less work in the long run!

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

Finding the balance between the institutional site and office sites will be crucial to the success of the site. CC's institutional pages will serve as introductions to certain aspects of campus. We must take care that those pages serve a purpose unto themselves and complement the information provided on Office sites—particularly on the homepages.

Be careful not to post content that is also found on the institutional site— directions to the College is a good example.

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 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.

Keep it simple.

Don't bite off more than you can chew over the long haul. Starting small with fewer pages to maintain is infinitely better than rolling out a large and brilliant website that looks great this year but quickly becomes dated because you can't maintain it. Updating the website needs to be a regular part of someone's routine. And even if you stay on top of things like events or news, make sure to schedule a few times each year (or at least once) to go over your entire site looking for dated information.

It's okay. Let it go.

Dated material needs to be reviewed and either transformed into content relevant in an archive or simply deleted from the public website. An archive should not be a bottomless pit of Web pages that are simply moved **as is** to a different section of the site. Ideally out-of-date pages/content would be edited to replace present with past tense and to add a wrap-up/synopsis/lessons-learned section before moving it into the archive.

You may want to keep the content of a page around for your own reference, but seriously consider if it's at all relevant to your web audience today and the impression it makes.

> *Example: Your office started a newsletter 7 years ago, published it quarterly for 3 years, and then stopped. Now your News page still lists the newsletters with the most recent issue being 4 years old (and counting).*

At best your site visitor will think you've forgotten to update this page; but at worst they will think other parts of your site are not credible because no one seems to be maintaining them. The newsletters, to continue with this example, could be kept on the site if you add an introduction that recognizes them as a lapsed effort, point out (and link to) a few things that might still be interesting, and mention any new locations for department-related news.

Otherwise, it's time to clean house. It'll feel good.

Homepage Recommendations

Homepage—general introduction

The homepage serves as the gateway to the office as a whole. It should be energetic, clear, articulate, and representative of the office. No matter what you do, it should make a visitor *want* to continue to seek out the information they need.

Office homepages should incorporate both static content (a welcoming, introduction) and dynamic content (news, events, blog headlines—if you have them). Your main goal is to funnel people to the information they are seeking and along the way show them things they may not expect, but you'd like them to know— department news, relevant upcoming events, etc.

The static homepage content should include:

- o A short **opening paragraph** in large type that offers a basic welcome and an overview of the resources and services you provide.

- o A few additional paragraphs that reference the most important internal site content with **in-text links** to those pages. But don't over-do the links—their effectiveness is lost when everything is emphasized.

Homepage—News & Events

Office homepages should consider having dedicated real estate for news, events, and/or announcements. The design will allow for flexibility, though. Not all offices will have events or news and there will be downtimes for everyone. Site administrators should also be able to populate their homepages with other dynamic content such as Twitter feeds, RSS-driven general CC news, office blog posts, etc.

Homepage—Media

Offices should have the capacity to present video, audio, and office-specific images on their homepages. Images and video used on homepages should be of high quality, with bright colors and good composition. Before deciding to incorporate media, develop a homepage content strategy and see where it will fit into furthering your goals.

Homepage—Other Features

Related Links will be a common feature throughout the CC site. When choosing to use this navigational pathway, be sure these links are truly related and relevant to your office. These links may point to pages deeper in your site, to the institutional site, or to other office sites that have information that may be useful to your constituents.

Homepage introductory text should be between 50-200 words. Adding to that other dynamic content, you should strive for around 200-300 words total in the main content area of the page.

Navigation / Information Architecture

General Guidelines

Office site navigation should follow the same IA guidelines as presented in the *Best Practices—IA & Content* document. In reviewing the current IAs for offices, we've found a few of these to be particularly relevant:

- **Keep navigation lists under control.** Sub-page navigation lists should be no more than 8-10 links long. Many sites have more than this. The shorter the better.

- **Link only to pages within the section.** With few exceptions, the navigation should link to internal pages only. Links that are part of the primary navigation should never lead to another site or to a PDF or other downloadable file.