# Immediate action for university web page authors

* Shorten content on pages that discuss mission and vision and other brochure type copy
* Create logical hyperlinks to departments, programs and faculty members by their names in the body of the content
* Create visible calls to action (what do you want the visitor to do?) on each page: Faculty page links, email addresses or phone numbers.
* Audit pages and remove 2017 and earlier referenced content (except for Curriculum Guides).
* Remove individual department News and Events page, create one page for the college and group all times there with links to the department & faculty member name where used
* Tenure track faculty should link faculty members names to the A&T Faculty Directory page
* Delete redundant pages

# Content Writing for university web pages

To hold the attention and interest of your target audience, the content writer needs to speak in a voice the audience will recognize as someone like them. Also, your target audience may use interface with many types of devices and platforms daily. You need to understand their media-consuming habits to truly engage your audience with your important stories and content.

But how do campuses begin to strengthen the content of their web page and maximize the SEO potential of those pages, while keeping it manageable? The following six strategies have worked for many campus web content creators.

**1) Prioritize the pages you optimize**

To get the best return on your investment of time and/or money, focus your initial search engine optimization efforts on *“magnet” pages*, the ones on your website that are the most likely to attract search engine clicks.
 For most colleges and universities, these are degree and program pages, followed by accreditation pages, financial aid pages, and rankings, awards, and recognition pages.

If your college/department has a significant number of pages (degrees, programs, etc.), and you need to further prioritize your work, use the following criteria to select pages for optimization:

* Programs or degrees that have capacity for students and need an enrollment boost
* New programs or degrees that you need to build awareness for
* Programs or degrees that are more unique to your institution and therefore have less competition for search results from competing campuses
* Popular programs and degrees that will have large numbers of students searching for them (e.g. criminal justice, nursing)

Helpful hint: Use web traffic analytics to drive your priorities. N.C. A&T University Relations can provide this information.

**2) Incorporate keywords into your web writing**

To determine which words and phrases are the most popular (and therefore have the highest search volume), it’s important to conduct *keyword research*.

Helpful hint: For maximum effectiveness, insert keywords into headings and subheadings (H1 and H2), body copy, anchor text in links and photo captions.

**3) Plan your page**

Once a visitor has landed on your page, the key to getting your copy read is to have clear goals for what you’d like to accomplish with the page.

* What is the purpose of the page?
* Who is your target audience and why do they need your content?
* What is unique about your page that separates you from your peers?
* What is the desired call to action once your audience visits the page?
* How are you going to measure success?
* What information should be left off this page, either deleted or moved to another page?

Keep the focus of each page tight. By maintaining a narrow focus, it’s easier to position the page for SEO (particularly in terms of URLs, title tags, and H1 headings). In presenting your information, follow the inverted pyramid delivery, presenting the most important information at the top of the page, with less important information placed toward the bottom.

Helpful hint: Ideally, you should have a unique page for each degree or program.

**4) Consider how the page relates to other pages**

In pre-planning for a page, it’s also helpful to consider how the page relates to other pages on your site. For example, if your school offers a BA and a BS option for the same major, and you intend to create a separate page for each degree, you’ll need to decide what information to include on each of the respective pages and how to cross-reference them.

**It’s also important to consider:**

* Where the page will reside on your website
* Which other pages on your site will link to the page
* Which other pages the page will link to

*Helpful hint: Google penalizes pages from appearing higher in search containing duplicate content. If you decide to cover the same topic(s) on multiple pages, you’ll need to rewrite the copy to make it unique for each page.*

**5) Optimize the length and amount of content on the page**

Google doesn’t like pages that are too short, but web visitors generally don’t like pages that are too long. Ideally, you want to find a happy medium between these two demands and create pages with about 300-700 words of content. If you have a page that’s too long, split the copy and create multiple pages; if the page is too short, beef up the content or eliminate the page.
 On all pages, break up the text, keeping it in short chunks. You can use bullets, links, and pull quotes to help separate the text and give visitors points of interest.

As you’re writing each page, don’t assume the reader knows something about the university. Many won’t, so it’s important to include brief, top-level information on your pages.

Helpful hint: Be sure to include calls to action on your pages, and don’t hesitate to include more than one. For example, on a degree or program page, you could include calls to action for requesting more information, scheduling a campus visit, and e-mailing a faculty member.

**6) Manage the approval process**

To ensure a smooth approval process, conveying the benefits of SEO to everyone who will be editing and/or signing off on the pages will be helpful if done beforehand in the writing stage.

To prepare proofreaders and stakeholders, explain these basic principles of SEO:

* It’s impossible to predict how visitors will enter the site and which pathways they’ll take once they get there. Therefore, some basic information will need to be repeated across different pages, and it will need to be rephrased, to avoid duplicate content issues.
* A certain amount of keyword repetition is included in each optimized page, by design, in order to help reach keyword-density objectives that are vital for SEO success. The copy, however, will seem more repetitive when it’s read and proofed, all at once, in a Word document, than it will when it’s presented on the web page.

*Helpful hint: When composing your content, highlight your primary keywords in green to show yourself and others how you’ve optimized the page for SEO.*

# Search Engine Optimization for Higher Education

Search engines are not capable of seeing web pages the same as end users. They will not see the aesthetics of it. They will basically process the raw text of each web page. A search engine will then analyze the web page by using an inverted pyramid bias. This means that it will assume that the most important content and information is at the top of the page. Because of this, when optimizing the content of a website, it is vital to write good meta data—this ensure that the relevant content will be placed toward the top of the rendered HTML and will make sure that the data on the page indeed matches the search terms that were intended. What are these on-page elements and their recommendations?

**URL**: to be search engine friendly, the URL needs to be descriptive yet concise. When there is a longer descriptive, it is best practice to hyphenate the phrase in the link, such as <http://www.ncat.edu/academics/why-study-at-a-and-t.html> so that it is easy to read and comprehend. You must also work to avoid any special characters within a URL—search bots stop indexing when they reach a special character and assume that there is not any valuable information after it. This includes question marks “?”.

**Page title:** this is what is displayed in the browser's title bar and might possibly be the most critical piece of information that determines how well a web page will rank. The title should be 65 characters or less, never more. Variation is key in title pages. Each should be unique—if they are repetitive then their value is diminished in rankings for search engines.

**Meta descriptions:** this describes the content of a page and does play a role in its ranking. Even more so, when Google lists a web page in its results, it will often use the meta descriptions in the abstract. This is why it is so important to take the time to write good meta descriptions that do include keywords, but also a user-friendly description of the web page. Here it is not necessary to stuff keywords into the description. It should sound natural.

**Meta keywords:** these are not used by search engines with ranking algorithms anymore. The only exception to this is Yahoo which still indexes keywords but the hold very little impact on the overall ranking of the content. SEO experts give an ultimatum: only use meta keywords on pages that are highly optimized, or totally abandon the component entirely.

**Headline:** this is the most prominent piece of content on a web page. It carries the weight of indexing and should use keywords or phrases that you have targeted specifically for your web page.

**Copy:** this is the text or body of the page. You should aim to keep your target keywords toward the beginning of the copy, and then repeat them in several places throughout the page. How many times the keywords are repeated is known as the keyword density. There is no precise science behind this, but too much repetition will signal to the search engine that the web page is spam, yet if there is too little then the page will be seen as irrelevant. Authors need to focus on the integrity of the page. Good copy will have the keywords repeated in a way that flows naturally, while bad copy will seem forced. For content that is highly optimized, the keyword should be repeated 2 or 3 times within the first half of the copy.

**Alt-text:** this describes the images on a web page. It is vital for web accessibility and compliance with 508a. For best practice, when you are optimizing a web page for a specific search term, include that keyword as part of the alt-text.

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