Subcommittee on Web Enhancement

The UTD website is the university's ***primary form of communication***—both with the external world (internet), and within the university between students, faculty and staff (intranet). The internet serves recruiting efforts and is viewed as a marketing tool and communications platform between the university and the outside world. The intranet serves functions tied to distance learning and personal communication between students and faculty. It addresses key student concerns such as coursework, syllabi, degree requirements and advising, as well as promotes development student chat rooms and study groups. Both aspects of the university website are needed and desired, but neither conforms or cedes to the other in terms of style or branding–the common look, feel and thread throughout all university-related sites. As such, ***top priority*** must be placed on revamping the university website to maximize the website's role in UTD marketing and recruitment efforts, while also considering the key end-users and prioritizing whose needs will be addressed. Primary focal points are bulleted and outlined below:

- **University website infrastructure:** First and foremost, a dedicated infrastructure needs to be established by the President, starting with a director of Marketing or Communications. ***Appointed by and answerable directly to the President***, this director is needed to oversee the consolidation, re-invention, implementation and *enforcement* of the website, along with the same functions for print and other forms of public communications. Marketing needs to be emphasized and made a key focus–UTD does not have a recognizable "brand" in contrast to universities like "MIT", "Berkeley", "Rice", etc. (one person at the meeting said that they had found ***sixteen different versions*** of the UTD logo on the current website). The homepage lacks direction and needs to be restructured to improve design, navigation, content, conformity, style, etc., with particular emphasize on students' needs and interests (this will improve campus life for students, as well as recruiting of future students). Directives would flow from the Marketing/Communications director to a web developers committee with representatives from each school/department. This group would consolidate sites and determine, implement and enforce a determined style. An approval process for anything on the university site would be implemented. The Marketing/Communications director would have final word over every aspect of the university site regarding style, etc. (most important for the internet). The committee would provide approved templates to university personnel/students to assist university personnel/students who create web pages associated with university functions (e.g. course pages).

- **Dedicate personnel to marketing, usability and design**: Building effective university websites will require marketing, usability and design personnel. The university should have in-house expertise (full-time jobs), for marketing and usability. After appropriate ideas ha**ve** been formulated regarding the desired marketing strategy to use for the site, an expert in website design should be brought in to set up the front page and basic architecture of the website, with attention given to the usability and navigation of the site. Afterwards successful implementation of the site, this person **c**ould be enlisted as a periodic consultant to ensure that future modifications to the website maintain the initial design, usability and marketing ideas that were started with.

- **Functionality for students:** Attention needs to be paid to the functionality of the website for our most important customers, the students. As a tool it should be more student-focused and not nearly as faculty or staff focused as it is presently. Students want better functionality to find course syllabi, grades, course listings, degree requirements, etc. The current largely random way of getting to content is frustrating and needs to be improved. Student representation on the web developers committee would be crucial to reflect and meet the needs of students. Student links should be restructured with an eye to getting students to the content they seek easier. There is currently too many logins required for students to access different resources (one for WebCT, a different one for Blackboard, a different one for email access, a different one for checking books out of the library, etc.). A single user login that provided access to all relevant resources is needed.

- **Web-based Academics:** There needs to be a single course management system used by everyone at the university (currently both WebCT and Blackboard are used). The decision would be made based on which system is best from the student prospective and which is used most. Once a system is selected, a dedicated support staff should be established to assist students with use and faculty with implementation, as well as to provide needed maintenance. Uniform use of these resources by all professors should be actively promoted to provide a uniform and efficient environment for the students. Current users of course management systems have observed that associated chat rooms promote communication between students who've never met for study sessions, and provide a needed sense of community among students.

- **Information Resources:** The appropriate technological support is crucial for every aspect of the website discussed in this report. Although this was not discussed in detail, how IR is currently handled on the campus should be evaluated, and appropriate changes made to provide the necessary support. A separate subcommittee on IR was recommended.

- **Resources for University Staff:** The University staff make extensive (and ever-increasing) use of the internet to execute their everyday duties. An emphasis should be placed on redesigning employee-focused sites such as Human Resources, Business Affairs, etc. to make them more user friendly, improve their functionality, and make them more uniform in their design.

People in attendance:

Daniel Calhoun, Special Assistant to the Director of Technology Customer Services
Cary Delmark, Manager, University Web Services
Gregg Dieckmann, Assistant Professor of Chemistry
George Graham, UTD student and McDermott scholar
Donovan Haines, Assistant Professor of Chemistry
Eric Kildebeck, UTD student
Haywood McNeill, content editor, University Web Services
Nigel Nazir, Information Resources, Unix Systems Administrator for Academic Computer Services
Sue Sherbet, Assistant to the Vice President of Student Affairs; Interim Director of the Career Center
Dean Terry, Assistant Professor of Aesthetic Studies, School of Arts and Humanities
Walter Voit, UTD student and former managing editor of student paper, Mercury