Bates.edu Home Site 4 Strategic Vision

Version 2.1

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Business vision

As a channel for first impressions, Bates.edu eagerly awaits its second chance. In collaboration with the Online Media Group, ISITE will support incremental renewal through guidance, feedback, and design that's appropriate for both the distinct Bates brand experience and its unique target audiences.

We're approaching this project with an eye on both immediate tactical intent and longer-term opportunities. The scope of this project comprises the redesign of five main and/or landing pages which will serve as templates for other pages across the site. While our research and focus group feedback indicate great opportunities for improvement, we recognize the constraints inherent in a project of this scope. Our guidance and the design itself will be limited by context: new pages will need to cohesively and consistently fit within the larger Bates.edu ecosystem.

By the time we are done, Bates.edu will offer a new front door to three key target audiences: prospective students, prospective employees, and prospective institutional contributors. Their immediate perceptions will better align with the brand vision of Bates and the idealized Bates experience: this is a special place that values the whole person, supports their growth and self-actualization with unparalleled opportunities, all while grounding those opportunities in a strong sense of responsibility to self and others, accountability for their actions, and community involvement.

This project will enable Bates to align its brand presentation (and brand perception) with the three dimensional Bates experience to better attract students and staff that can thrive within and perpetuate it, and contributors who are eager to support it.

Current situation

Bates offers a unique educational experience in the context of a small, New England-based liberal arts institution. However, that context is laden with connotations and stereotypes that can hide the true nature of specific schools. The perceived similarities of selective residential liberal arts colleges belie Bates' accessible nature, grounded in its roots not as a school of privilege, but rather as a welcoming community open, from the start, to all qualified students from diverse racial, ethnic, religious, and economic backgrounds. Even though Bates continues to grow its campus diversity, prospective students aren't getting an accurate understanding of Bates from just what they've heard or learned (or attempted to learn) from the current site. Prospective contributors may worry that a liberal arts institution is too removed
from reality and rubber-meets-the-road relevance to be a worthy recipient of their support.

While prospective students, employees, and contributors are getting information about Bates through the web, they may be finding it on websites beyond the purview of Bates and traditional media. Students have described mining Facebook groups and Flickr galleries for images of student life beyond just the panoramas and information beyond just the academics. At the same time, professional staff and faculty applicants may be getting their information from sites solely offering job descriptions. Although the Bates experience and Bates community nurture student and faculty involvement beyond just the classroom, current visitors may be getting an inaccurate and incomplete sense of all Bates and Lewiston have to offer.

**Project goals**

At a tactical level, we’ve identified several opportunities to refocus the design and bring the three-dimensional Bates experience to the web in a modern and approachable manner that underscores the nature of an ever-changing and diverse place.

- **Explain the “impact lifecycle” Bates engenders:** Whether they are students, teachers, staff, or contributors, individuals come to Bates after seeing this is a place where they can thrive and make an impact. They find support for personal growth and identify their way to make an impact, whether on campus or in the world. Bates provides support and guidance on their personal trajectory through problem-solving skills and lifelong learning.

- **Communicate the balance of personal challenge and social support:** We want to show how exploring new territories — creating new ideas and understanding new perspectives — requires self-discipline and focus, yet is made possible through the generous collaboration of mentors and partners in Bates’ community of learning.

- **Focus on the role, impact, and context of the whole person:** Use first-person narrative — through text, imagery, graphics, audio, video, maps and other rich media — to ground the student (or teacher) experience in supportive mentoring relationships and generous philanthropy; also capture the impact of individuals on shaping others, whether they’re dining staff, academic staff, alumni donors, or corporate donors.

- **Provide persuasive pathways.** Pull visitors into the Bates experience through clear calls to action and effective visual design. Create an active experience with which visitors want to engage.

- **Communicate the nature of learning** in a residential liberal arts institution in general, and Bates specifically. Lifelong learning and growth is a facet of student, faculty, and staff experiences. The notion that learning happens many places beyond the classroom, can come to life through “did you know”-style focus areas.

- **Focus on the most relevant.** The content that is left out of the experiences will be just as important as that left in. Create a persuasive and focused experience by carefully prioritizing the content for each section.

- **Support engaging pathways** for at least our three main target audiences and/or their primary actions: explore and apply to Bates, explore a career at Bates, contribute to Bates.
• Incorporate more photography, curated content, and rich media to show “the real Bates” through, for example, lectures on the quad, student life in residence halls, cheering on the home team, fun even in the cold winter and slushy spring.

• **Adopt more modern web standards** of style sheets, semantic code, centered design, accessibility features such as alt tags, and clear calls to action.

**Measurements of success**

The core team detailed a binary checklist of features and functionality:

• **Modern, fresh look and feel that communicates intellectual vigor** in the first few seconds and a sense of evolution, progress, and dynamism

• **A sense of the Bates experience** replicated through the site in a manner appropriate to the unique institution while capturing the challenge to engage and explore that it engenders

• **Fresh content**: Pulling in dynamic content from deeper in the site to provide fresh content that pulls visitors in

• **Ways to engage and respond to what you’re reading**, with contextual calls to action and filtering mechanisms

We also recommend you monitor a few more specific metrics to measure the effectiveness of the new experience:

• **Homepage bounce rate**: The percentage of visitors that leave after only viewing the homepage. Key metric to trend over time based on homepage changes.

• **Pathways of engagement**: The click-through rate for visitors who view the pathway content. Measures the engagement of the experience and the persuasiveness of the content.

• **Feedback mechanism**: A simple, web-based feedback mechanism that can help get more qualitative feedback on how Bates is perceived online and the general satisfaction of the visit. Would ideally be segmented for visitors that view the pathway content as well as those that don’t.

• **Calls to action**: The percentage of visitors that follow the pathway content and end up participating in a key site goal, such as subscribing to continuing updates for topics of interest. Ideally compare to a baseline of all site visitors to determine the relative influence of the pathway content.
Key target audiences

Our three main target audiences are prospective students, prospective professional staff and faculty, and prospective institutional contributors—all of whom have no great preexisting knowledge of Bates. For each group, we emphasize the impact they can have through and on Bates.

- **Prospective students**
  - Seeking intellectual challenge in a stimulating setting
  - Engaged in perpetual self-actualization
  - Seeking a place to thrive and make an impact with support, guidance, nourishment, and within a real community
  - Passionate about ideas and action

- **Prospective faculty and professional staff**
  - Seeking collaboration, teaching, and mentorship within a strong community
  - Charged about close relationships with a high opportunity for impact
  - Enthused by quality of life and centrality of Lewiston

- **Prospective contributors**
  - Seeking efficient and effective opportunities to make an impact on Bates and the world through Bates
  - Rewarded by visible bang for the buck and sound investment

Message architecture

As we recommend new features and areas of focus, we’ll build on a foundation of key communication themes. The terms used in this message architecture don’t reflect actual copy to be used in the site, though they do serve to define and illustrate the key messages we’ll try to communicate through features, visual design, and verbal presentations of your brand.

- **Elevating the distinct and whole person**
  - Appreciating the interests, impact, and personal journeys of individuals and their connections
  - Supporting learning, exploration, change, and growth
    - Risktaking prized over following a rigid path
  - Emphasis on whole, multifaceted people over just their job, work, research, or background
  - Legacy of equality and being progressive since the start

- **Rigorous, passionate,**
  - Challenging and encouraging
  - Integrating intellectual theory and action and application
  - Practical, promoting critical research and problem-solving skills
• Welcoming
  o Supportive
  o Approachable and accessible; inclusive
    ▪ Appreciative, rather than entitled
  o Fair and respectful

• Engaged
  o Progressive with a strong sense of history
  o Integrated with the world, and the local Lewiston community
  o Community-minded