

Heuristic Evaluation

Conducted by: Christina Snell

Overview

Founded in 1929, the Academy of Art University (AAU) is a school of higher education that provides Associates, Bachelors and Masters Degrees as well as Continuing Education Courses and Certificate Programs both on campus and online. AAU is looking for a heuristic evaluation on their home page to improve the usability of their website <http://online.academyart.edu> so that visitors to the website are able to efficiently and effectively find relevant information specific to their needs.

Background

Academy of Art University is the largest private art and design university generating \$37.3 million in revenue in 2010 and has 1,100 employees.¹ AAU provides over 30 areas of academic study with 18 art and design degrees and has more than 17,000 students.

According to the Google index, the AAU website contains over 6,080 pages on its primary domain, and over 17,300 pages including various sub-domains that have been created to organize content by subject matter. The <http://online.academyart.edu> website has 107 pages indexed in Google. In evaluating AAU Online website, the primary focus and target market of the website is prospective online students. The complete user base that has been identified is as follows:

1. Prospective Students
2. Current Students
3. Faculty
4. Graduate Students
5. Industry Recruiters
6. Parents
7. Job Seekers

Competitive Analysis

According to U.S. News and World Report, the top three ranked art schools in the U.S. are Rhode Island School of Design, Yale University and School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Based on AAU's primary targeted keyword phrases "art school" and "online art school" online competitors are schools which are engaged in paid advertising, such as Google AdWords. The advertisements are targeting potential visitors based on geo-location and highlighting their online programs. These competitors include the Art Institute, IADT and American Public University. Organic search results include Savannah College of Art and Design and Rhode

¹ <http://www.indeed.com/cmp/Academy-of-Art-University>

Island School of Design. Other results include directories and information sources, several of which are either owned by a university under the pretext of being a nonbiased information source, or operated by businesses that generate revenue by selling the leads that are generated through the website to partnerships with various universities.

Identified competitors with a micro-site dedicated to online learning are briefly evaluated below. The evaluation includes a home page screen shot and detailed notes on their information architecture:

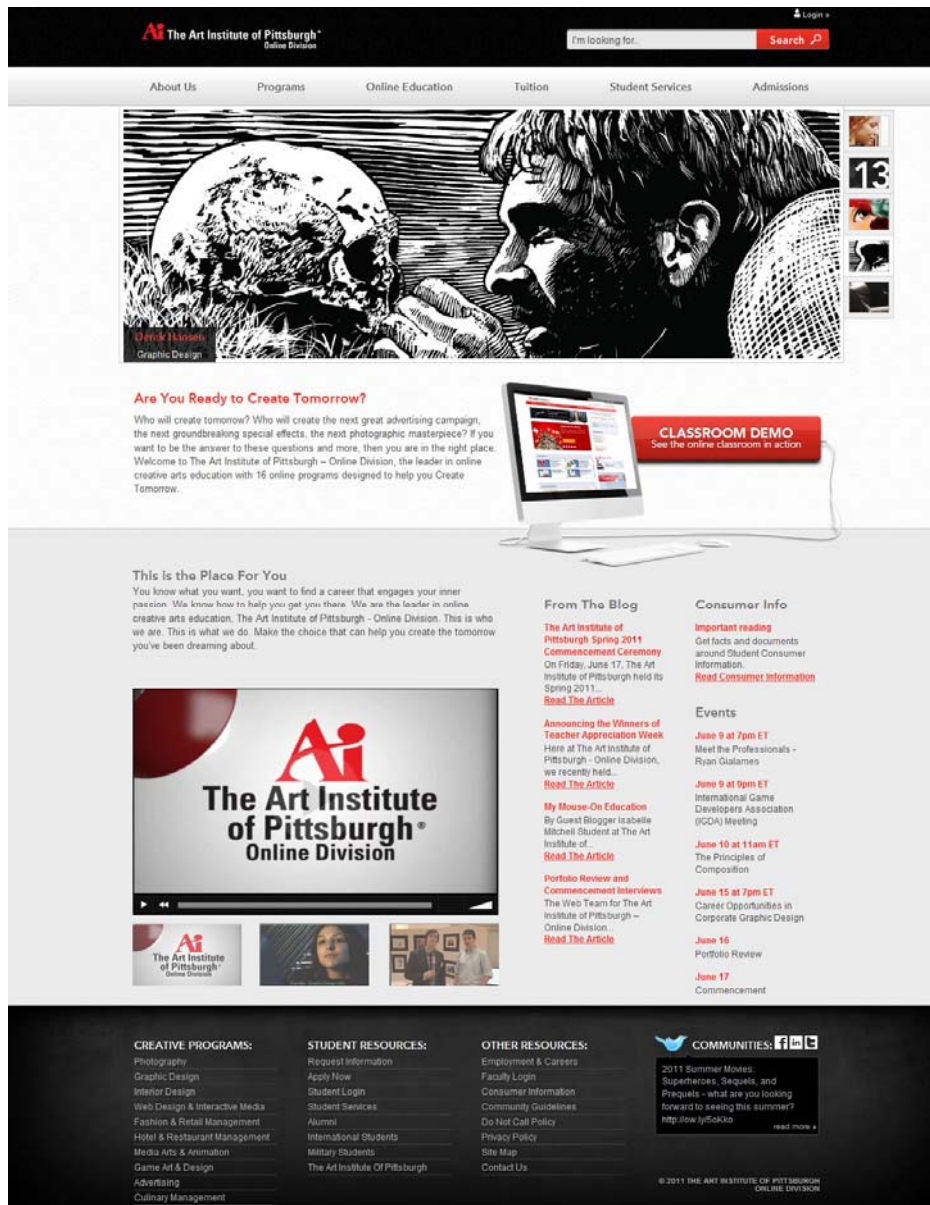
Savannah College of Art and Design <http://www.scad.edu/online/>



The Savannah College of Art and Design has the main visual area of their website in Flash. It has a simple clean primary navigation with three categories: *Learn* (focusing on admissions and areas of study), *Experience* (focusing

on providing prospective students with insight to the College), and *Connect* (with various ways of contact) and a search feature. The tertiary navigation in the primary content area specifically targets prospective students with crucial information regarding their online programs with *About*, *Programs*, *Admission*, *Faculty*, *Student Services*, *Technical Requirements* and *FAQ's* and contains “breadcrumb” navigation above it. A secondary highlighted navigation includes focusing on prospective students with *Apply*, *Live Chat*, *Request Info*, *Calendar* and *MyScad* (for current students.) The footer contains navigation with a *Site Map*, *Help*, *Privacy/Terms* and *Feedback*. The side bar highlights contact details for Admissions and other relevant content. The site also contains a search feature to increase visitor accessibility to content. The overall design is professional with high quality graphics with such a substantial amount of content; however the site does not have the same attention to typography and design as the primary scad.edu website.

Art Institute Online <http://www.aionline.edu/>



The screenshot shows the homepage of The Art Institute of Pittsburgh Online Division. The header features the AI logo, navigation links (About Us, Programs, Online Education, Tuition, Student Services, Admissions), a search bar, and a login link. The main content area includes a large graphic of a man's face and a skull, a section titled "Are You Ready to Create Tomorrow?" with a "CLASSROOM DEMO" button, and a video player for "The Art Institute of Pittsburgh Online Division". The right sidebar contains "From The Blog" and "Consumer Info" sections. The footer lists "CREATIVE PROGRAMS", "STUDENT RESOURCES", "OTHER RESOURCES", and "COMMUNITIES".

Header: AI The Art Institute of Pittsburgh® Online Division. Search bar: "I'm looking for...". Login link.

Navigation: About Us, Programs, Online Education, Tuition, Student Services, Admissions.

Main Content:

- Graphic:** A black and white illustration of a man's face in profile, looking at a skull.
- Text:** "Are You Ready to Create Tomorrow?"
- Text:** "Who will create tomorrow? Who will create the next great advertising campaign, the next groundbreaking special effects, the next photographic masterpiece? If you want to be the answer to these questions and more, then you are in the right place. Welcome to The Art Institute of Pittsburgh – Online Division, the leader in online creative arts education with 16 online programs designed to help you Create Tomorrow."
- Button:** "CLASSROOM DEMO - See the online classroom in action"
- Video Player:** "The Art Institute of Pittsburgh® Online Division"

From The Blog:

- The Art Institute of Pittsburgh Spring 2011 Commencement Ceremony**
On Friday, June 17, The Art Institute of Pittsburgh held its Spring 2011.
[Read The Article](#)
- Announcing the Winners of Teacher Appreciation Week**
Here at The Art Institute of Pittsburgh – Online Division, we recently held...
[Read The Article](#)
- My Mouse-On Education**
By Guest Blogger Isabelle Mitchell Student at The Art Institute of...
[Read The Article](#)
- Portfolio Review and Commencement Interviews**
The Web Team for The Art Institute of Pittsburgh – Online Division...
[Read The Article](#)

Consumer Info:

- Important reading**
Get facts and documents around Student Consumer Information.
[Read Consumer Information](#)
- Events**
 - June 9 at 7pm ET**
Meet the Professionals - Ryan Gialames
 - June 9 at 9pm ET**
International Game Developers Association (IGDA) Meeting
 - June 10 at 11am ET**
The Principles of Composition
 - June 15 at 7pm ET**
Career Opportunities in Corporate Graphic Design
 - June 16**
Portfolio Review
 - June 17**
Commencement

Footer:

- CREATIVE PROGRAMS:** Photography, Graphic Design, Interior Design, Web Design & Interactive Media, Fashion & Retail Management, Hotel & Restaurant Management, Media Arts & Animation, Game Art & Design, Advertising, Culinary Management
- STUDENT RESOURCES:** Request Information, Apply Now, Student Login, Student Services, Alumni, International Students, Military Students, The Art Institute Of Pittsburgh
- OTHER RESOURCES:** Employment & Careers, Faculty Login, Consumer Information, Community Guidelines, Do Not Call Policy, Privacy Policy, Site Map, Contact Us
- COMMUNITIES:** Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube

© 2011 THE ART INSTITUTE OF PITTSBURGH ONLINE DIVISION

The Art Institute Online website has a JavaScript slideshow on the home page and a primary horizontal navigation with a drop down submenu docked at the top of the page. Parent level navigation includes: *About, Programs, Online Education, Tuition, Student Services* and *Admissions*. Login information is located in the top right corner. The footer navigation is quite extensive, focusing on *Creative Programs, Student Resources* and *Additional Resources* as well as social media icons. The site also contains a search feature to increase visitor accessibility to content. The aionline.com site appears to be coded in a content management system utilizing ASP.NET. The site design is clean and professional and organized, more so than the primary artinstitutes.edu website.

International Academy of Design and Technology <http://www.iadt.edu/Online>

International Academy of Design & Technology
No matter, we can get you there.™

APPLY NOW!
IADT supports a wide variety of help you through every step of the process.

REQUEST INFO!
Have an admissions advisor contact you directly or Call 1-877-488-6111!

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IADT-Online
About IADT Online
President's Welcome
Program Offerings
Campus Faculty & Staff
Alumni
Memberships & Affiliations
Library
Campus News
Campus Events
Accreditation & Licensure
Press Room
Complementary Career Guide
Documents & Resources
Request Information
Apply Now
Student Portals

Areas of Study:
Advertising Design & Communications
Building Information Modeling
Digital Media Production & Animation
Fashion Merchandising
Game Design & Production
Graphic Design
Information Technology
Internet Marketing
Retail Merchandise Management
Web Design and Development

Welcome to IADT-Online!
Welcome to IADT-Online, the amazing [Virtual Campus](#) of the International Academy of Design & Technology.
For more than 30 years, IADT has inspired students from across the country to think outside of the box when it comes to tapping into their talents and turning them into marketable assets in today's competitive job market.
Our 100% online courses have been developed using sophisticated web technology to create a learning environment that puts everything you need, from an online library to a virtual campus, right at your fingertips. IADT-Online courses are very interactive, delivered via rich, multimedia presentations with capabilities designed to give you complete control over your learning experience.
Best of all, we understand that every student is different in the way they absorb information, so we designed by Unique Learning Experience (U.L.E.), an innovative, student-focused course content-delivery system that allows IADT-Online students to engage with content using multiple methods to support multiple learning styles.
IADT also has [live classes](#) nationwide around the country that offer additional programs in areas such as [fashion design](#), [audio production](#), [professional photography](#) and [internet design](#).
To learn more about IADT, our [degree programs](#) or how to [apply for admission](#), please [contact us for more information](#).
International Academy of Design & Technology is accredited by the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools to award associate's degrees and bachelor's degrees. For more information on IADT's credentials, visit the ACCJC website at [accjc.org](#).
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IADT-Online Buzz
June 20, 2011
[Coming to a URL Near You: Custom Website Domains](#)
June 14, 2011
[New Opportunities at IADT: Retail Merchandise Management](#)
[Click here for more buzz...](#)

IADT-Online Events
There are no current events for this campus.

IADT in the News
March 21, 2011 - IADT General
Art and Design Schools of Career Education Corporation to Donate \$5,000 to Ronald McDonald House Charities Thanks to Facebook Campaign
[Click here for more news...](#)

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Tell us more about yourself and specify your campus and program of interest. An Admissions Advisor will contact you to provide you with more information.
Live outside the US: [Click here](#)
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Step 1 of 2
* Zip Code:
* Campus of Interest:
* Highest Level of Education:
* Year Enrolled:
* Program of Interest:

Student Disclosures
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About IADT
Welcome to IADT
History of IADT
Mission & Objective
Accreditation & Licensure
Military Students
New Students Choose IADT
Career Opportunities at IADT
IADT Events
Press Room
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Degree Programs
Learning Options
Associate's Degrees
Bachelor's Degrees
Design Programs
Fashion Programs
Media Arts & Technology Programs
Student & Alumni
Shells
Documents & Resources
Request Information
Apply Now

Campus Locations
IADT Online
IADT Chicago
IADT Detroit
IADT Las Vegas
IADT Nashville
IADT Orlando
IADT Sacramento
IADT San Antonio
IADT San Bernardino
IADT Seattle
IADT Tampa

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Undergraduates
Admissions
Military Student
Admissions
International Student
Admissions
High School Students
Complementary Career
Guide
Documents & Resources
Request Information
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Tuition & Financial Aid
Tuition and
Required Disbursements
How to Apply for
Financial Aid
International Financial
Aid Process
Military Financial Aid
Process
Financing Options for
Your Education
Financial Aid FAQ
Code of Conduct
Documents & Resources
Request Information
Apply Now

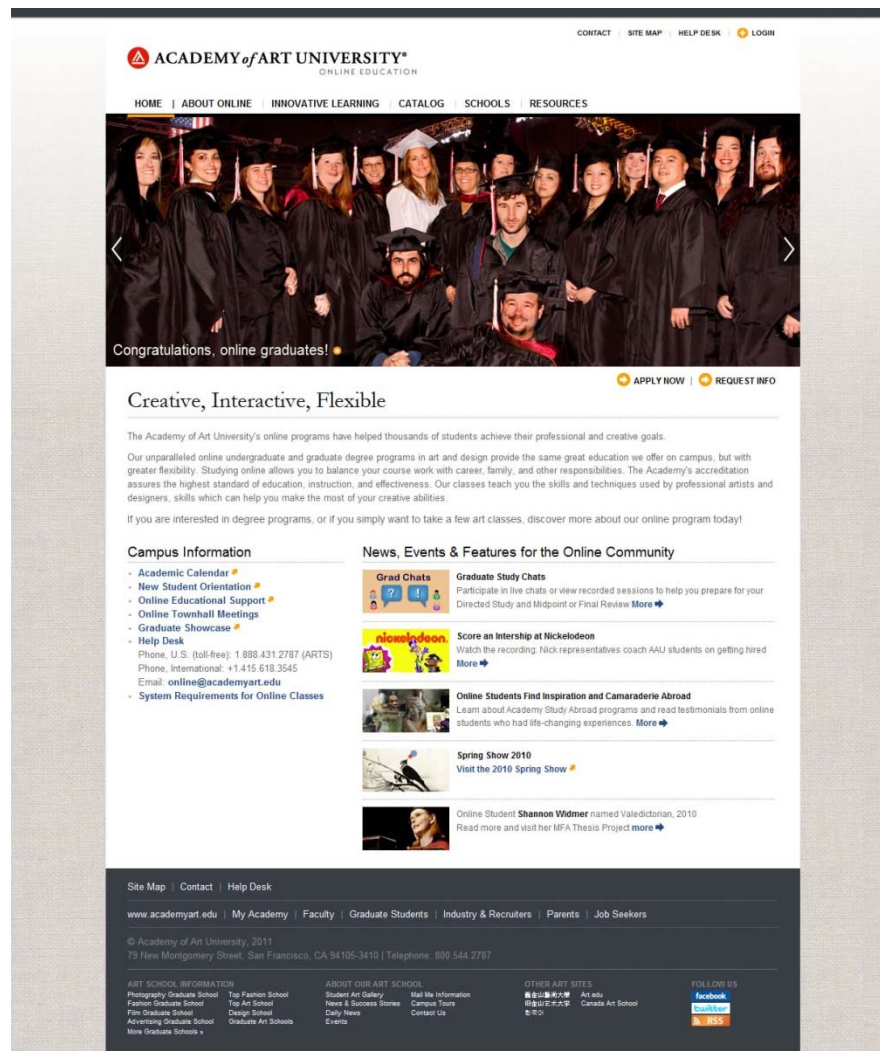
Student Life
Online Communities
IADT Buzz
Alumni
Student & Alumni
Online
Alumni Magazine
MAGNIE Fashion
Show
Student Housing
IADT in the News
IADT Events
Relax & Play

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The IADT Online website appears to be coded in ASP.NET and utilizing a custom content management system as well as several JavaScript and jQuery functions to create interactivity. The primary horizontal navigation includes: *About IADT, Degree Programs, Campus Locations, Admissions, Tuition and Financial Aid, Student Life and Request Info*. There is an *Apply Now* link with broken positioning and CSS, and a secondary vertical navigation including *About IADT Online, President's Welcome, Program Offerings, Campus Faculty & Staff, Alumni, Memberships & Affiliations, Library, Campus News, Campus Events, Accreditation & Licensure, Press Room, Complimentary Career Guide, Documents & Resources, Request Information, Apply Now, and Student Portals*. At the footer is a complete site map of the primary navigation and all of the associated subpages of each content area. At the top is a student login as well as a dynamic search. The home page is extremely long and the secondary vertical navigation is too lengthy and not as targeted. Although the areas of study are highlighted, the *Get More Information* form is located below the fold.

Website Overview

Academy of Art University Online <http://online.academyart.edu>



In evaluating the home page of Academy of Art University Online website, the initial impression is a professional higher education facility. In viewing the source code of the website, the site was created with SilverStripe, an open source content management system and consists of several JavaScript and jQuery files for navigation and various interactive effects. The primary horizontal navigation includes *Home, About Online, Innovative Learning, Catalog, Schools, and Resources*. A secondary navigation docked in the upper right hand side includes *Contact, Site Map, Help Desk and Login*. *Apply Now* and *Request Info* images are prominently displayed below the header graphic. *Campus Information* contains additional submenus and is located in the primary content area. The footer area has 3 additional navigations, one reiterating the top right navigation, another dedicated to addressing the specific target markets, a listing of school information purely for search engine optimization purposes and an *About* sub menu items. The site also contains social media links.

Despite the excessive number of navigational areas on the website, the initial impression upon viewing the site is that it is well designed, professional, and organized. The AAU Online website is designed more professionally than the primary www.academyart.edu website, which is riddled with poor search engine optimization techniques utilizing the keyword phrase "Art School" repeatedly (and actually harming their visibility with search engines). The primary domain also shows poor use of typography - displaying several different font sizes in the links, black hyperlinks, and black text on a white background which is very difficult to read. The primary domain also has a narrow three column format with limited graphics which forces the user to read the entire page to find what they are looking for and feel confused.

This report will be specific to pages on the <http://online.academyart.edu> domain and not any of the various sub-domains or the primary domain, all of which are accessible from this site.

Usability Heuristics

1. Visibility of System Status

- A. When a user clicks on "Login" you are taken directly to a login page. However, when you finish logging in, you are redirected to the student discussion and classroom portal, which is a completely different website.

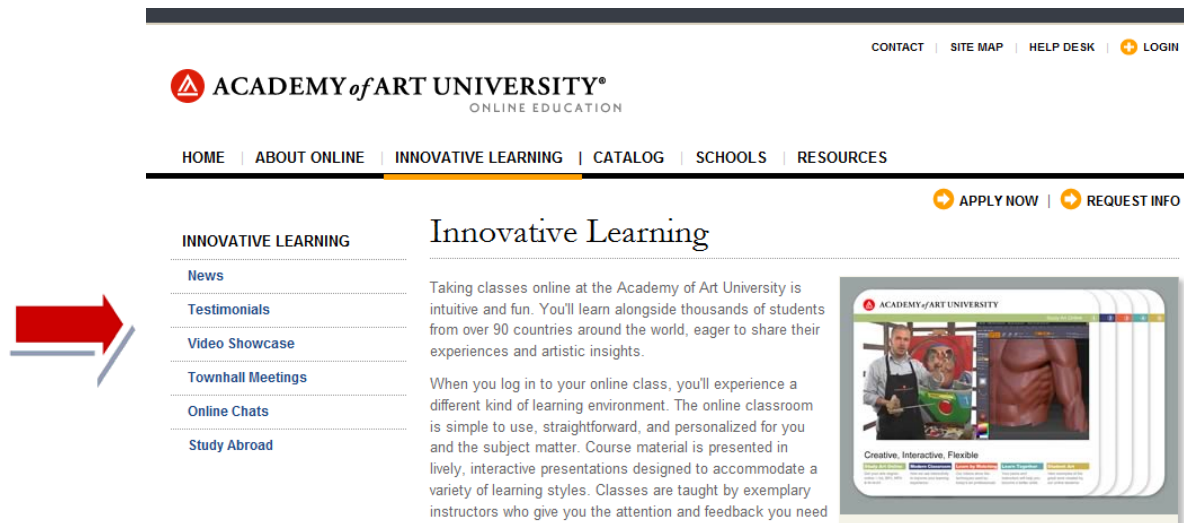


The image shows two screenshots of the Academy of Art University Online Education website. The top screenshot is the login page, which features a header with navigation links (CONTACT, SITE MAP, HELP DESK, LOGIN) and a secondary navigation bar (HOME, ABOUT ONLINE, INNOVATIVE LEARNING, CATALOG, SCHOOLS, RESOURCES). Below the navigation is a 'Login' section with fields for USERNAME (CSNELL2) and PASSWORD, and a 'Login' button. To the right of the login fields is an 'Announcement' section stating that the Online Help Desk will be closed from 12am to 7:30am on Sunday 6/26/11. Below the announcement is a 'Need Help?' section. The bottom screenshot is the student portal page, which features a header with navigation links (HOME, MAILBOX, PROFILE, CLASSES, ONLINE NEWS, STUDENT RESOURCES) and a secondary navigation bar (Profile, Classes, Mailbox (0), Help, Resources, Logout). Below the navigation is a 'CLASSES' section, an 'ONLINE NEWS' section, and a 'STUDENT RESOURCES' section. A large red curved arrow points from the 'Login' button on the top screenshot to the 'Need Help?' section on the bottom screenshot.

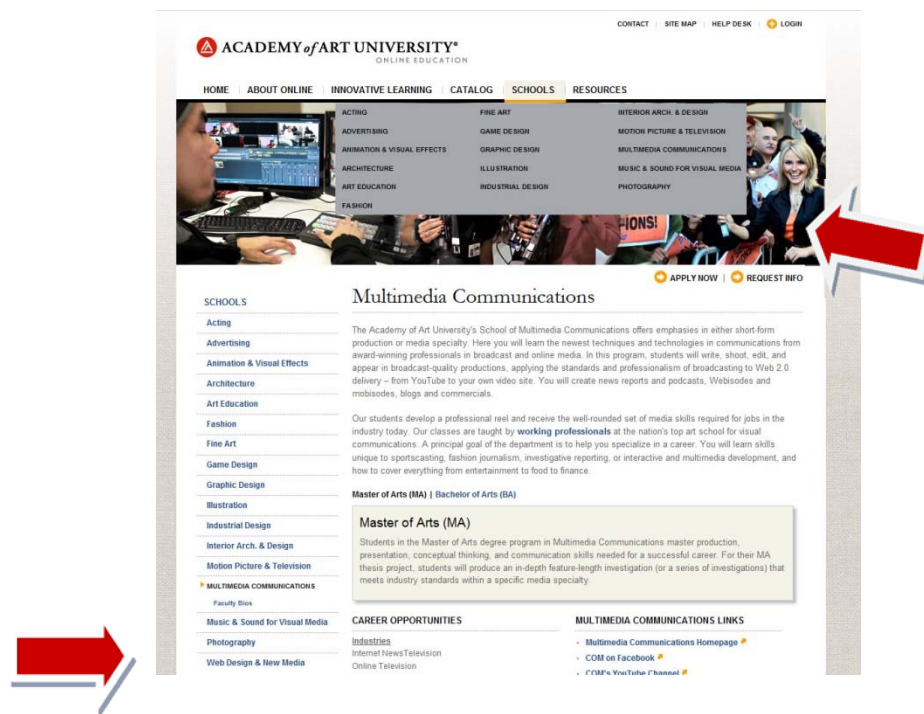
Recommended Action: Rename "Login" so that users are informed

that they are being taken to a different site. When you are logged into <http://online.academyart.edu>, you can add courses from the Catalog page to your Schedule Planner, but this is the only area on the AAU online site that utilizes the login feature. In evaluating the competitive websites, possible alternatives could include renaming the link to “Student Portal Login”, “Online Campus Login” or redirect students to the MyAcademy website.

- B. When accessing pages on the primary navigation, the sub navigation items listed on the drop down menus are clearly visible in sidebar navigation for that category of content making it clear to the user where they are located within the website.

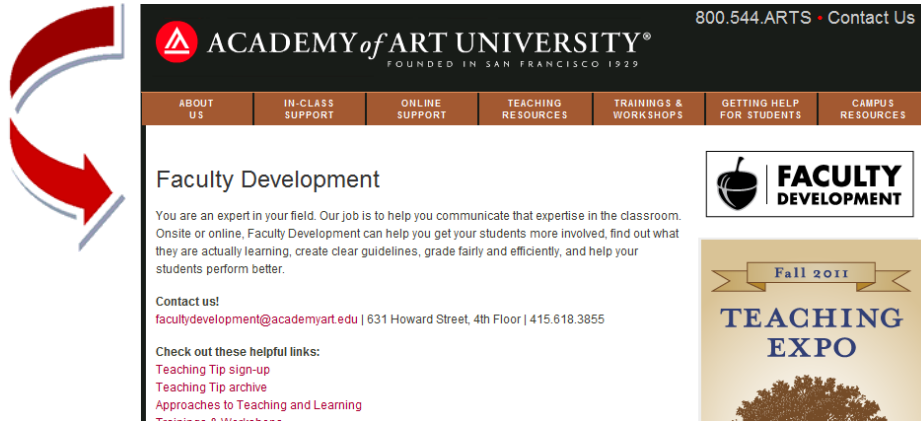


However, under “Schools” in the primary navigation, the major of “Web Design & New Media” is not listed as an option in the drop down menu, and only becomes visible once you have selected another content area within the drop down list.



Recommended Action: Add “Web Design & New Media” to the horizontal drop down menu under “Schools”.

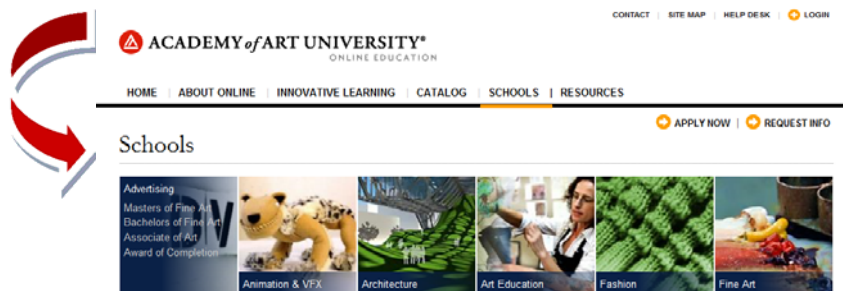
- C. When users click on the navigation in the footer focused on the target markets for the site, they are redirected to another micro-site that deviates from the strength of branding established by the online website. This issue also occurs on the primary navigation when a user clicks on “Resources” then “Showcase” items are clicked on. The user is taken to a “media” sub-domain which has a wide variety of other websites all uniquely designed in its directory. In the footer example, the “Faculty” link takes you to a site that looks like this:



Recommended Action: Develop a cohesive branding strategy and apply it consistently across all of the various sub-domains so that a user does not feel like they have been transported to a completely different organization. A short term solution until this issue can be resolved would be to name the heading of the footer navigation to “Additional Academy of Art University Websites and Resources” and for other links such as the media sub-domain, an indication that the link is a new website.

2. Match between system and the real world

- A. The number one issue in terms of usability with this site is the content on the home page. The content is not specifically geared towards prospective students, which is the primary target market. The home page does not focus on the degrees or certificates that are available at AAU, and only mention undergraduate and graduate degrees once in light gray text. In order for users to be able to determine what specific programs are available, they must click on “Schools” and then mouse over the relevant major to see the associated degrees or certificates.



- B. Another issue is the course catalog and detailed program requirements. Unless you are able to find the link to the digital copy of the print catalog, you cannot access the detailed requirements for fulfilling the individual programs which includes the general education courses. Utilizing the online catalog does not provide you with this information, nor is it listed on any of the individual program information pages. Instead, the Online Catalog provides you with a list of courses in a specific department only.



SEARCH RESULTS / SCHEDULE PLANNER
Summer 2011
JUNE 19, 2011 - AUGUST 10, 2011

View as:   Courses 1 - 17 of 17

▼ **WNM 600: MS: DIGITAL APPLICATIONS | 3.0 Units** View Details: [On Campus](#) [Online](#) [ADD TO SCHEDULE PLANNER](#)

Through the exploration of traditional techniques and digital media each student will discover a higher level of creativity and self-expression through exercises that transform the written word into visual message.


Prerequisite: None

▼ **WNM 605: MS: TYPOGRAPHY FOR DIGITAL MASTERS | 3.0 Units** View Details: [On Campus](#) [Online](#) [ADD TO SCHEDULE PLANNER](#)

The fundamentals of typography and application, from historical fonts to the new classics will be introduced. Exercises for print media will lead up to design for screen resolution and legibility with emphasis in composition, grid and aesthetics for optimal purpose and message.

Prerequisite: WNM 600. Must be a WNM major.

▼ **WNM 606: MS: PRINCIPLES OF USABILITY | 3.0 Units** View Details: [On Campus](#) [Online](#) [ADD TO SCHEDULE PLANNER](#)



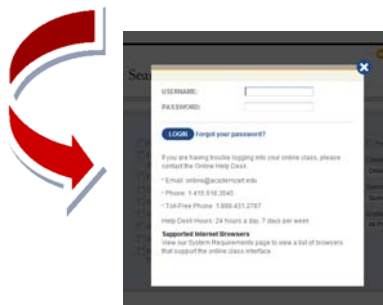
This course addresses the principles of usable design such as listening to users, understanding the medium and the ability to bridge the two with a well-designed user interface. Objectively evaluate the usability of products, design from user requirements, and test designs to verify successes or uncover flaws.

Prerequisite: Take WNM 600. Must be a WNM major.

Recommended Actions: Highlight the actual programs on the home page. Most prospective students already know what type of program they are looking for (i.e. Associates, Bachelor's, Master's, Certificate) as well as the subject of their major. Their only focus at this stage would be to determine whether or not the Academy of Art University has the program they are looking for. Next, provide detailed program information on the website, so that a prospective student can easily understand what courses are required for their degree or certificate.

3. User control and freedom

- A. The user is able to freely access all areas of content on the website with one exception. All sub-domain pages open a new window so that an individual is not taken away from the main AAU online website which shows good use of information architecture. The only instance where a user is restricted from accessing any of the navigation is on the Courses page, when the user clicks "Login" and a JavaScript pop-up menu appears.



Because the Catalog page is the only page that utilizes the username and password functionality in order to add classes to a Schedule Planner, it is clear why this is the only page to have the pop-up and why users are not redirected to the Discussions sub-domain. However, when logging out on the catalog page after adding a class to the Schedule Planner, a 500 error gets returned.

Recommended Actions: Instead of utilizing the pop-up menu on the catalog page, embed the login feature into the actual page and notify the user that they have the ability to log in and add courses to their Schedule Planner. The 500 error must be resolved to negate the need for exception handling. (See Section 5 A)

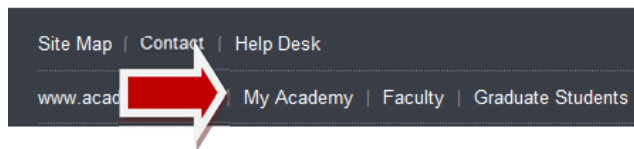
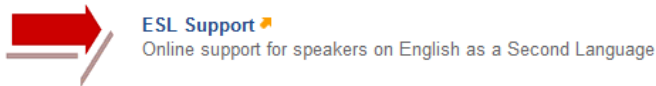
- B. Once you log out of the Catalog page, you are completely removed from having access to the primary AAU Online website navigation.



Recommended Actions: Include the primary navigation on the Catalog page once a user has logged out.

4. Consistency and standards

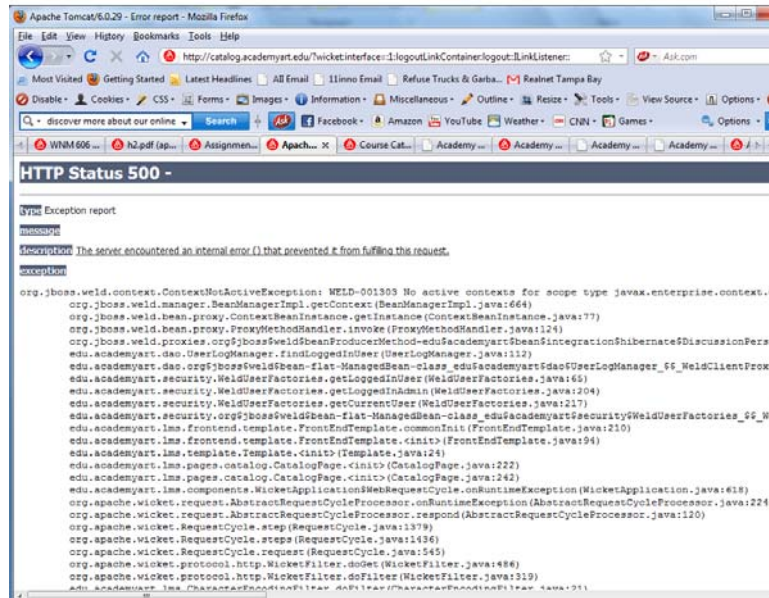
- A. The Online website itself is consistent in its terminology, link styles and colors (appropriate to the relevant background color) and heading styles with the exception of the footer. It was not immediately evident that links with the orange arrows were indicators of a different sub-domain website.



Recommended Actions: All links not a part of AAU Online domain should follow the same convention of utilizing arrows, with the appropriate CSS. As mentioned in 1C, consistent branding should exist for all AAU websites so that the entire brand retains its integrity.

5. Error Prevention

- A. When logged into the Catalog page, and you add a course to your Schedule Planner, and then go to log out, a 500 error gets returned. This issue also falls in line with section 1. A. of visibility of system status.



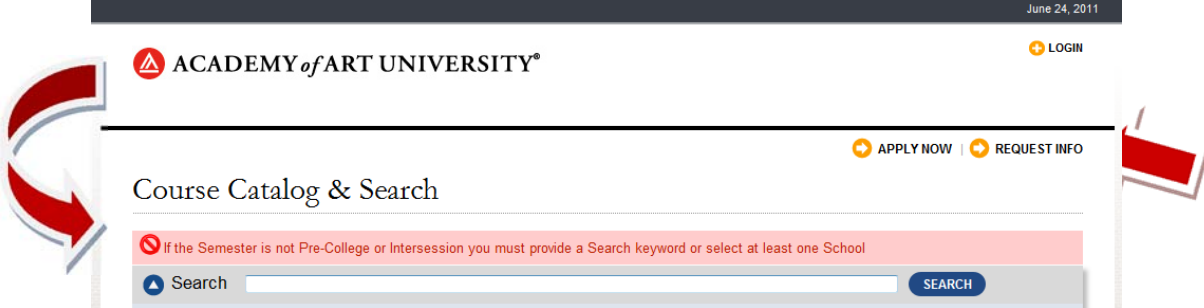
Recommended Actions: The user should have a message appear letting the user know when a course has been added to their Schedule Planner, and the coding that causes the 500 error should be resolved immediately.

- B. Mandatory fields for the Request Info page are not indicated on the initial form page.



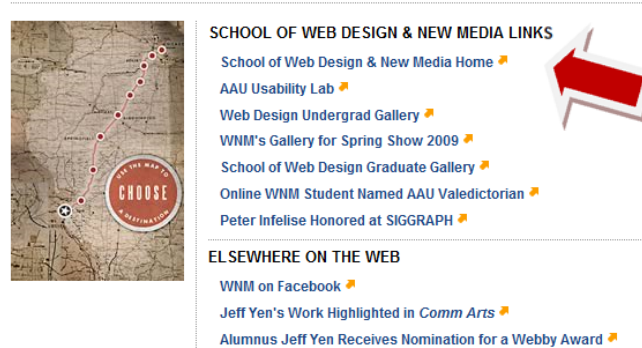
Recommended Actions: The initial form page should have required fields indicated with an asterisk or some other designation and a notification that those fields are required prior to filling out and submitting the form. Although the site does let an individual know what fields are missing, this information would be more useful prior to filling out the form.

- C. If on the *Courses* page you do not select a “keyword” and receive the error message, the Request Info link will no longer work.



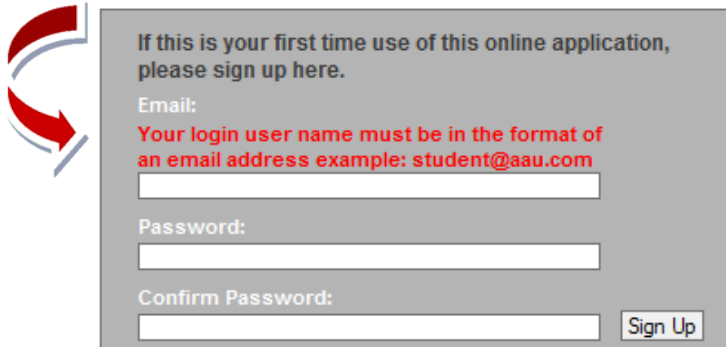
Recommended Actions: Resolve the scripting error that prevents the Request Info link from working immediately.

- D. When on the *Web Design & New Media* page, after finding it in the vertical side bar navigation, when you click on the link for School of Web Design & New Media Home, you are actually taken to the home page for School of Multimedia Communications:



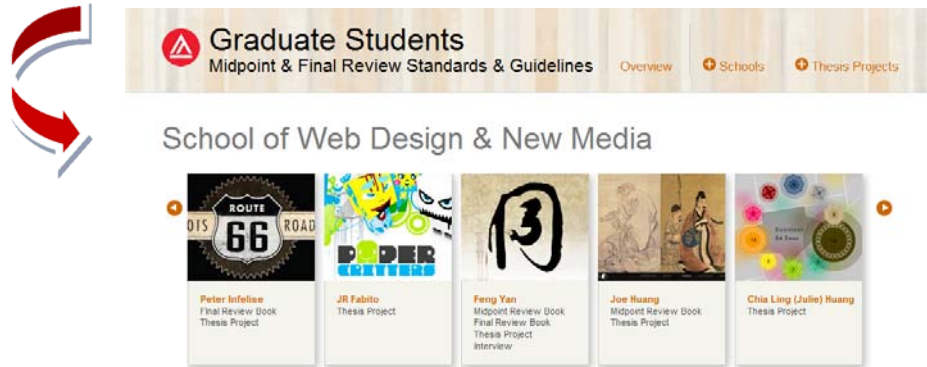
Recommended Actions: Update the link to reflect the accurate URL that is being requested: <http://www.academyart.edu/computer-arts-school/index.html> immediately.

- E. When you click on the “Apply Now” button and enter a false email address, an error message is effectively displayed. No recommended actions for this are required.



6. Recognition rather than recall

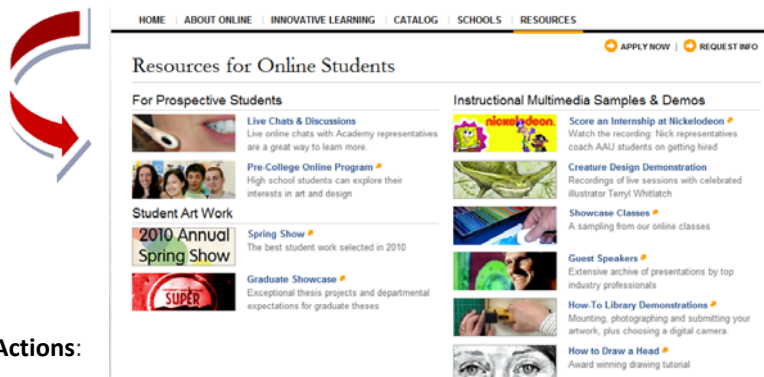
- A. Because there are so many sub-domains which can be accessed from the AAU Online website, it can be difficult to remember how you got to a particular section of AAU content. For example, at one point I had accessed a 2011 Graduate portfolio website for the Web Design & New Media program. It took a total of 7 clicks to be able to access the interactive projects (beginning with the Resources page) and was very difficult to find a second time because it was not technically located on the AAU Online domain. A link to this site was listed on other pages, providing users with multiple ways to access the same content. However, because *Web Design & New Media* is not a part of the primary drop down menu, and its associated “home page” is linked incorrectly, it was still difficult to find.



Recommended Actions: Re-evaluate the information architecture for the various sub-domains and associated content linked to and from the AAU Online website to streamline efficiency, accuracy and use. Address the lack of consistency through branding across the various sub-domains. **A corporate branding manual should be created and enforced that establishes the rules and regulations of the use of the various sub-brands.** Through this portion of the evaluation, it was also discovered that the other majors do have program requirements listed under their respective “home” pages and micro-sites (on a new sub-domain) contrary to my evaluation in section 2. B.. However, this was not discovered because the Web Design & New Media “home page” is linked incorrectly from the Schools → Web Design & New Media page.

7. Flexibility and efficiency of use

- A. As stated in section 6. A., a careful evaluation to restructure the information architecture of the AAU Online website should take place. Because so much of the content is actually located on other websites, it is difficult to address these issues effectively. On the Resources page, there are a total of 48 links that take you to other domains or URLs.



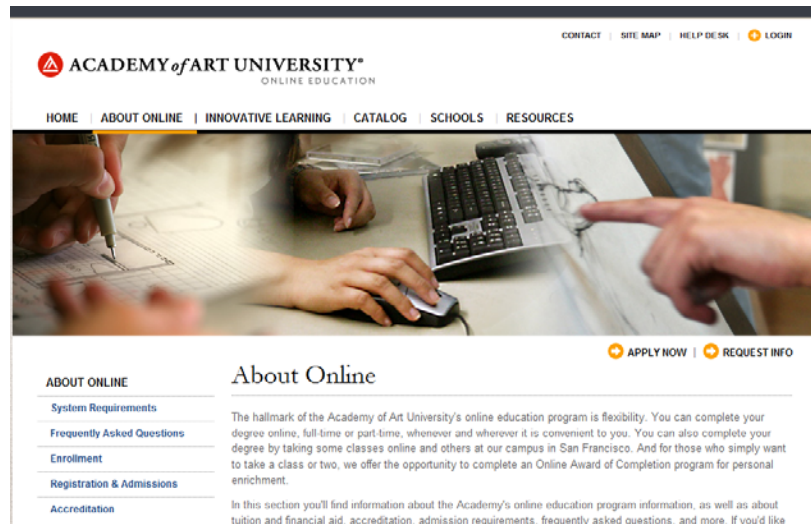
Recommended Actions:

Minimize the

number of pages that are being linked to outside of the AAU Online website. It is recommended that the primary content, accessible through the various sub-domains, be repeated within the context of this website. This would reduce the number of tabs or new windows that are opened, and the confusion a user encounters while being redirected to a different website. More effective use of typography to highlight particular categories of content is needed. As stated in section 2. A., provide website users with immediate information regarding the types of programs available with the associated major directly on the home page of the AAU Online website.

8. Aesthetic and minimalist design

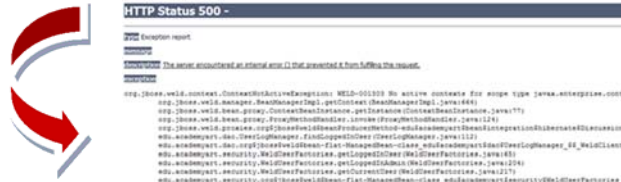
- A. The AAU Online website has a very clean and professional appearance through the use of quality graphics, and the use of background colors and shading to isolate specific related content when applicable. Given the current information architecture within the website, the content is organized with appropriate headings and illustrates effective use of typography.



Recommended Actions: Apply the same design principles utilized within the AAU Online website to the other various sub-domains. Special focus on the primary domain www.academyart.edu, which has a complete lack of application of professional design principles, will reduce confusion for users when they are redirected to another domain or micro-site.

9. Help users recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors

- A. As stated in section 5. A., the website returns a 500 server error when trying to log out after utilizing the login feature on the Catalog page.



Recommended

Actions:

Correct the coding error and

create an error handling notification if the system is unable to add a course to your Schedule Planner for any reason.

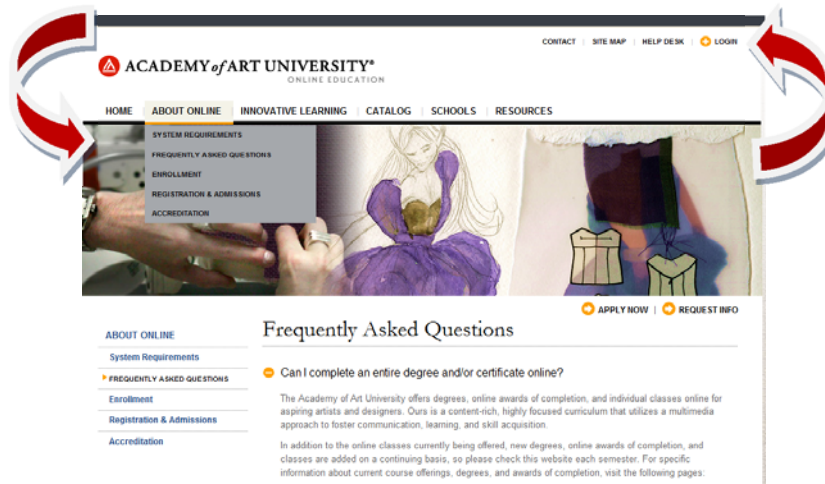
- B. As stated in section 5. B., on the Request Info page, mandatory fields are not immediately denoted to the user.



Recommended Actions: Create a dialog on the form page notifying the user that fields marked with an indicator (*) are required for the successful submission of the form.

10. Help and documentation

- A. Links to the Help Desk, Contact Page and Site Map are located in a prominent area of the website, and again in the footer area. However, the “Frequently Asked Questions” page is nested within the “About Online” menu item.



Recommended Actions: Include a direct link to the Frequently Asked Questions in the header and footer area to assist users in being able to easily resolve any potential issues or questions. It is also recommended that the contact information for AAU Online be posted and easily visible on the Frequently Asked Questions page. A questionnaire should also be provided to the individuals who answer the phones to note what questions they are asked regularly and ensure that information is incorporated on this page to increase effectiveness.

Conclusion

Upon the successful completion of this Heuristic Evaluation, it is clear that there are several issues that need to be addressed by the Academy of Art University. While the overall design of the AAU Online website emulates a professional higher education establishment, there are an exceptional number of sub-domains as well as the primary domain that do not emulate the same branding principles or style. It is strongly recommended that a corporate identity brand manual be created to effectively establish the proper use of graphical elements across all levels of communication provided by the school. It is recommended that the total number of sub-domains is reduced or that key areas of content are replicated within each individual domain if that content is specific to the targeted user of the site. During a sub-domain evaluation, the information architecture and content should be carefully reviewed to maximize efficiency and streamline the user experience. Results of the evaluation should be tested adequately prior to implementation.

It is also recommended that the actual content of the AAU Online website be redirected and focused on the primary target market of a prospective student. Because students represent the primary generation of revenue for the school, the actual programs and availability should be highlighted effectively on the home page. A sales process for capturing prospective student information should be defined and that user experience should be customized. AB testing methods can be incorporated to refine placement of these elements to increase student conversions.

As noted in the report, there are several errors that exist within the AAU Online website, including a server error and incorrect links that should be corrected immediately to avoid potential confusion or loss of prospective students. In addition, there are several areas that can be better refined through proper notifications to the user of various actions they are able to perform.

If the Academy of Art University has any questions regarding this Heuristic Report, please email CSNELL2@academyart.edu. A quote to resolve all of the issues highlighted in this report can be provided upon request.