

Texas State University Gato Template Update, 2015

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Backstory

The Gato template design has not been updated since 2009. Since then, users, devices, technology, and strategy have changed tremendously. Texas State University web communications look dated when compared to its competitors. Since the beginning of 2015, University Marketing and ITS have built the necessary momentum and buy-in from stakeholders across campus to make these important changes in a responsible, transparent fashion.

We've held multiple focus groups, conducted interviews, ran user tests, researched competitors, gathered best practices, built demos, and solicited feedback from large groups. Our focus groups consisted of nearly 40 Gato editors and one-on-one interviews were conducted with 10 handpicked stakeholders from various departments. The focus groups were recorded and have been reviewed multiple times for feature requests and clarity. Follow-up emails and feedback solicitations were sent at regular intervals to the same groups as the design progressed. The data gathered has been the cornerstone of the design process, and through it we've concluded that an update to the Gato template is absolutely imperative for the institutional reputation and continued growth of the Texas State University brand.

Reference links

- **Website for communication updates:**
<http://gato.its.txstate.edu/template-redesign.html>
- **Links to resources and template demos:**
<http://edelstone.github.io/templates/>

Focus Groups - March 20-21, 2015

In-depth focus groups were conducted with nearly 40 Gato editors from varying units across campus. They were organized according to the editor's affiliation to the university:

1. Academic
2. Service related
3. Student focused
4. Special projects

After the sessions concluded, the session leaders compared their extensive notes and reviewed the videos for clarity. The below list resulted from that research and has since been used as an aggregate representation of the most-requested features for a future template design.

Feature Requests:

Responsive across screen size (desktop, tablet, mobile friendly)

New web font choices/typography

Grid based layout (content location flexibility)

Modern look

Use of feature sliders

Collapsible menus

Persistent top navigation

Large image areas on background

Use of buttons/icon sets

Large marketing footer

Image heavy sites

Strategic use of background video

Info graphics

Use of secondary colors

Text over image overlays

Separate popular links/quick links section

Mobile quick links

More action shots from University for Marketing

More professional video

Participant Testimonials

Users were able to leave anonymous feedback at signup.txstate.edu. Below is a complete, unfiltered collection of the comments received.

- **Focus Group 1 (Academic Websites)**

Average Instructor Rating: 4.00

Average Content Rating: 4.00

Average Overall Rating: 4.00

What Attendees Found Most Useful

I appreciated being included in the process of the website template re-design options. I felt the instructors were listening to those of us in the workshop and were generally happy with the feedback that we provided.

There was a lot of really good discussion, which actually felt productive towards our ultimate goals. The mockups and other University sites were also very helpful so we could see what direction we were taking in the future. This gives us an idea in advance of what things make look like so we can plan for future site changes.

I liked that the university is looking for user recommendations for change.

Seeing so many examples, especially the stuff Michael is currently working on.

General Comments

Would have liked more time to discuss changes but the hour was still very productive.

- **Focus Group 2 (Service Department Websites)**

Average Instructor Rating: 4.00

Average Content Rating: 3.50

Average Overall Rating: 3.50

(No additional feedback from Focus Group 2)

- **Focus Group 3 (Student Serving Websites)**

Average Instructor Rating: 3.67

Average Content Rating: 3.83

Average Overall Rating: 3.67

What Attendees Found Most Useful

Examples of other university web pages and the templates from Marketing.

Looking at examples of good web design

I appreciate the opportunity to see where the project is going and provide input.

Visual presentation of leading websites, presentation of template options, open discussion.

The fact you are asking different departments what their needs are and what they would like to see in an update template is the best possible choice instead of just forcing something on us.

General Comments

Most enjoyable. Looking forward to progress reports.

Pace was good. I think I would have liked to be asked some prepared questions.

Good job and well done. Thanks for your work on this project guys!

- **Focus Group 4 (Special Project Websites)**

Average Instructor Rating: 4.00

Average Content Rating: 3.67

Average Overall Rating: 4.00

What Attendees Found Most Useful

Before I attended the workshop, I didn't see the need to update the look of Texas State's website, but after listening to the presenters and seeing other university websites, I can definitely see that ours needs to be updated.

That we were all able to have an open discussion and realize a lot of departments were on the same page as KTSW.

I loved seeing the new possible templates, and am excited to see them implemented. I think it will fit better with our page.

General Comments

The facilitators were knowledgeable and were very thorough with their presentation. The time allotted was good.

Everything seemed very well planned, paced, and laid out for us. I'd love to hear from the instructors a time estimate on the new layout of the website rolling out.

Everyone was very eloquent and impressive. I loved how receptive the process was.

Design Phase & User Feedback, April-August 2015

Design commenced immediately after the focus groups and progressed at a rapid rate through the summer. Michael Edelstone was the primary person responsible for this effort.

Gato editors that participated in the initial focus groups have been distributing demos, screenshots, and progress updates throughout their departments and units. Since the initial meetings we have sent out multiple follow-up emails. Below is some general feedback; these were conversations that resulted in a lot of well-received changes. Our most recent designs have been tested internally and externally, and have been approved for brand standards by the Enrollment Marketing & Management leadership.

Email Testimonials

"There is certainly a balance between giving creative freedom to those that maintain sites and ensuring whatever end users may do still fits within the bounds of our marketing regulations and I think you're all doing a wonderful job with that. Keep up the good work!"

"Overall, I think it looks good and I am excited to see where this goes and can't wait to implement the design."

"This template seems to cover the items my focus group liked: large icons, large buttons, clear type, photo options, and graphic headers and footers. I like it. I showed the template to others in the office and they're fans, too. Looks great on mobile, as well."

"Looking good. The color palette and typography is a great improvement. Love the icon fonts."

"I like the carousel with the secondary colors. And thank you for the button option!"

"These look great; every one of them. Thank you for freezing the nav bar at the top of the page. The different carousels are great, too. The layout and colors of each template are very pleasing to the eye. Thank you so much for working on these for all of us!"

"I really like how clean everything is. The Carousel function and the image slider functions would be perfect for our page. It will allow us to utilize student travel images and short blurbs linking to specific degree information. Great work! I'm excited for the finished product!"

"This looks really great to me. I love the Carousel page. They were nice and clean. Thank you for all of your hard work on our Internet presence. Looking good, sir."

"I like the carousel feature. This feature would be really helpful for the library as we're always trying to highlight new items/services here in the library."

"I love the layout and font choices on these samples. The FontAwesome icons and the options they represent (e.g., calendar) are excellent. These pages look absolutely amazing on modern displays (tested on my new MacBook Pro with retina display, as well as my iPhone 6). Love the look and feel of the mobile version on iPhone 6. Thanks for all you do!"

Web Fonts

Web Fonts are a strong example of how the web has changed in recent years. In the past, designers had to choose fonts based on those that were most likely to be present on the average user's computer. Now there are fast, innovative ways to serve any font to any device, for a feature rich and easily readable experience. Web fonts give us access to the same typography we use in print for a uniform user experience and stronger brand identity. In the focus groups, web typography was the 2nd most-requested feature after responsive/mobile-friendly design.

The fonts we use (Univers and Adobe Garamond) require licensing. Due to the demand for web fonts we have been proactive about reaching out to the proper groups that handle software licensing for the university. At the beginning of June, Dan Eggers and Michael Edelstone met with José Rodriguez, Director of Technology Resources Business Services, and Kimmy Hendley, Coordinator of Software Licensing, to formally request a global font license for all Gato-based web properties. They agreed with our assessment of the need and passed on our request to IT Administration for review, with the purchase being approved in July. We now have a full license to use those fonts on all Gato properties. The license allows for 7.5 million page views; last year our properties received 6.3 million per year, so there is room to grow. These will be deployed by default for all Gato websites; no coding knowledge is necessary.

Template Development and Communication

The development phase of the new template began in the beginning of September and is progressing rapidly with multiple developers and designers participating in the effort. Much thought and deliberation has been put into deploying the new designs and technology. The release of the new template will be multi-phase and voluntary to start.

The timeline is very simple and will go something like this (dates may vary):

- December 15, 2015: Release the new template to editors; switching is voluntary
- June 1, 2016: Move all properties to the new template

This schedule gives editors plenty of time to test their sites, get creative, seek assistance, and convert their properties at their leisure. Editors that have used baked-in Gato functionality to build their sites will inherit a new look/feel without much effort. The new design will likely inspire some edits, but it won't be necessary from a purely functional standpoint. We have been transparent about this timeline with editors and none have expressed reservations.