Web Standards

Approved by the NIU Web Steering
Committee on May 6, 2019

go.niu.edu/webstandards

Northern Illinois University

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This document was approved by the Web Steering Committee on May 6, 2019.

The standards will be reviewed and updated annually by the committee. Please see the Web Team website at go.niu.edu/webteam for announcements and updates that are released between the annual reviews of this document.

1   Introduction and Purpose

1.1   Providing the Best Content Possible

NIU's website is the face of NIU, often the first impression visitors have of the university, and we want their experience to be a positive one. To help provide a positive user-experience, we have the following standards and best practice guidelines in place to assist you and to ensure a consistent and unified user experience for our visitors. The standards were collaboratively written by members of the NIU Web Team, approved by the Web Steering Committee and president of the university and grounded in thorough research of industry standards and best practices for usability and lawful accessibility compliance.

Our guiding principles for web governance of the niu.edu domain are:

- All pages should be audience-centered (student first) and consistently use the NIU brand.
- All pages should have a content strategy, featuring an intuitive navigation and relevant (audience focused) and current content that is optimized for search engines.

1.2   Content Ownership, User Access Rights and Responsibilities

All subdomains and sub-sites within the niu.edu domain belong to, and are representative of, the university. Colleges and divisions serve as caretakers of their websites, experts in their content and stewards of NIU's brand.

The university's central Office of Web and Internal Communications (Web Team) has access to all areas of the niu.edu website and, to ensure quality control, will edit/alter content as needed for clarity, grammar, spelling, usage and style, as well as to conform with university naming conventions and branding. The university reserves the right to revise or delete content housed either on university IT resources or external resources that does not meet acceptable use guidelines or the standards outlined in this policy.

For each site on the niu.edu domain, a primary (and in some cases a secondary) page manager will be identified. Access to the Web Content Management System (CMS) will only be granted to and retained by users who have completed Level 1 Web Training and/or the annual refresher training (FY18 and beyond) offered by the Office of Web and Internal Communications. If a site's content director and/or page manager has not completed – or does not wish to complete – the required training, the Web Team will maintain the web property in collaboration with the department, college or division.

If it is determined that a page manager is making updates to their site that do not align with web standards, the director of web strategy and services, web manager and/or college communicator will meet with them to review the standards. Continued updates that do not align with web standards may result in additional training requirements or suspension of access to the CMS.

1.3 Governance and Collaboration

Web governance is defined as a system for managing an online presence in an orderly way.

At NIU, web governance is facilitated through the Web Steering Committee. The committee's objective is to provide collaborative centralized governance for the ongoing development, deployment, delivery and maintenance of the niu.edu domain and to consistently represent the Northern Illinois University brand online through standard processes, roles, responsibilities and practices.

Primary support for niu.edu and associated sites is led by the Office of Web and Internal Communications (Web Team) in the Division of Enrollment Management, Marketing and Communications. The senior director for Web and Internal Communications provides oversight and strategic direction for the university's web presence. The director of web strategy and services reviews requests from academic and administrative stakeholders, sets priorities and apprises the Web Steering Committee of projects and plans.

The Web Team also provides training for page managers, support for all niu.edu webpages, maintains the Web Standards document and provides administrative support for the Web Steering Committee.

1.4 Support

We support niu.edu webpages for compatibility with the current version and previous major release of the following browsers:

- Chrome
- Firefox
- Safari
- Internet Explorer
- Edge

Older browser versions may work, but not all web applications may be compatible. For this reason, we recommend that users update to the most recent version of their preferred browser. We also recommend that any web applications utilized meet the same criteria as stated above.

To request an update to a website, visit go.niu.edu/webupdate.

To request a new website, contact our office at webcommunications@niu.edu.

2 NIU Branding

2.1 NIU Brand Standards

To present a consistent, unified image and reinforce NIU's branding and marketing initiatives, all division, college, school, department and special information web properties must clearly identify their relationship with the university.

All web properties must adhere to NIU's Communication Standards for Institutional Brand Identity.

To ensure compliance with brand standards, any document uploaded to an NIU website (such as forms and department handbooks) must first be reviewed by the Clearinghouse.

2.2 Use of NIU Logos and Trademarks

All NIU websites should include the following elements, which are included in NIU's standard templates:

- The NIU logo, implemented according to the university's graphic standards.
- The logo must link back to the NIU homepage (www.niu.edu).
- Copyright information as follows: © 2xxx Board of Trustees of Northern Illinois University. All rights reserved.
- The full name of the university – Northern Illinois University – must appear somewhere on every webpage.

Use of the Huskie Athletics logo on sites other than niuhuskies.com is prohibited without written consent from Intercollegiate Athletics, or its designee.

No university trademarks may be altered or manipulated in any way or merged with or placed directly against any other logo.

Figure 1. Huskie Athletics logo

2.3 Use of Third-party Advertising and Logos

As a .edu domain, third-party advertising is prohibited on NIU's website.
Only Enrollment Management, Marketing and Communications may grant an exception.

Event sponsorship logos are permitted after being cleared by Enrollment Management, Marketing and Communications and must be taken down once the event/sponsorship has ended. A third-party logo must be supplied by the sponsor and must be a high-quality image. Low quality or unofficial logos will be removed.

If a partnership exists between a third-party and NIU, a link (not a logo) may be placed on the NIU website. If the partnership is terminated, the link must be removed.

If the use of a third-party logo is required for contractual or accreditation purposes, contact the Web Team at webcommunications@niu.edu for assistance in placing them on your site.

2.4 Banners

Sub-branded banners on NIU websites must comply with brand standards and should be approved by University Marketing.

3 Compliance

3.1 Copyright

Page managers must comply with official copyright laws. Any content, photo, image, logo or media that doesn't meet copyright laws will be removed from the NIU website. Before posting any element that may infringe on copyright law, contact the senior director of the Office of Web and Internal Communications who can make a final determination.

3.2 Accessibility

As a state institution, the NIU website is required to comply with the Illinois Information Technology Accessibility Act (IITAA) which requires Illinois agencies and universities to ensure that their websites, information systems and information technologies are accessible to people with disabilities. Page managers should review IITAA requirements on a regular basis.

Refer to our Content Accessibility page for helpful tips on ensuring that your content is accessible.

3.3 Privacy Policy

Page managers must review the university's Website Privacy Policy to make sure all pages are in compliance. Please note that NIU is prohibited by law from requiring an individual to transmit their social security number over the internet, unless the connection is secure or the social security number is encrypted. Please also see the NIU Information Security Procedure.

3.4 General Data Protection Regulation Statement

NIU complies with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), an enforceable regulation that standardizes data protection and privacy. New visitors to the NIU website see a message at the bottom of their screen about our use of cookies. They can click either "Got It" to indicate their understanding or "Learn more" to read our privacy notice.

4 Editorial Guidelines

All NIU websites follow the editorial standards outlined in the NIU Editorial Style Guide (PDF), which provides guidance on spelling, punctuation, degree terminology and other areas. Some guidelines specific to the web are included below.

4.1 Capitalization

Page navigation labels are written in Title Case.

Main headings and H3 should be written in Title Case. In cases where a subheading (H4, H5, etc.) is a complete sentence, it can be formatted in sentence case (only the first word capitalized).

Example: Application Fee Waiver – Freshmen Applicants

4.2 Content and Text Formatting

Do not center align text or headings.

Bold may be used to emphasize particular words and phrases. Do not bold full sentences or use bolded words in place of a heading.

Do not use underline (may be confused with a hyperlink).

To emphasize words or phrases, italic may be used sparingly, but bold is preferred.

Italic and bold should not be combined.

ALL CAPS should only be used in an official name already formatted that way or in cases of abbreviation (ex., NASA, NIU).

Do not use symbols in words in lieu of letters on webpages, (i.e., Latin@s) as it cannot be read aloud for the visually impaired and is therefore not accessibility compliant.

Phone numbers should be linked for ease of use.

When referring to campus buildings, link to the interactive map. This does not apply to headings.

Example: Our office is located in [Lowden Hall](#).

5   Web Content Standards

5.1   Content Management

5.1.1   Audience
Content published to NIU websites should be geared primarily toward recruitment and retention of students. Content for which the audience is inter-office would be better suited offline or on an intranet system (see [Document retention and storage](#), below).

5.1.2   Official University Content
Do not recreate content that exists elsewhere on the NIU website. Always link to the official online source. For example, link to the official, current catalog using [GoURLs](#) established and maintained by the Web Team for course descriptions and degree requirements; link to the Office of the Bursar for current tuition and fees information; link to Housing and Residential Services for current room and board rates.

5.1.3   Outdated Content
Content should be reviewed every six months to ensure information is accurate. The Web Team and page managers will periodically perform content assessments, working with the subject matter expert (SME) to determine a plan for updating outdated content. If the SME is unresponsive, the page manager will update or delete the content as necessary.

If a web property has not been updated in 12 months, the Web Team may send out a notification to the user associated with the subdomain. If the user does not respond within 10 business days, the Web Team will delete the site from the server.

5.1.4   Archival Content

Archival content should be stored outside of Cascade CMS. For example, if past course syllabi need to be archived, they should be maintained by the professor or the department in O365 or, in some cases, University Archives. Another option for archiving work created by the NIU community is Huskie Commons.

5.1.5   Content Readability

Website content should be written for a fifth through eighth grade reading level. This is not to "dumb down" the content. Rather, it acknowledges that the majority of website visitors are scanning pages quickly for specific information.

Content should further be made easily scannable by keeping sentences and paragraphs short, and by using relevant and descriptive headings. Use brand voice and avoid jargon and/or difficult-to-read words when less complex words can easily substitute.

Ordered and unordered lists should be used to make content easy to scan. An ordered list should be used only when the order of the information is important.

Examples:

Bring the following items to class:

- Pen or pencil
- Paper
- Calculator

How to log in to MyNIU:

1. Visit MyNIU.
2. Enter your user ID and password.
3. Click the Sign In button.

Tables can also be used to organize and present related information. Keep tables simple for best usability. The table title should be in title case. Capitalize the first word in each table cell.

Tables and Accessibility

Someone who can't see a table can't make the same quick connections between data in the columns and rows a sighted user can. To make your tables accessible, use the table caption tag to summarize table contents, and identify row and column headers. This allows a screen reader to read the information in the correct order.

Read more about creating accessible tables at WebAim.

5.1.6   Document Retention and Storage

Cascade is a web content management system, not a records management/retention tool. All offices should have an offline or intranet storage system, such as [SharePoint](#), [Blackboard](#), [Dropbox](#) or an [O365](#) group and follow the [Records Retention and Administration Guidelines](#). The type of storage system should be determined by the colleges, divisions, departments and/or schools managing the documents. Another option for archiving work created by the NIU community is [Huskie Commons](#).

For current information on file sharing and linking internally or externally from a website, check the [NIU web resources](#).

5.1.7   Event Listings and Event Pages

Information about NIU-sponsored events and events in the surrounding community must be published on the [NIU Calendar](#) instead of manually entered onto a webpage. Events may be subject to approval by Web and Internal Communications before they are added to the calendar.

The Web Team then installs a calendar widget on the appropriate webpage to pull in events related to the department, school or organization. When an event date has passed, the event is automatically removed from the calendar, eliminating the need to manually update webpages.

Pages in Cascade may only be created for major annual events or event types (such as an information page about a conference or about a colloquium series). Event pages must be kept up to date. Once the date of an event has passed, information about the next date must replace it. Do not use placeholder text, such as "information coming soon."

5.1.8   Event Websites

Websites for conferences, symposiums and similar one-time or annual events will be built and maintained in Cascade using standard NIU templates only if all of the following criteria are met:

- The event is sponsored by NIU and/or takes place on an NIU campus.

- The website abides by the NIU Communication Standards and the NIU Web Standards.

- The website will remain live only until the next recurrence takes place (i.e., a conference held every two years will have its website live for 24 months) and then it will be updated or removed. If the event will not reoccur, the site will be removed after 12 months.

5.1.9   Faculty Profile Pages

If a department directory links to individual profile pages for faculty members, the profile pages should be consistent in aesthetic and type of information presented. Department directories may link to a faculty site in lieu of a profile page as long as the faculty site is in the same NIU template as the department site and meets web standards.

Profile pages may be created for emeriti who are actively teaching at NIU or working in the scholarly community.

Do not post "In Memoriam" pages for deceased staff or faculty members.

5.1.10 *Faculty, Lab and Student Organization Websites*

All faculty, lab and student organization websites must comply with the NIU Web Standards and the NIU [Editorial Style Guide (PDF)](#).

Websites for student organizations formally recognized and/or funded by the Student Association (SA) are maintained on [Huskie Link](#), not through Cascade.

Research lab websites must comply with any additional standards determined by their related department or college.

Research lab and faculty websites should be maintained by their division or college's page manager and linked to/from their department's primary website.

5.1.11 *Tutorials and Modules*

Tutorials and learning modules can be hosted in Blackboard, SharePoint, MOOC, Cascade CMS or another third-party service. Tutorials hosted in Cascade CMS must meet all web and brand standards and should be submitted to the Clearinghouse for QA review prior to launch. Work with the [director of Web Strategy and Services](#) to determine the best hosting solution for your module.

5.1.12 *Forms and Fillable PDFs*

Labels for fields in online forms and fillable PDFs should be brief and in title case. Field labels that need to be formatted as sentences should be in sentence case.

Examples:

- First Name
- How did you hear about this event?

It's not necessary to include colons after field labels, as long as the field and the label are on separate lines or are otherwise visually distinct.

Fillable Forms and Accessibility

If you need an online form for your site, contact us at webcommunications@niu.edu. We will create it for you, ensuring it is accessible to all users. Alternatively, you may use Qualtrics to create a survey and link to it from your site. If you would like to embed a Qualtrics survey on your webpage, please contact webcommunications@niu.edu for assistance.

If you are creating a fillable PDF for your site, please learn how to [create an accessible PDF form](#) (WebAim).

5.2 Website Structure

Sites are divided into folders and subfolders, where every folder corresponds to a site section.

Each folder should have a landing page with the system name "index." A web browser will default to (or "land on") this page if only the site URL and folder are entered (for example, niu.edu/marcomm/services/, where "services" is a folder under the "/marcomm" website, will actually land on niu.edu/marcomm/services/index.shtml). This is also necessary for usable breadcrumbs.

The only folders in a website that do not need an "index" page are folders for the purpose of organizing files (i.e., image folders, PDF folders, etc.).

The site's **Base** folder (aka, "[sitename]") is the location where all of your site's content is housed. The base folder's primary index page is your site homepage.

Images should be stored in a folder with the system name "_image" under the base folder, not within site section folders.

Likewise, PDFs should be stored in a folder with the system name "_pdf" in the base folder, not within site section folders.

Your site will also have a folder with the system name "_internal" where your navigation blocks will be housed.

BEST PRACTICES FOR WEBSITE STRUCTURE:

When you keep all of your images and PDFs stored in a centralized location, it helps keep your site organized and avoids accidental file duplication. You may break up your "_image" and "_pdf" folders into subfolders that correspond with site sections, if you wish, for further organization.

5.3 Navigation

The site's navigation should reflect the site's folder structure. Changes to navigation should not be made lightly, as doing so can result in broken links and/or major architectural changes.

All navigation items should be formatted in Title Case.

Top Navigation appears horizontally at the top of your website. This is created using a custom navigation block. A website may have only one top navigation menu and it must appear consistently on every page.

Figure 2. Example of Top Navigation menu

The order of items in the top navigation menu should be as follows:

- Home icon* (🏠): this should link to your site's homepage
- About*
- Customized labels

- Contact Us (if needed and not already present as a dropdown option under About)

*The Home icon and About items are required in top navigation menus.

`Left Navigation` appears as a content block in the left column (right column navigation, similar in style, is used for faculty websites. Left navigation should be customized for the content folder. Additional menu items outside the content folder should be marked with the "New Window" icon.

Donate to Scholarships ⌐

Figure 3. Example of New Window Glyphicon

`Breadcrumbs` appear directly beneath your top navigation menu. Items are generated automatically using the display names for pages and folders. Breadcrumbs must be enabled for any page that is three or more steps away from the site's homepage.

Office of the Bursar / Tuition and Fees / Undergraduate Rates

Figure 4. Example of Breadcrumbs

BEST PRACTICES FOR WEBSITE NAVIGATION:

For consistency, use the following labels in top navigation:

About (not About Us)
Contact Us (not Contact)

Left navigation menus are optional, as the top navigation menu has dropdown menu options. However, if a left navigation menu is used in one site section, all pages in that section should include the left navigation menus to maintain consistency and prevent confusion. The same left navigation menu should be used on each page of a site section.

If you wish to change your site's overall navigation, or the navigation for a specific site section, please contact the Web Team or your division's page manager to assist you. Navigation changes should only occur when a site is undergoing major reconstructions, as it will affect any internal links within the site and external links from other NIU sites and beyond. If you have any questions, contact webcommunications@niu.edu.

5.4 Naming Conventions

There are various types of "names" in Cascade.

The `System Name` (also known as the `Page Name` or `File Name`) corresponds to the asset's URL and should be formatted with all lowercase characters and no spaces. If the asset is the landing page for a folder, its system name must be "index." If the system name for an asset contains multiple words, words should be separated by hyphens rather than formatted as all one word (for example,

"contact-us"). Avoid using abbreviations or acronyms, unless commonly recognized such as "faq," as they are not intuitive to your users nor are they helpful for search indexing.

The **Display name** for a page appears in navigation elements, such as in breadcrumbs. Display names should be simple but descriptive and can be formatted in title case (for example, "Policies and Fees"). Display names are required for pages and folders in Cascade CMS, but are generally unused for other assets, such as files and blocks.

The page **Title** (also known as the meta title tag) appears at the top of a user's web browser or tab and is useful for Google search indexing and relaying a user's location on the site in relation to the niu.edu domain. Titles must be formatted in the following way:

[Page Name] – NIU – [Website Name]

(for example, "Contact Us – NIU – Enrollment Management, Marketing and Communications").

The exception is for the homepage of a site, which follows this format:

[Website Name] – NIU – [Parent Site]

If the site doesn't have a parent site, enter Northern Illinois University.

> BEST PRACTICES FOR NAMING:
>
> System names should be kept short and relevant to the page content.
>
> Display names for pages should not contain the same phrases as the display name for their parent folders, otherwise breadcrumbs will appear repetitive (i.e., "Division of Student Affairs > Dean of Students > Policies and Procedures").
>
> Title formatting should be consistent across the site (for example, if you use "[Page] – NIU – Academic Affairs" on one page, don't use "[Page] – NIU – Division of Academic Affairs" on another page).

5.5 Meta Content

For search engine optimization (SEO) and accessibility value, pages must have unique meta titles and descriptions.

Title tags (also referred to as page titles) are approximately 55 characters with spaces.

Descriptions are optional but encouraged on the site's most important pages. Descriptions are approximately 115 characters with spaces. Descriptions should be formatted as 1-2 sentences that briefly summarize the purpose of the page.
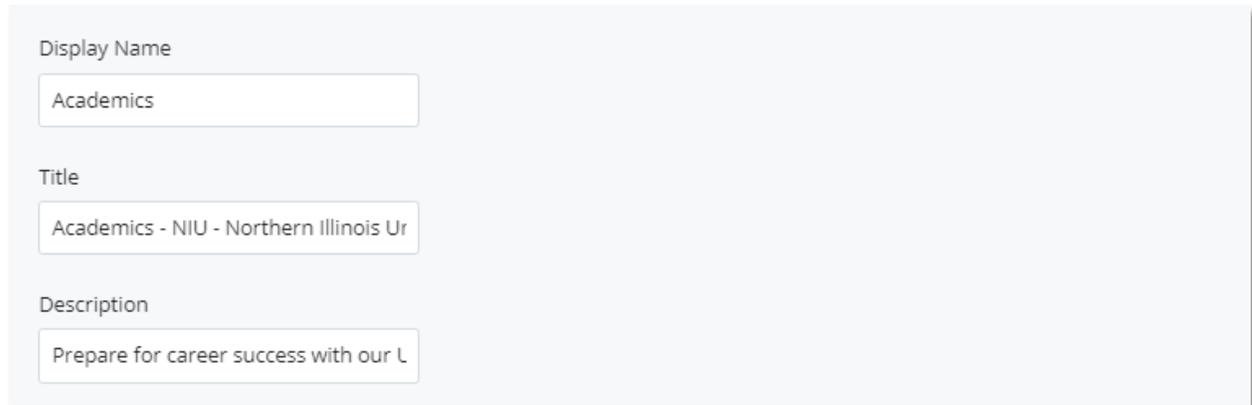
Figure 5. Screenshot of meta content fields in Page Editor

5.6 Headings

Headings help search engines locate webpages and make it possible for users to scan pages and quickly find information. Headings are visually distinct from the other text on a page. Good headings divide content into easily identifiable chunks and include keywords relevant to your visitors.

Headings must be useful, concise and nonredundant:

- Aim for a maximum length of four to eight words.
- Use language that gives a clear, general idea of the content to follow.
- Avoid unnecessary words or repeated words, such as "how to," adjectives and prepositions.

Headings must be formatted using appropriate HTML tags:

h1: Do not use. This heading is used automatically by the meta title tag.

h2: Main heading (when you place text in the `Main Heading` field in Cascade, this is automatically formatted). h2 should only be used once on a page. If you put text in the `Main Heading` field, do not use the h2 tag anywhere else. If you do not use the `Main Heading` field, you may use the h2 once in the `Main Content Area` as a page heading.

h3: Sub heading, block heading

h4: Lower sub heading, nested under h3

Headings must follow semantic hierarchy:

<h1>

<h2>

<h3>

Do not skip or use out of order.

Do not select heading levels based on their appearance.

Do not bold or emphasize paragraph text in place of a heading.

Do not add additional formatting such as bold or underline to headings.

Do not apply heading formatting for aesthetic purposes to text that does not head a section.

BEST PRACTICES FOR HEADINGS:

Avoid slogan-like headings, since they're not informative enough to allow for efficient scanning. Slogan language can instead by included by using p class="lead" or alert class to visually set it apart.

Avoid redundant headings. Each heading should head a unique section of content. No more than one heading should be used for each section. Subheadings should not be treated as subtitles.

Incorrect (the <h2> and single <h3> head the same section of content, with no unique content to either):

```
<h2>The Perfect Grilled Cheese</h2>

    <h3> Making the Perfect Grilled Cheese</h3>
```

Correct (the <h2> heads two unique subsections):

```
<h2>The Perfect Grilled Cheese</h2>

    <h3>Ingredients</h3>

            <ul>…</ul>

    <h3>Directions</h3>

            <ol>…</ol>
```

Correct (introductory text prefaces the subsection headed by <h3>):

```
<h2>The Perfect Grilled Cheese</h2>

    <p>While many say that sliced bread is the greatest invention, it was greatly improved
upon by whoever decided to melt some cheese in between two slices. Ever since sliced bread
became readily available in the 1920s, grilled cheese has become a staple lunch in
American households.</p>

    <h3>Recipe for the Perfect Grilled Cheese</h3>
```

Headings and Accessibility

Accurate headings make it easy for all visitors to navigate a webpage. Screen reader users can listen to a list of a page's headings to help them locate relevant information. In order to be useful, headings must accurately describe the content that follows. Headings must also be formatted with heading tags (instead of bolded text, for example) in order for a screen reader to identify them.

5.7 Links

Do not bold links.

Do not use "Read more" or "Click here" as your linked text. Rather, link an appropriate snippet of the text within the paragraph or sentence.

Linked text should be relevant words or phrases, not full URLs (with the exception of email addresses and "go.NIU" URLs). Rarely, it may be acceptable to spell out a full URL. Do not use "http://www." or "www." when spelling out a URL. For example, our web address is simply "niu.edu."

Don't do: Visit the Web and Internal Communications website (http://niu.edu/marcomm/services/campus-communications /index.shtml) to learn about maintaining your web presence.
Do: Visit Web and Internal Communications to learn about maintaining your web presence.

Don't do: Click here for more information about web support!
Do: Find more information about web support.
Do: Visit go.niu.edu/web-support for more information.

Don't do: Email Web Communications for more information.
Do: Contact us at webcommunications@niu.edu for more information

Links that point off-site (including any other NIU sites that are not your specific site) should be created as an external link and the target should be set to "open in a new window."

PDFs should be created as internal links, but because they are not pages with breadcrumbs or navigation menus, they should be set to open in a new window.

When linking to a document, indicate the file type in the link after the name of the document.

Example: Read the Editorial Style Guide (PDF).

When you enter the URL in the link dialogue box, be sure to include the "www" at the beginning of the link. This ensures that any redirects work properly and helps with search engine optimization.
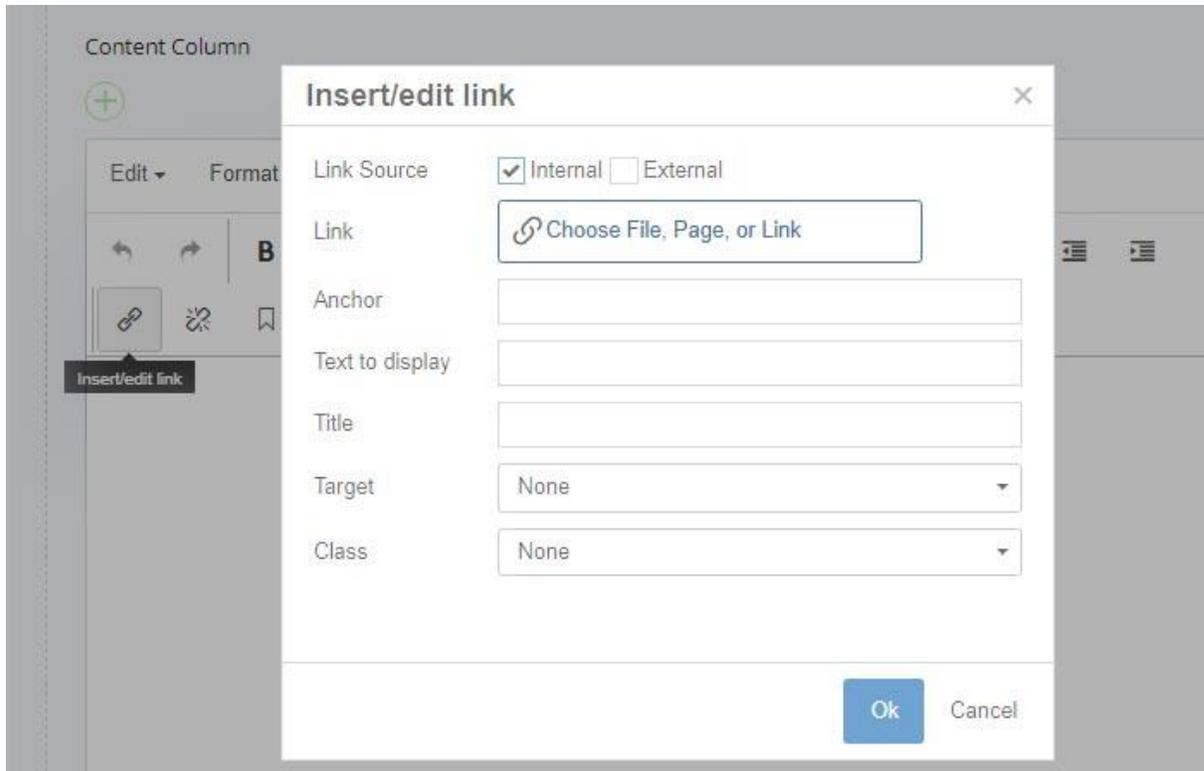
Figure 6. Screenshot of Page Editor displaying "Insert/edit link" icon selected with link dialogue box open.

Links and Accessibility

To quickly gain information, screen readers users often access a list of links on a page. If you use general labels (such as "click here") instead of descriptive ones, the list is not useful.

Spelling out an entire URL can look clunky and is inconvenient for screen reader users. If you spell out the entire URL, screen reader users have to listen to every letter of the URL.

By including the file type (DOC, PDF, etc.) in the link after the file name, you're ensuring that someone using a screen reader will know what type of document will open when they click a link.

5.8 Files

5.8.1 File Types
PDF is the most preferred text-based file type.

Other text-based file types, such as DOC(X), XLS(X) and PPT(X) should be converted to PDF format before being uploaded into Cascade.

BEST PRACTICES FOR FILES:

Non-PDF file types typically require another program to open, which the user may not have access to. Non-PDF files also, in most cases, automatically download from the browser, which may be alarming to the user if they are unsure whether the source can be trusted.

However, some files are easier to maintain as Word DOCs or other editable file types. See the NIU web resources for up to date information on document management and sharing.

Documents that get updated periodically should include a "last updated" note in the footer to indicate the version.

Use of SWF files is not recommended.

Documents intended for print distribution, such as flyers, posters and brochures, should not be posted to NIU websites. Print and web are different types of media with different purposes and means of conveying information. Rather than posting a print content to a website, we recommend creating web content (if it does not already exist) that contains the same necessary information but that is presented in a way that best fits the website structure, brand voice and standards.

5.8.2   Naming and Renaming

Use simple, descriptive names. Do not include dates or references in the name.

Don't use spaces in file names. Separate words with hyphens (-), not underscores (_). Use lowercase words.

Files must be unpublished before being renamed. After the file is renamed, republish the file and all of its relationships. Find any off-site links and update them to the new file name or complete a web update request form to have them updated.

5.8.3   Storage and Management

Files uploaded to Cascade must be in use. Files that are not in use or that haven't been updated in more than two years should be deleted. Files must be unpublished before deleting.

Don't store multiple versions of a file in Cascade. Rather, replace existing files with their updated versions by uploading over them.

Files uploaded to Cascade must be accessible for persons with disabilities and must not infringe on copyright.

5.9   Images

5.9.1   Image File Formats

We recommend using the following types on the NIU websites. For help determining the file type for your project, contact the Office of Web and Internal Communications.

- JPG is the most common image format and recommended for photos.

- PNG can be used for flat art images, but is most useful for supporting transparencies.
- GIF is used most often for flat art images. Do not use animated GIFs on your NIU website.

5.9.2   Image Sizes and Dimensions

To shorten download times and conserve server space, optimize images for web before uploading, keeping the file sizes below 150KB.

For banner images, use 1200 x 420 px.
For column images, use a 3:2 aspect ratio (ex., 300 x 200 px or 450 x 300 px.)
For staff profile images, use a 2:3 aspect ratio (ex. 150 x 200 px or 200 x 300 px.)

For websites that use the older (beige/gray, responsive/non-responsive) templates, please consult the templates appendix.

IMAGE DIMENSIONS FOR BLACK AND WHITE WEBSITE TEMPLATE:

You can use Cascade's image editor, Photoshop or another external photo editing service to crop your images to the appropriate dimensions/aspect ratio. We recommend uploading your images at a size slightly larger than you intend to display them on the page to ensure the best image quality.

When adding an image to a page in Cascade, the page editor's image dialogue box allows you control the display size without changing the uploaded file. You can reduce the display size from the image's actual size, but attempting to display the image larger than the uploaded file will result in the image appearing pixelated or blurry.

Please note: the page editor's image dialogue box is separate from Cascade's image editor. While changing the dimensions of an image in the page editor's image dialogue won't alter the actual uploaded file, changing the image dimensions in the image editor will affect the actual file size.

5.9.3   Responsive and Accessible Images

All new NIU websites are created in templates that utilize responsive web design (RWD). This is done so that content is always optimized for whichever device and screen-size it is being viewed on.

To optimize images for RWD, the "img-responsive" class must be added to the image tag in the HTML, in the Format Custom Classes dropdown or via the Insert/Edit Image dialogue box.
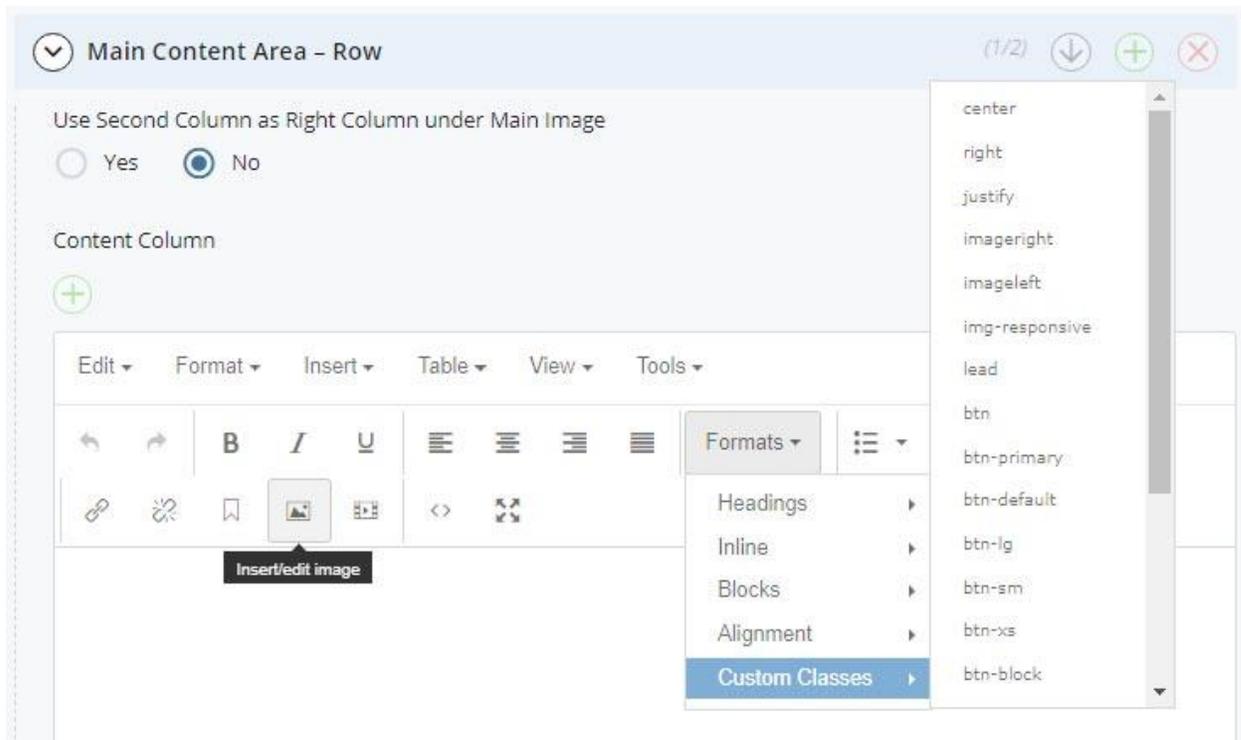
Figure 7. Screenshot of page editor displaying "Insert/edit image" icon and "Format > Custom Classes" dropdown where the "img-responsive" class can be added to an image.

To ensure that images are accessible for assistive technologies, use alternative text (or alt tags). This can be done in the "alternative text" field on the "Insert Image" pop-up or within the <img> tag in the HTML editor.

Do not simply describe the photo, but provide information equivalent to that which the image conveys.

Bad example: "John Smith in classroom."

Good example: "Professor John Smith leads [class] in a lively discussion."

Don't use "image of…" or "photo of…" phrases, as they are unnecessary.

Don't include redundant information that is conveyed in the surrounding textual content.

BEST PRACTICES FOR ACCESSIBLE IMAGES:

Alt tags are one of the easiest things to get lackadaisical with when creating web content because they take thoughtful consideration to use correctly but can quickly and easily be used incorrectly. However, it's very important that we do whatever is in our power to make our pages accessible for persons using assistive technologies.

One reason alt tags are often used incorrectly is because we often assume that every image needs one. On the contrary, most of the images on our websites won't require alternative text because they either

don't convey information and are simply decorative or the information they do convey is presented elsewhere in the context of the page (i.e., in the textual content).

No alt text required (Must be marked as "decorative" in the Insert Image window or tagged `alt=""` in the HTML):

- Decorative images (i.e. a close-up on Bunsen burners placed on a chemistry department webpage)

- Images where the message or information being conveyed is present in the surrounding text (i.e., a photo of a staff member next to their name and bio or contact info)

Alt Text Required:

- Images conveying information that is not present anywhere else on the page (i.e., an infographic or a staff photo that is **not** followed by the staff member's name)

- Images that serve a particular function, such as icons or buttons, for which the alt text should simply state that function (i.e., an arrow icon indicating that the user should advance to the next page would have an alt text of "next page")

Optional*:

Decorative images that don't require alt text would still benefit from it as descriptive text used to enhance search engine optimization (i.e., a decorative image of students in the bleachers at a football game might have an alt text such as, "No football game is complete without its sea of red and black, proud Huskies cheering enthusiastically in the stands.")

View more information about alt text at WebAim.org.

5.9.4   Image Storage and Management
Images uploaded to Cascade must be in use. Images that are not in use or that haven't been updated in more than two years should be deleted. Images must be unpublished before deleting.

Don't store multiple versions of an image in Cascade. Rather, replace existing images with their updated versions.

5.9.5   Approved Image Sources
The Creative Services Image Library is a catalog of images taken by the university's photographers. For access to the image library, register on the site as a user. To limit duplication of images on different NIU websites when downloading a photo, add a comment listing the page/site where you expect to use the photo. You may also tag images and create a shared gallery to organize your photos.

You can also use this link to search for stock images: go.niu.edu/stockimages. If you cannot find what you need, please contact Institutional Communications for help or to schedule a photoshoot.

Photos used on NIU webpages must meet the guidelines for photos established in the NIU Communications Standards and have adequate image resolution. Always select photos that reinforce NIU's brand personality and narrative. Imagery should convey student engagement that is authentic and creates an emotional connection with our audience. Look for photos that are warm and full of spirit and energy. Photos of people interacting with each other are preferred over photos of buildings.

Page managers should take the time to check whether an image is being used on another page before uploading it to their site.

Personal photos taken by a member of the department/office should not be used, nor should images available through the public domain, Internet image searches like Google or Bing, or Flickr. For assistance in locating copyright-free photos, please contact the Office of Web and Internal Communications.

5.9.6   Rotating Banners and Slideshows

Rotating banners, or slideshows, should appear only on the homepage of a site and are limited to three banner images. Each image should relate to an event, department or program and should link to the appropriate page on the site. Captions are optional. The Office of Web and Internal Communications has several default rotating banner scripts available and will help set up the banners upon request.

Slideshows/rotations should not be used solely for aesthetic appeal, rather they should serve a purpose. Only use a slideshow/rotating banner if you have specific content in mind that you'd like to highlight.

BEST PRACTICES FOR BANNERS AND SLIDESHOWS:
Current research in user experience and best practices find that slideshows add little to the usefulness of a webpage and that only a small percentage of users click through to view each slide.

Even fewer users remain on a webpage long enough to view each banner rotation for banners that don't have advancing slides.

Thus, rotations and slides are limited to three elements, and websites are limited to one rotating banner/slideshow per site.

We recommend having unique, diverse and engaging static banner images for each of your site's index pages rather than using a slideshow/rotation.

A slideshow is most useful for highlighting pages in the site that are not otherwise featured, such as student success stories, recent news appearances or featured faculty profiles.

5.9.7   Icons, Buttons and Graphic Text

Don't use image files as icons or buttons. Instead, use Bootstrap compatible glyphicons and button classes. There are many options to choose from. To see examples, check out how we've included icons in buttons.

Don't embed text inside a flattened image or use an image as word art. This is for usability and accessibility purposes. Assistive technologies, such as screen readers, will not be able to recognize text in images as text. Additionally, embedded text is neither searchable by browsers nor able to be translated for non-English speaking users.

> BEST PRACTICES FOR GRAPHIC TEXT:
>
> Image files as icons and text present numerous problems, not only with storage and maintenance difficulties in Cascade, but with usability in responsive design as well as many accessibility issues. There are more accessible options to choose from dependent upon your needs, including custom CSS, web fonts and html text overlays. Please contact the Office of Web and Internal Communications and we will be happy to assist you.

5.9.8 Photo Galleries

Cascade does not have a native photo gallery option. Therefore, photo galleries may be hosted on a third-party site, such as Flickr, Facebook or Wordpress. Page managers can link to the photo gallery from their NIU site. Modals may also be an option. Please contact webcommunications@niu.edu to discuss the best solution.

Don't create a makeshift gallery by adding rows of images to a page in Cascade. Instead, use one of the options above.

5.9.9 Social Media Icons

Use social media icons provided by the Web Team. Do not modify or use alternative icons. If an icon is needed that is not already provided, contact webcommunications@niu.edu.

5.10 Video

Videos for educational purposes should be uploaded to the MEDIAL video server accessible through Blackboard. Videos for promotional purposes, or shorter than five minutes, should be posted to NIU's official YouTube channel, which is managed by the social media team in Institutional Communications, or the college or division's YouTube channel (when applicable). All videos embedded on NIU websites must be closed-captioned to meet accessibility law. Contact the social media team in Institutional Communications for guidance on how to closed-caption videos.

5.10.1 Embedding Videos on NIU Websites

Videos hosted on MEDIAL Video Server and YouTube may be embedded onto an NIU page in Cascade. All videos added to an NIU website must be approved by the Clearinghouse. Videos posted to NIU websites that do not meet the video standards will be removed.

Videos embedded on NIU webpages should be added only to the Main Content Area, not the right column or column below left navigation.

A single embedded playlist is preferable to multiple video embeds.

For embedded YouTube videos, "Show suggested videos when the video finishes" option should be deselected.

BEST PRACTICES FOR VIDEO EMBEDDING:

Make sure the YouTube URL in your iframe src attribute has

```
?rel=0&amp;wmode=transparent
```

added to the end of it. This does two things: disables the suggested videos that display after a video finishes playing (which don't always show NIU videos), and fixes an issue where dropdowns appear behind embedded videos.

So for example, instead of this:

```
<iframe src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/RbZ-Y-0QzSA"> </iframe>
```

You will want to use this:

```
<iframe src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/RbZ-Y-0QzSA?rel=0&amp;wmode=transparent"></iframe>
```

5.10.2 Full Video Banners

Full width video background banners for webpages will be reserved for recruitment-focused pages on the NIU site and must be made in conjunction with Institutional Communications and Photography and Videography.

5.11 Blogs and News Sites

Cascade does not support blogs. Depending on your specific needs, we recommend using a Wordpress-based blog hosted by Web and Internal Communications through a third-party vendor. This will help to ensure necessary system updates and support are available for the blog should the primary content owner/s be unavailable. Free WordPress.com blogs containing ads will not be permitted.

Departmental blogs must be maintained by the department and updated with fresh content.

Additional guidelines for creating an NIU blog can be found in the [Social Media Toolkit](#).

5.11.1 Blog Branding

Any blogs affiliated with NIU must be properly branded and contain top navigation with links for the following:

- NIU homepage (http://niu.edu)
- College/division/department homepage
- Newsroom (http://newsroom.niu.edu)
- College/division/department social media links (if applicable)

The footer should contain copyright information and the following disclaimer stating the persons or entities that maintain the site:

Copyright © 2017 Board of Trustees of Northern Illinois University. All rights reserved. The [Name of News Site] is maintained by [College or Division.]

The college or division name in the statement should link back to the contact page on the division or college's primary website.

5.11.2 Access
Any college/division/departmental WordPress blog must have at least two associated user accounts designated as admin, as well as access provided to webcommunications@niu.edu.

5.11.3 RSS Feeds
An RSS feed may be used to pull story headlines from a WordPress blog onto your department's Cascade website.

If you use a blogging platform other than WordPress, the use of an RSS newsfeed may be possible but is not guaranteed.

6 Web Communication Tools

6.1 Social Media
All online social media campaigns should follow NIU's official Social Media Policy.

Content posted on social media outlets, such as news updates or events, should not be duplicated in Cascade.

6.2 Google Analytics
NIU uses Google Analytics to track its web data. Page managers or stakeholders may request monthly reports by submitting a request form to the Office of Web and Internal Communications.

If a college, division or department has a unique Google Analytics account ID, they must grant administrative access to Enrollment Management, Marketing and Communications. Before a web property with a unique account ID converts to the newest NIU templates, the page manager must alert Enrollment Management, Marketing and Communications and/or DoIT so that the unique tracking code is implemented.

6.3 Go URLs
Go.NIU is a URL shortener similar to TinyURL or Bitly. It can be used for any niu.edu (or niutoday.info) URL to shorten the URL and provide a stable reference for print materials.

To create a new Go URL:

1.   Log in with your NIU authentication.

2. Paste or type the full URL you wish to shorten into the field.

3. Select "More Options" (optional) to create a custom alias or tie the URL to a Google campaign.

To modify an existing Go URL*:

1. Log in with your NIU authentication.

2. In the left-navigation menu, select "Manage My Go.NIU URLs."

3. Select "Edit" or "Delete" next to the URL you wish to modify.

Tracking your traffic:

You can add parameters to your URL to tag a specific Google Analytics marketing campaign. When users click on your URL or enter your short URL into a browser, your traffic will be recorded in the **Google Analytics Acquisition > Campaigns** report. **Campaign**, **Source** and **Medium** are required fields.

*You will only be able to modify Go URLs that you've created. For URLs you did not create, contact the Office of Web and Internal Communications for support.

6.4 Mobile Apps

NIU Mobile is the university's official mobile app and is strategically managed by the Division of Enrollment Management, Marketing and Communications and developed by DoIT. Requests for module development in NIU Mobile should be submitted to NIUMobile@niu.edu for consideration.

Any apps using the NIU or Northern Illinois University name or branding must be approved by Enrollment Management, Marketing and Communications prior to being developed and submitted to mobile app stores.

Repurposing of data or content – both static and real-time – from any NIU website, or which is otherwise owned or controlled by NIU, through a mobile application is prohibited without prior written consent from the authorized university department or official that owns or controls the original data or content. The written consent should address: 1) the period of time for which the consent applies; 2) how recognition of the data/content owner(s) will be provided in the app; 3) whether there is an obligation on the part of the data owner to provide notification of a change to the data or the mechanism through which it is shared and 4) who is responsible for the accuracy of the repurposed data or content.

Unauthorized use of data or content by a mobile application is monitored by and should be reported to Enrollment Management, Marketing and Communications. Apps found in violation of this policy will be reported to the appropriate app store(s) as cause for removal. The university reserves the right to take any additional actions it deems necessary in furtherance of the protection of its data, content, intellectual property or other university interests (NIU Information Security Procedures).

7   Appendix I. Non-standard Sites and Templates

7.1   Image Dimensions

7.1.1   Beige/Gray Non-responsive (non-RWD) Templates

Full width banner – 944 x 270 px

Banner on page with left nav – 690 x 280 px

Column image – 210 x 110 px

Staff profile image – 210 x 110 px

7.1.2   Beige/Gray Responsive (RWD) Templates

Full width banner – 960 x 275 px

Banner on page with left nav – 714 x 290 px

Column image – 210 x 110 px

Staff profile image – 210 x 110 px