

Web Standards

Approved by the NIU Web Steering Committee
on June 27, 2023

go.niu.edu/webstandards



Northern Illinois
University

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This document was approved by the Web Steering Committee on June 27, 2023.

The standards will be reviewed and updated annually by the committee. Please visit go.niu.edu/webteam for announcements and updates 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. We have created the following standards and best practice guidelines to ensure a consistent and unified user experience for our visitors. They are intended to assist any member of the NIU community involved with creating, updating or reviewing an NIU website.

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. The standards are subject to change as laws and university policies evolve.

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 subsites 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.

In collaboration with the department, college or division, the web team will determine a maintenance and support plan for each site on the niu.edu domain. Based on the number and type of updates per week, the plan will include identifying a coordinator, contributor or manager user role to maintain the site:

- Most users are coordinators and use the web update request form to get updates made. This role is sufficient if you make infrequent web updates, don't have enough time to keep current with web standards and [Communication Standards for Institutional Brand Identity](#), or are part of a team with multiple people making web updates. Temporary employees and graduate assistants would be classified as coordinators.
- Contributors make content updates in Cascade and submit them for review and publishing by the web team. This role is ideal if you make at least one update per week and IT/web maintenance is a significant part of your job description.
- Managers will be identified by the web team in collaboration with college or division leadership.

The web team will invite coordinators, contributors and managers to complete annual training to stay current on web standards and best practices.

If it is determined that a user is making updates to their site that do not align with web standards, a senior member of the web team and/or the 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 director of digital strategy provides oversight and strategic direction for the university's web presence. The assistant director of web communications reviews requests from academic and administrative stakeholders, sets priorities and apprises the Web Steering Committee of projects and plans.

The web team provides training for Cascade users and support for all niu.edu webpages. The team also 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
- 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, visit go.niu.edu/request-new-site.

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.

Web properties must adhere to NIU's [Communication Standards for Institutional Brand Identity](#).

To ensure compliance with brand standards, documents uploaded to an NIU website may need to first be reviewed by the [Clearinghouse](#). This pertains particularly to documents intended for a large audience with available access over an extended period of time. Exceptions for temporary or limited-audience documents may be granted.

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 to the page determined by the site's template.
- 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.

The NIU shield and department name that appear at the top of a webpage do not constitute a departmental logo and should not be used elsewhere. The website banner must match the sub-brand, if applicable. Consult with University Marketing about any questions you have about sub-branding.

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



Figure 1. Huskie Athletics logo

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

2.3 Use of Third-party Advertising and Logos

As a .edu domain, third-party advertising is prohibited on NIU's website. Enrollment Management, Marketing and Communications may grant an exception for partnerships existing between third parties and NIU. In such cases, links and/or logos may be placed on the NIU website. They must be removed when the partnership is terminated.

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 the use of a third-party logo is required for contractual or accreditation purposes, or to recognize an institutional accolade, contact the web team at webcommunications@niu.edu for assistance in placing it on your site.

NIU decorative elements designed by Creative Services are allowed on the corresponding website's homepage or in the left column on relevant pages (only as needed).

3 Compliance

3.1 Copyright

NIU must respect the rights of [copyright](#) owners. You may not include copyrighted content on an NIU website unless you've received written permission from the copyright owner. Any content, photo, image, logo or media that doesn't meet copyright laws will be removed from the NIU website. There are some exceptions to this for use of copyrighted materials in certain educational settings. To learn more, read [The Basics of Copyright in the University Setting \(PDF\)](#). For specific guidance, contact the [Division of Research and Innovation Partnerships](#) or the [Office of General Counsel](#).

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. Cascade users should review [IITAA requirements](#) on a regular basis.

Many web standards and guidelines relate to accessibility. By following them, you can create more accessible content. Refer to our [content accessibility](#) page for helpful tips on ensuring that your content is accessible.

3.3 Privacy Policy

Cascade users 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 number is encrypted. Please also see the NIU [information security procedure](#).

All NIU websites must comply with the following:

- [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#)
- [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act \(HIPAA\)](#)

Due to potential FERPA violation, websites may not include a general listing of the names of students in a non-employment capacity. However, as employees, names of graduate assistants, research assistants and teaching assistants may be provided. Contact the web team about photos before posting. College communicators are responsible for maintaining waivers for the release of student information.

Do not include employees' personal (non-university) email addresses on NIU websites.

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.

3.5 Fundraising

The NIU Foundation is responsible for all gifts and donations to NIU. Webpages on the NIU domain cannot solicit donations without the prior consent of the Foundation.

4 Editorial Guidelines

All NIU websites follow the university's [editorial guidelines](#) 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 H2 should be written in Title Case.
- In cases where a subheading is a complete sentence, it can be formatted in sentence case (only the first word capitalized).
- File types must be capitalized (e.g. PDF, DOCX)

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). Spell out acronyms on first use.
- 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](#).

4.3 Honorifics and Post-nominal Letters

The NIU web standards comply with the editorial guidelines on reserving the Dr. prefix for medical doctors only. An exception may be applied to faculty members in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. This exception must be requested by the faculty member and will only apply to pages in Cascade. An exception can also be made when Dr. is part of an official name, such as a scholarship or program.

Post-nominal letters, also known as degree abbreviations, may be included after the first occurrence of a person's name in order to establish credentials. Post-nominal letters should be punctuated in accordance with AP style, with the exception of the College of Health and Human Sciences, which may instead use AMA style.

Examples:

- Ferris Bueller, B.S.
- Doogie Howser, MD (CHHS)

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 Duplicate Content

Do not recreate content that exists elsewhere. 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; link to the Policy Library for all university policies.

5.1.3 Outdated Content

Content should be reviewed every six months to ensure information is accurate. The web team, subject matter experts (SME) and/or Cascade users will periodically perform content assessments, working with the SME to determine a plan for updating outdated content. If the SME is unresponsive, the web team or Cascade user will update or delete the content as necessary.

If web content 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](#), SharePoint or, in some cases, [University Archives](#). Another option for archiving work created by the NIU community is [Huskie Commons](#). Please contact webcommunications@niu.edu to discuss options.

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.

Make content easy to scan 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. Don't punctuate list items unless they're complete sentences. List items should be consistent; if one is a complete sentence the others should be written as complete sentences.

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.

5.1.6 Tables

Tables can be an effective way to organize and present related data. In general, tables shouldn't be used for layout; instead, use Bootstrap's grid system. Keep tables simple for best usability and accessibility. If the table uses a caption, the caption should be in title case. Capitalize the first word in each table cell. Use table heading tags for column headings.

Before creating a new table, please submit the data you plan to use through the [web update request form](#). The web team will work with you to create an accessible table or layout that best matches your content.

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.

5.1.7 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 university's [records management policy](#). 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](#). Please contact webcommunications@niu.edu to discuss options.

5.1.8 Event Listings, Pages and Sites

Information about NIU-sponsored events and events in the surrounding community must be published on the [NIU events 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 colloquium series). Event pages must have substantial content and 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.”

Websites for conferences, symposiums and similar one-time or annual events may be created in Cascade if the web team determines there’s enough content for multiples pages when following best content strategy practices.

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 member’s professional website in lieu of a profile page as long as the faculty website is in the same NIU template as the department site and meets web standards. Learn more about [web support for faculty](#).

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 Lab and Student Organization Websites

All NIU clinic and lab websites that are not part of faculty websites must comply with NIU web standards and [editorial standards](#), as well as with any additional standards determined by their related department or college.

Clinic and lab websites should be maintained by the web team or their division or college’s Cascade user and linked to/from their department’s primary website.

A webpage containing a general overview of a student organization can be hosted in Cascade if determined appropriate by the web team.

5.1.11 Tutorials and Modules

Tutorials and learning modules can be hosted in Blackboard, SharePoint, MOOC, Cascade CMS, Kaltura/Media Space 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

assistant director of Web and Internal Communications to determine the best hosting solution for your module.

5.1.12 Forms and Fillable PDFs

Online forms are highly preferable to fillable PDFs. If you need an online form or fillable PDF 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 a platform such as Qualtrics, Google forms or Microsoft forms to create a survey and link to it from your site. If you would like to embed a 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).

5.1.13 Advertising Landing Pages

Advertising landing pages are independent from department, college or division websites. They're connected to marketing campaigns to generate leads for specific programs. Web and Internal Communications and/or an external NIU marketing partner creates the page in coordination with Marketing and Creative Services. Any changes to a department, college or division website related to a marketing campaign must be coordinated with Marketing and Creative Services and approved by Web and Internal Communications prior to submitting a website update request.

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/emmc/web-internal-communications, where "web-internal-communications" is a folder under the "/emmc" website, will actually land on niu.edu/emmc/web-internal-communications/index.shtml). This is also necessary for usable breadcrumbs. Use descriptive words in system names, rather than acronyms or long names.

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 "_images" under the base folder, not within site section folders.

Likewise, PDFs should be stored in a folder with the system name "_files" 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 "_images" and "_files" folders into subfolders that correspond with site sections, if you wish, for further organization.

5.3 Navigation and Contact Blocks

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.

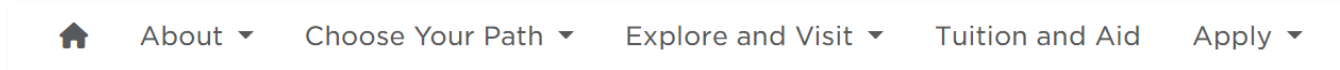



Figure 2. Example of Top Navigation menu

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

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

The top navigation of a child site should contain a link to its parent site, preferably under the About menu. For example, the About menu on the School of Music site contains a link to the College of Visual and Performing Arts site. Parent sites should include links to their child sites.

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 appropriate icon.



Figure 3. Example of icon used to indicate a link to a page outside the current site

Breadcrumbs appear directly beneath your top navigation menu. Items are generated automatically using the display names for pages and folders. Any page other than a site's homepage should have breadcrumbs.

[Undergraduate Admissions](#) / [Choose Your Path](#) / [First-generation Students](#)

Figure 4. Example of Breadcrumbs

Every site should have a contact block to help users easily find contact information. It must include the heading Contact Us, a name, address, email and phone number (if applicable). Social media icons can be used to link to related social accounts. The NIU building in the address line must be linked to the interactive map, and the phone number must be a tel: link. Any other information must be limited to keep the focus on contact information. No photos can be used in a contact block.

BEST PRACTICES FOR WEBSITE NAVIGATION:

For consistency, use the following labels in top navigation:

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

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. Navigation changes should only occur when a site is undergoing major revision, 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, and instead use a related word or short phrase.

The **Display name** for a page appears in navigation elements, such as in breadcrumbs. Display names should be simple but descriptive and should 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 should be formatted in the following way:

[Page Name] | [Website Name] | Northern Illinois University

Example: Fairs and Events | Career Services | Northern Illinois University

Sometimes the title can be simplified if the website name would otherwise be repeated.

Do: About Career Services | Northern Illinois University

Don't do: About | Career Services | Northern Illinois University

Don't do: About Career Services | Career Services | Northern Illinois University

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

[Website Name] | 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").

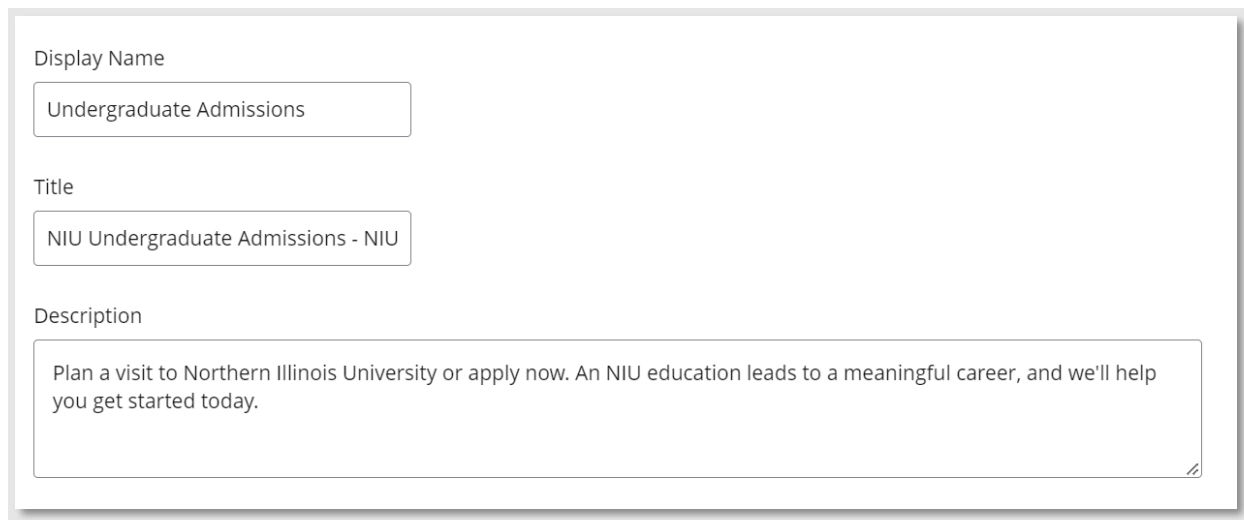
Title formatting should be consistent across the site (for example, if you use "[Page] | Academic Affairs | Northern Illinois University" on one page, don't use "[Page] | Division of Academic Affairs | Northern Illinois University" on another page). Always use the most condensed title option possible while remaining unique.

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. They should be formatted as one or two sentences that briefly summarize the purpose of the page (about 115 characters with spaces).



The screenshot shows a form with three sections: 'Display Name' with the value 'Undergraduate Admissions', 'Title' with the value 'NIU Undergraduate Admissions - NIU', and 'Description' with the text 'Plan a visit to Northern Illinois University or apply now. An NIU education leads to a meaningful career, and we'll help you get started today.'

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:

For sites in the newer website themes (3.0 and 4.0 and onward):	For sites in older website themes (2.0 and earlier):
---	--

<p>h1: Main heading (when you place text in the Main Heading field in Cascade, this is automatically formatted). h1 should only be used once on a page. If you put text in the Main Heading field, do not use the h1 tag anywhere else. If you do not use the Main Heading field, you may use the h1 once in the Main Content Area as a page heading.</p> <p>h2: Subheading, block heading</p> <p>h3: Lower subheading, nested under h2</p>	<p>h1: Do not use. This heading is used automatically by the meta title tag.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>h3: Subheading, block heading</p> <p>h4: Lower subheading, nested under h3</p>
---	---

Headings must follow semantic hierarchy:

`<h1>`

`<h2>`

`<h3>`

Follow these heading guidelines:

- 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.
- Do not use headings in FAQ answers.
- Do not make a heading a link.

BEST PRACTICES FOR HEADINGS:

Avoid slogan-like headings, since they're not informative enough to allow for efficient scanning. Slogan language can instead be 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):

```
<h1>The Perfect Grilled Cheese</h1>
  <h2> Making the Perfect Grilled Cheese</h2>
```

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

```
<h1>The Perfect Grilled Cheese</h1>
```



```
<h2>Ingredients</h2>

<ul>...</ul>

<h2>Directions</h2>

<ol>...</ol>
```

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

```
<h1>The Perfect Grilled Cheese</h1>
```

```
<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>
```

```
<h2>Recipe for the Perfect Grilled Cheese</h2>
```

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 red links.

Do not use “Read more” or “Click here” as your linked text. Rather, link a unique, 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 short URLs, including “[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 (<https://www.niu.edu/emmc/web-internal-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

All links should open in the same window, except for PDFs, which should open in a new window. A new window may also be used if opening a link in the same window would interrupt a process (i.e., filling out a

form, viewing a video). When linking to a document, indicate the file type in the link after the name of the document. Use all caps for the file type.

Example: Read the [Editorial Style Guide \(PDF\)](#).

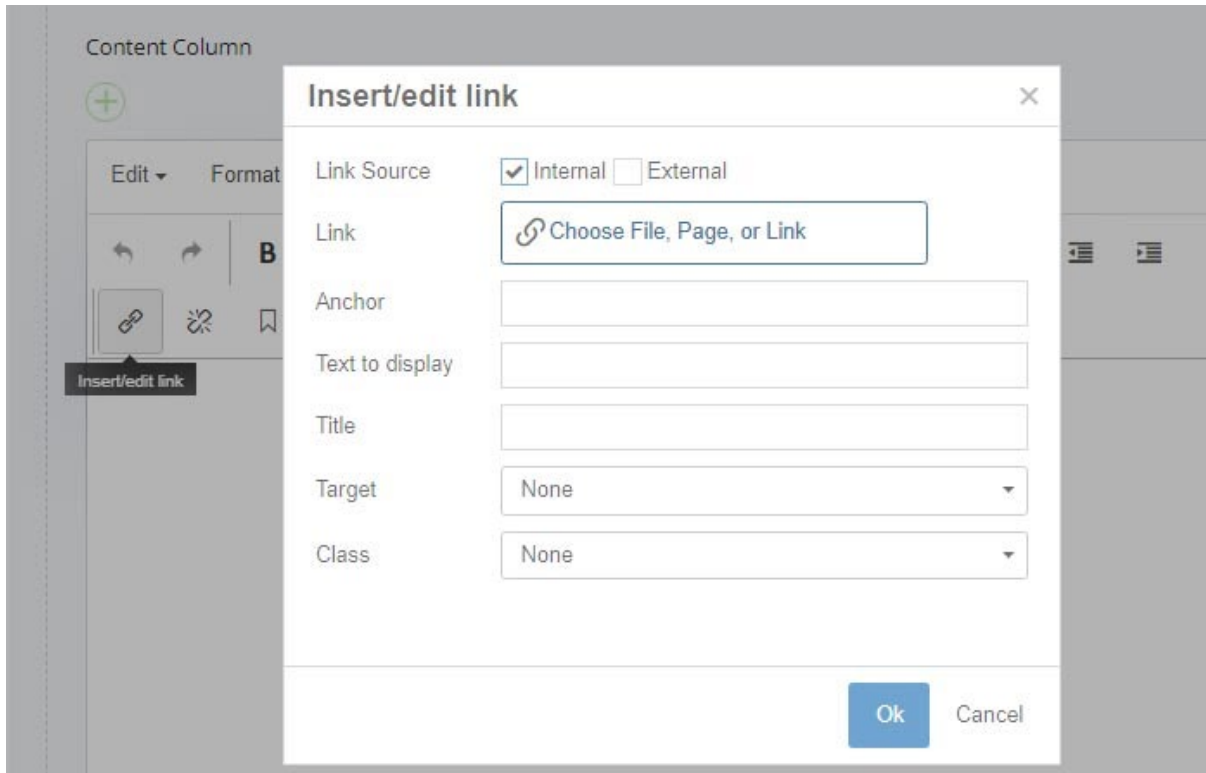


Figure 6. Screenshot of Page Editor displaying "Insert/edit link" icon selected with link dialogue box open.

Links and Accessibility

To quickly gain information, screen reader users often access a list of links on a page. If you use general labels (such as "click here") instead of unique, descriptive text, 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

In general, we recommend placing the content from files onto webpages in .shtml format instead of uploading the files. This requires less effort of users and allows them to remain in the context of the NIU website.

In particular, avoid posting documents intended for print distribution online (i.e., flyers, brochures, posters). Printed materials have different purposes and use different techniques to convey information.

However, it's sometimes necessary to upload files to NIU sites. By choosing appropriate formats for files and reviewing their accessibility, we ensure the consistency and usability of NIU sites.

5.8.1 File Types

Microsoft Office documents can be added to sites after checking their accessibility and making any needed changes. For example, headings should be formatted and nested appropriately.

PDFs require further evaluation. The complexity of a PDF's design, the size of its audience and whether it's intended for print must be considered:

- For a PDF with a simple design, it's more effective to place the content from the PDF into a webpage in .shtml format, instead of uploading the PDF. This makes for a smoother user experience.
- For PDFs with complex designs intended for large audiences, it's best to create and post an accessible version in another format, such as a Word document. Alternatively, the PDF can be posted along with a disclaimer that an accessible version is available upon request.
- A PDF with a complex design that's intended for a small audience can be posted after its accessibility has been reviewed and an effort has been made to remediate it accordingly. An example of this type of file might be an area's annual report.
- PDFs with complex designs that are intended for print shouldn't be uploaded. Instead, place the content into a webpage in .shtml format. If necessary, the PDF can be posted along with a disclaimer that an accessible version is available upon request.

Here are the most effective ways to share additional kinds of content with our audiences:

- Events and event schedules: Add to the NIU calendar. A calendar feed can be added to your website.
- Posters and flyers: Reformat as .shtml.
- Universitywide policies: Add to the [Policy Library](#). Contact rhunt@niu.edu for more information or with any questions.
- Handbooks, reference guides and manuals: These can be .shtml-based if needed. These don't have to go through the Clearinghouse, but if the NIU logo is used it must be formatted appropriately.
- Articles and research: Link to the original source. Add to [Huskie Commons](#) if possible.
- Forms and applications: Design with accessibility in mind. We recommend web-based forms, which we can create for you.
- News: Add to your college or division's news site or [NIU Today](#). A feed can be added to your website. Contact the web team with any questions or to discuss alternate solutions.
- Newsletters: These should be sent to the Clearinghouse for review, with some exceptions.
- Teaching materials: Add to Blackboard or O365/SharePoint. Please contact webcommunications@niu.edu with any questions.
- Org charts should be converted to html by the web team. PDF may be placed on the page as well. These do not have to go through the Clearinghouse. If the [NIU logo](#) is used it must be formatted appropriately.
- ISSUU documents: Provide a link to an accessible Word or PDF version when linking to a document on ISSUU, as ISSUU is not accessible.

5.8.2 Naming and Renaming Files

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 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 not a preferred file type. 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. When choosing an image, particularly for a banner, consider how it will look after cropping.

For banner images, use a 20:7 aspect ratio (minimum of 1500 x 525 px).

For column images, use a 3:2 aspect ratio (ex. 300 x 200 px) or a 4:3 ratio (ex. 400 x 300 px).

For staff profile images, use a 3:4 aspect ratio (ex. 300 x 400 px).

5.9.3 Responsive and Accessible Images

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.

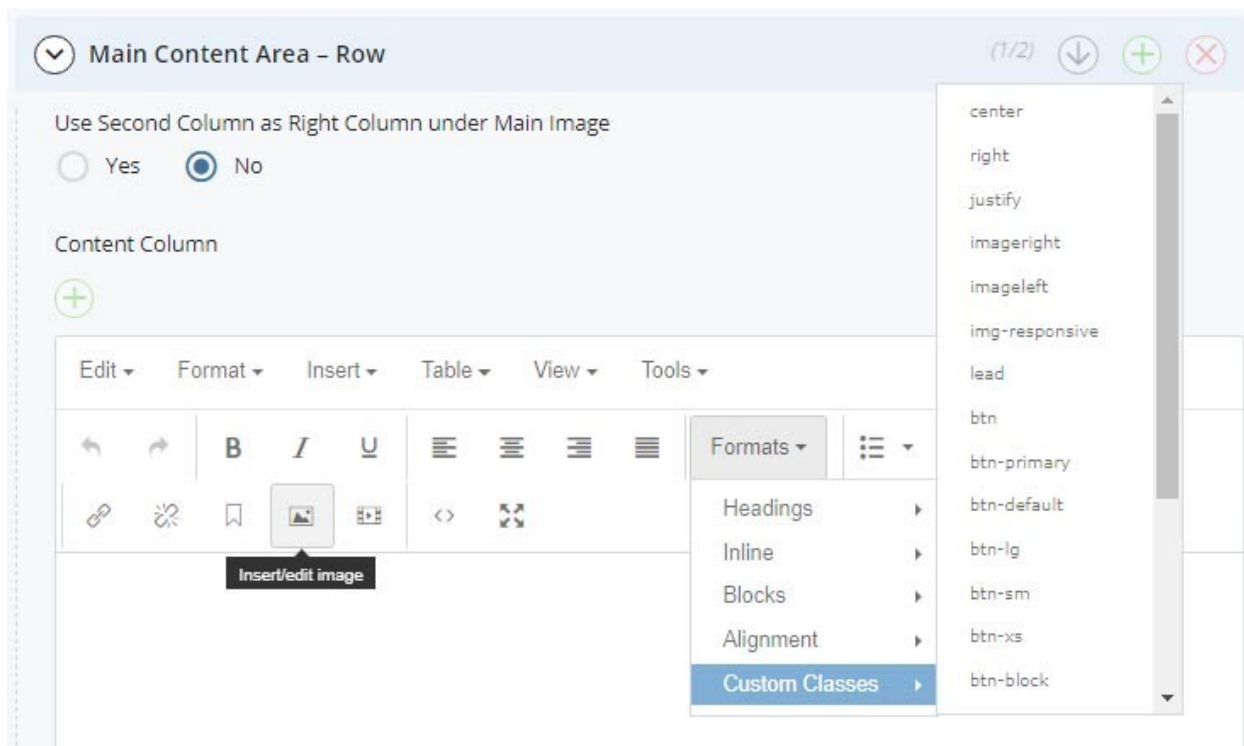


Figure 7. Screenshot of page editor displaying "Insert/edit image" icon and "Formats > Custom Classes" dropdown where the "img-responsive" class can be added to an image.

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 tag in the HTML editor.

Follow these guidelines for writing alt text:

- Don't just describe the photo, provide information equivalent to that which the image conveys. Instead of "John Smith in classroom," try "Professor John Smith leads [name of 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.
- Do include relevant keywords, which can help improve SEO (search engine optimization).

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”)

View more information about alt text at [WebAim.org](https://www.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.

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 NIU image library is a catalog of photographs taken by the university’s photographers. The image library is available as a [public portal through Canto](#). College communicators, and other communications staff across the university, have accounts to access high-resolution images for download.

When you find an image you would like to use on your site, and you have a Canto account, you can download the image. Images can be manually cropped within the platform, eliminating the need for Photoshop to size the image. Be sure to add a comment listing the page/site where you expect to use the photo.

If you find an image and you do not have a Canto account, you can use the [Asset Request](#) feature in Canto (be sure to specify the page/site it’s going on so it can be added to the comments). If you need help with the image library you can consult our [Image Library Manual](#), or contact photography@niu.edu for assistance.

For access to the [former 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.

If you cannot find what you need in the image library, you can use this link to search for stock images: go.niu.edu/stockimages. Or, contact photography@niu.edu for help or to schedule a photo shoot.

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.

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 web team. Students or faculty members studying/researching abroad can contact Institutional Communications for guidance on taking photos for potential use on NIU websites. Schedule an appointment by emailing photography@niu.edu.

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. The web team 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:

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. Limited exceptions may apply.

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 Font Awesome icons 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 web team for assistance.

5.9.8 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

5.9.9 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. Cascade users 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.

5.10 Video

Videos for educational purposes should be uploaded to [Kaltura](#). 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). [Learn more about posting videos](#).

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 close caption videos. To assist users with visual disabilities, a transcript that includes any text that appears in the video should also be provided.

5.10.1 Embedding Videos on NIU Websites

Videos hosted on Kaltura 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.

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&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&wmode=transparent"></iframe>
```

5.10.2 Full-width Background Videos

Full-width video backgrounds 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 news site 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 news site should the primary content owner/s be unavailable. Free WordPress.com blogs containing ads will not be permitted.

News sites will feature the official NIU logo in the upper-left corner and the respective site name—appended with “News”—in the right of the header section. Example: [College of Business News](#)

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

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

5.11.1 Blog and News Site Branding

Any blogs or news sites 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 © 2xxx 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 blog or news site 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 blog or news site onto your department’s Cascade website.

If you use a blogging platform other than WordPress, the use of an RSS news feed 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. Cascade users or stakeholders may request monthly reports by submitting a request form to the web team.

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 Cascade user must alert [Enrollment Management](#), [Marketing and Communications](#) and/or [DoIT](#) so that the unique tracking code is implemented.

6.3 Go URLs

[Go.NIU.edu](#) 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.

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 the web team 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](#)).