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Office of the Provost (570) 662-4804  
<http://www.mansfield.edu/~academic/>

## How the Web Matters to Mansfield

More prospective students identify their choice of colleges using the web than any other medium, including broadcast and printed materials. But the key issue is how our public perception – including both our reputation and student recruitment – is shaped by how people interact with our web site. The simple truth is that the web has become our primary marketing vehicle, but we haven't been treating it as such.

Please don't misinterpret this as criticism of our existing web site or anyone who worked on it. It is a good site by any standard, and phenomenally good in light of the meager resources we have devoted to it. Campus Technologies will continue to provide and improve the platform for our web site; it's a difficult job that they do very well. But CT should not be asked to also provide the contents of the web site. The rest of us must re-envision our web site and transform its contents to provide an effective public face of the University in this new context. Although we may also be changing how the web site looks, I am talking about how we look at the web site.

The original model of the web was that visitors reached your site by finding the home page, and through this found their way to your other pages. Search engines like Google changed that. They use automatic indexing programs known as "spiders" and "bots;" every page can be indexed. A Google search can just as easily lead to a page deep down in our web site as to the home page.

What this means is that every one of the more than 12,000 pages on the Mansfield University site is a potential point of entry, and so every page may be our last chance to make a first impression on a new visitor. Does it make the impression we want it to? Does it help the visitor to learn more about the University and what goes on

here? Does it invite the visitor into our community of learners? Are there easy ways for interested students to pursue applying for admission?

In this new reality, content drives everything. If you post something interesting and valuable, others will make links to it. These links identify the page as worthwhile to search engines, so it climbs in the rankings. Each of these highly ranked pages also lends its ranking in small measure to all of the other pages on the site, and the effect compounds as more pages attract links.

As some of you know, Dr. Hobart King took on a small project a couple of years ago by buying the "geology.com" domain name. Along the way to transforming this web site into a highly visible and trusted resource that is also a successful business, he has learned a tremendous amount about what makes web sites successful. What started out as a hobby project now attracts over two million visitors every month. To grow more, the site requires full time attention, and Dr. King has decided to leave our faculty to pursue this. He has, however, agreed to stay with us part time through the spring semester to share that hard-won and valuable knowledge and help us learn how we can apply it to the MU web site. He will offer a workshop on this at the January University Days; please consider attending this important session.

Our University has some of the finest teachers I have ever known. There are also many members of the staff – and even students – who are recognized experts in something. Imagine the effect if each of them took the time to write and post one or more short, informative pieces in their areas of expertise. As each piece is posted, it becomes a resource to the world and an important vehicle for advertising the quality of our University to a broad

audience. In my opinion, this is scholarship, teaching, and service rolled into one. And it feeds the future health of the university by attracting positive attention and potential students.

- Michael Renner

### News in Brief

- \* Gary McIntyre, Chuck Hoy, and James Lohrey, Communication, have received a PA Association of Broadcasters grant for a digital upgrade to MU's audio studio.
- \* Adrienne McEvoy, Philosophy, has been selected to serve as the Academic Affairs Fellow for the 2008-2009 Academic Year.

### Spotlight on Scholarship

Congratulations to...

- \* Andy Gaskiewicz, History, who narrated the segment on WW II for the "The Ends of Wars" online feature from the Associated Press.
- \* Scott DiMarco, Library Director, who published a review of the audio version of *The Double Agents* by W.E.B. Griffin in a recent issue of *The Library Journal*.
- \* Brian Loher, Peter Keller, Francis Craig, and Margarate Launius, Psychology, who presented a workshop on assessment of undergraduate programs at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association. Denny Murray also contributed to the development of the presentation.
- \* Nancy Sidell, Social Work, who has published a new book, *Professional Communication Skills in Social Work*, in collaboration with a former MU graduate student, Denise Smiley.