Academy of Our Lady of Good Counsel High School Web Site
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Abstract
The Academy of Our Lady of Good Counsel High School, a private girls’ high school located in White Plains, NY, received its charter from the New York State University Board of Regents in 1922. The school embraces values of academic excellence, service, compassion, diversity and, leadership. The students, faculty, administration, alumnae, parents and friends form a community in support of these values. Communication and connection are essential for keeping this community thriving and growing. In 1998, several students developed a static, student-oriented website for the high school. Since that time, the school’s needs have outgrown this basic site. The goal for this project was to design and build a more dynamic site targeted for a broader audience that communicated a growing technical savvy without losing sight of the values and traditions that define the school’s character. The solution provides a single space where information needs of the students, faculty, alumnae, parents and prospective students can be served while fostering connectedness within and among these diverse groups. The website needed to be easy to navigate for the sophisticate and novice alike and have a professional and appealing look and feel. In order to accomplish these goals, a consistent design was needed throughout the site along with a pop up menu that allowed any page of the website to be reached by a single mouse click. In order to support the dynamic content essential for a truly effective website, a user-friendly mechanism for staff and faculty to update web content was needed.

Template Page (utils.php)
To provide a consistent look and feel throughout the site, we created a template page which is used by all pages. The template page is responsible for displaying the header, footer, title bar, navigation menu, and has a cascading style sheet (css) template to render all content with a single look. This approach serves not only to display a consistent style throughout the site, but also provides a single point of change for any future template redesign. Once the template is changed, each page is assured of having the same, up to date look. For example, the header and footer, which are displayed here, will appear at the top and bottom of each page. The header design includes an ink drawing of the school’s chapel, which is universally regarded as the schools most familiar and representative symbol. The school’s emblem also appears in the header as part of a graphic which, with its clean, somewhat geometric lines communicates a degree of sophistication and substance. The footer is a smaller graphic in the same style and together the header and footer provide effective page boundaries that do not compete with the information being provided on each page.

Header:

Footer:
Navigation Menu
The menu bar was created to be as user friendly and powerful as possible. It is written mostly in Javascript and is linked in the template page. A requirement from the school was to have any page be accessible from any other page by a maximum of 3 mouse clicks. By utilizing this style of menu we were able to meet this requirement easily. This menu also supports the use of sub menus which are displayed only when the user hovers over the main menu item of interest. This is an effective method to provide rapid access to specific pages without cluttering the site. The main menu topic of interest changes background color as the sub menu appear so the user is, at all times, oriented and sub menu items are clearly associated with their main menu counterpart.

Menu:

Content Types
The site contains a mixture of content pages which are static, partly dynamic or fully dynamic. The repository for the dynamic portion of the content is provided via a MySQL database. About half of the site’s content is static while the remaining portions fall into several degrees of dynamism. There are 5 different types of pages in the high school website:

- Static pages
- Dynamic List Pages
- Dynamic Field Pages
- Dynamic Table Pages
- Dynamic Calendar Pages

Static Pages
These are pages which are simple HTML and are not updateable without actually changing the code. This type was chosen for pages that are not likely to change often, if at all. An example of a static page is the school history page.

Dynamic List Pages
The content on list pages appears as a series of bullet points. The actual content is pulled from the database. A easily navigated, password-protected administration website has been provide so that authorized users can add, edit or delete line items in a page’s list. An example of a list page is found in the General Information sub menu item within the Admissions menu item.

Dynamic Field Pages
These pages consist primarily of static content with a few updateable fields interspersed. An example of this type of page is Admissions > How to Apply, which is shown, with its administration page, below. The process for applying remains the same from year to year; however, the specific dates will vary. Fields on the administration page are identified with meaningful names and the associated dates can be updated each year.
As this screen capture shows, these dynamic fields blend seamlessly into the static text.

**How to Apply**

For applicants entering grade 9 taking the *Test for Admission into Catholic High School* (TACHS):

1. Take TACHS Exam on **Friday, November 5, 2004**
2. Make sure your school sends the Ninth Grade Applicant Record which includes:
   - The most recent eighth grade report card
   - Sixth and seventh grade report cards showing final grades
   - Standardized test scores
   - Attendance Records
3. Release of high school notices of acceptance will be issued **January 20, 2005**
4. Response cards are due back to Good Counsel Academy by **February 16, 2005**
5. High School Registration Day – **Wednesday, March 9, 2005**

As this screen capture shows, these dynamic fields blend seamlessly into the static text.

**Dynamic Table Pages**

The requirements for these pages could not be handled with dynamic lists or fields. For these pages, dynamic tables where constructed that could be filled by the user via the administration site. Currently there are two types of this page: Library > Library Databases and Library > Research Help.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field Name</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tachsExamDate</td>
<td>Friday, November 5, 2004</td>
<td>Edit</td>
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<tr>
<td>highSchoolAcceptanceNotice</td>
<td>January 20, 2005</td>
<td>Edit</td>
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<tr>
<td>responseCardsDueBack</td>
<td>February 16, 2005</td>
<td>Edit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HighSchoolRegistrationDay</td>
<td>Wednesday, March 9, 2005</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Research Help page is a multi-level dynamic table. First the user specifies categories of research and the order in which they are to appear (note the Order By column on the administration page):

And then enumerates the resources within that category:

The result is a webpage which displays a large volume of information in a well organized manner and provides the user with exceptional flexibility.
Dynamic Calendar Pages

This page type provides the user with a calendar and a viewable schedule of events. The website was designed to accommodate as many different calendars as the school requires. Each calendar has its own instance for event recording in the database. The displayed calendar itself is very interactive, with the users being able to select the day, month and year they wish to view from a calendar graphic. An example follows:

**Schedules**

**Dates & Events**

Feb 28 2005 17:00 - Feb 28 2005 19:00

**Good Counsel vs Harvard**

rain or shine (or snow)

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<table>
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Site Administration
A second web was created to handle administrative functions for the main site. This website will only be accessed by a small number of site administrators; therefore, the look and feel are less important. This site uses authentication since it has control over what is displayed in the main site and it would not be desirable for a public user to stumble across this site and make inappropriate changes to the high school website. Users and passwords are stored in the database along with the other dynamic content. The navigation menu has links to administer each dynamic page on the main site. In addition, the administration supplies the ability to:

- Add and delete users
- Create an emergency or informational bulletin

The emergency and informational bulletin features allow the user administrator to update the site in minutes with an important message such as the delay or closing of school due to inclement weather. This message will immediately appear prominently on the site’s home page.

Below is the home page of the administration site. You will note that functionality, not style, is the key purpose here.

Admin Site

GCA Site Administration

Login Successful
Welcome to the GCA administration site

Login

The bulletin is the dynamic content menu choice offered. It is anticipated that this item will represent the highest priority update.

Customer Feedback
The design and construction of this site represent a significant benefit for Good Counsel Academy High School (GCA). All constituents in the GCA community will find representation on this site. Prospective student can read and download information about applying to the school and about student life. Parents can find up-to-date Parent Bulletins and a link is provided to Faculty websites that list course syllabi and homework assignments. Students can click through the Library links to a wealth of research material.
Alumnae can provide updated biographic information about themselves or classmates. The development office can enumerate ways of donating to the school and publish the names of alumnae whose whereabouts are unknown in hope of receiving new information. This site will positively impact efforts to bring alumnae back into active interaction with the school which will provide students with a richer educational experience and assist in fund raising endeavors. On-line admissions information will ease the work load of the Admissions office and reduce the number of phone calls to be answered. Parents will feel more informed about their daughter’s school experience with an up-to-date site. And students will enjoy better access to research and the delight of seeing their accomplishments published on a public website. All this is possible because of the organized, structured yet creative approach that was applied to this project. The result is solid product which speaks proudly about GCA and has the flexibility to grow with the school.

References


Xaverian Brothers High School: http://www.xbhs.com