

# Standard Ten: Public Disclosure

## OVERVIEW

The University presents itself to the public through both print and electronic media. In general, the individual departments, schools, and colleges assume responsibility for the production, review, and update of their communications. The Division of Marketing and Communications — in conjunction with other University offices, such as Advancement and Admissions — produces many of the University's most widely read publications and websites.

## DESCRIPTION

Northeastern presents itself to the public through numerous electronic materials, while continuing to maintain many of its print publications. Over the last ten years, the University has moved increasingly toward using electronic vehicles, though it continues to produce key print publications, which in some cases serve as archival materials.

Currently, the majority of University-level communications appear in both print and electronic form. Programs and departments tend to rely on electronic communications. Electronic media offer programs and departments much broader public exposure than was previously available to them.

Marketing and Communications collaborates with Enrollment Management and Student Affairs units to review and update the *Undergraduate Catalog*, the *Undergraduate Student Handbook*, various residential life publications, and informational and marketing communications for use by prospective and admitted students and their families.

### *Catalogs*

The university produces several catalogs outlining its academic programs, available in both print and electronic forms. These include the *Undergraduate Catalog*, various college-level graduate school catalogs, various College of Professional Studies catalogs, the School of Law catalog, and department-based brochures and websites describing individual graduate programs.

The Registrar's website includes both an archival and a current list of graduate and undergraduate courses; the current course list is available only in electronic form. Similarly, CPS lists courses on its website. The Law School offers both electronic and print versions of its course offerings.

The *Undergraduate Catalog*, prepared by the Office of the Registrar, contains general information about the University, contact information, information about aspects of student life, and descriptions of undergraduate programs in all the colleges, including curriculum descriptions for the individual departments and programs.

The catalog lists full-time faculty members, including those faculty members who are away from campus on sabbatical or other leave, and provides their academic credentials. It contains information on financial aid and information about cooperative education and experiential opportunities. It lists the members of the governing boards and the officers of the University. It contains the University's affirmative action statement and expresses the University's commitment to diversity.

Updating of the *Undergraduate Catalog* begins in January of each year. Responsibility for revising specific components of the catalog falls under the aegis of appropriate units within the University. Curricular emendations, for example, are overseen by the Office of the Registrar in conjunction with the college deans and the individual departments.

Approximately 1,000 paper versions of the catalog are made available to faculty members and advisors. This represents a significant reduction from earlier years when print versions were produced for all students and faculty members. The majority of users now access the *Undergraduate Catalog* online, and the print catalog serves as the archival edition.

Information about student retention, graduation rates, and the University's financial information is maintained by the Office of Institutional Research. This information is found on a page within the Institutional Research website titled Common Data Set. Data on financial aid and freshmen persistence are also available in the *Undergraduate Catalog*.

The college-level graduate schools are responsible for providing information on their graduate programs. Some colleges, including the College of Engineering and the College of Business Administration, prepare college-wide catalogs. In contrast, the departmentally based College of Arts and Sciences prepares a set of brochures, one for each department and one with general rules and regulations. All these documents contain descriptions of programs, lists of faculty members, and information about admissions, financial aid, and academic progress. Some list recent course offerings. All this information is also available on websites. Some programs also provide graduate information on their websites beyond what is available in printed sources. This information is updated each year with the graduate school of the particular college coordinating the process; updates are shared with the Registrar's Office as appropriate.

The College of Professional Studies prepares both undergraduate and graduate catalogs that are available online and in print. The catalogs contain information on all programs offered by CPS, those that take place at the main Boston campus as well as those on the Dedham, Burlington, and Financial District campuses. They provide information on admissions requirements, procedures and policies, and transfer credit, as well as student fees, charges, and refund policies.

The School of Law has two primary resources, one electronic and one print, to provide information about the school and contact information for inquiries. Both contain profiles of full-time and visiting faculty members. The website includes a directory of the Law School's faculty and staff.

The School's print catalog contains its mission statement and information about its experiential program, admission requirements, student tuition and fees, financial information, descriptions of academic programs and educational opportunities, degree requirements, and employment data. The School's website contains the material in the print catalog as well as further information concerning academic and student affairs, courses, registration and Massachusetts Bar passage rates.

## ***Handbooks***

Student handbooks currently exist at Northeastern for full-time undergraduates, graduate students, law students, and CPS students. All are available online. Numerous institutional policies regarding student rights, responsibilities, and behavior are common to all University handbooks,

and the policies themselves are collegially created and periodically reviewed through the University's governance bodies. The Office of University Counsel reviews all handbooks before publication.

The *Undergraduate Student Handbook* is compiled by a cross-functional team within EMSA, with input from the Provost's Office. The Provost's Office manages the *Graduate Student Handbook*. CPS oversees and produces its *College of Professional Studies Bulletin and Student Handbook*.

The *Undergraduate Student Handbook*, which also includes an academic planner, is distributed to new students at orientation and made available to all students, faculty, and staff at the beginning of an academic year. A required one-credit course for incoming freshmen includes a discussion of the handbook's important features, particularly those related to the University's expectations for compliance with the student code of conduct. In addition, at the beginning of each academic year all undergraduate students must review and acknowledge notification of the *Undergraduate Student Handbook* and the Student Code of Conduct using the myNEU portal.

The *Graduate Student Handbook 2004–2006* is available online. Serving as the general guide for graduate students, it contains an overview of the University, its services, libraries, and environment, as well as information on policies, University regulations, and financial aid.

The Law School's *Student Information Handbook* provides information on the School's rules, policies, and services. Updated annually, it is distributed to students at orientation. Law students are also expected to comply with the standards of student conduct as described in the *Graduate Student Handbook*.

The College of Professional Studies *Bulletin and Student Handbook* provides, for both undergraduate and graduate students, admissions information, financial aid opportunities, program offerings, and course descriptions. It also presents policies, guidelines, standards, and rules for the various programs.

### ***Internal News Vehicles***

The University community's newspaper is the *Northeastern Voice*, published by Marketing and Communications. Until January 2008, a print version of the *Voice* appeared 15 times during the academic year. Since then, an electronic version and a print version have appeared in alternate weeks. The *Voice* staff also produces the University's homepage news content, which is updated twice a week.

### ***Alumni Publications***

Print and electronic communications aimed at Northeastern alumni are created at the university, college, department, and program levels. Marketing and Communications publishes the quarterly *Northeastern University Alumni Magazine*, which is mailed to all alumni and is also available in an online version. In addition, Alumni Relations offers on its website a quarterly video magazine called *Husky Nation*, which features alumni news and events. Alumni may ask to have *Husky Nation* editions sent automatically to their iTunes files for their iPods. (<http://www.northeastern.edu/alumni/eventsnews/huskynation.html>) Both the *Northeastern University Alumni Magazine* and *Husky Nation* target the entire alumni community.

Publications aimed at specific alumni groups appear at the school and college level. The School of Law, for example, publishes *Northeastern Law Magazine* in print form twice a year. The College of Arts and Sciences also produces a yearly magazine.

Other colleges offer either a print or an online newsletter. Several larger departments and programs maintain contact with their constituencies through print newsletters. Smaller units are also beginning to use electronic newsletters to keep their alumni informed of departmental news and events.

### ***College and Department Websites***

All colleges and departments have websites created in conjunction with Information Services, Marketing and Communications, or the Educational Technology Center.

College- and department-administered websites have largely replaced print brochures. These sites provide information to prospective and current students, department alumni, and the wider scholarly community. The sites usually offer details on faculty research, student activities, and public events.

In 2007, Marketing and Communications redesigned the top tier of the University's website and deployed it over a new content management system (CMS) called Serena Collage. To date, the following main websites are either on or moving onto the new CMS: the University homepage; most offices within the EMSA division; all Advancement sites, including Alumni Relations; Bouvé College of Health Sciences; the College of Engineering; most departments within the College of Arts and Sciences; the College of Criminal Justice; and the Office of the Provost, including University Research and Experiential Learning.

## **APPRAISAL**

Northeastern's widely disseminated publications and key websites are updated regularly through a coordinated process to ensure continuity and accuracy. The University's websites are easy to access and move through.

### ***Availability of Key Information***

Although information on Northeastern's retention and graduation rates is available online, it appears on the Institutional Research website under the heading Common Data Set, which makes the information difficult to locate. Once users locate the correct site, however, they find the information presented clearly.

Both the print and the electronic versions of the catalog and the Bulletin and Handbook for the College of Professional Studies provide clear access to important information.

A tab on the Law School's home page takes users to a Quick Facts page, which offers statistics about enrolled students, fees, and Massachusetts Bar passage rates.

Neither the print nor the online *Undergraduate Catalog* indicates which faculty members are on sabbatical or other leaves because the catalog is prepared before sabbatical leaves are granted. Although a few departments' websites note faculty sabbaticals, most do not.

A review of the *Graduate Student Handbook* has just been completed and the document can be accessed through either the Academic Resources website or the Office of the Provost website.

### ***Course Lists***

The Registrar's Office periodically reviews courses to see when they were last taught and, in consultation with the academic units, retires them to an archive when they are not current. Current course lists are generally up-to-date, since all curricula and courses were redone when Northeastern converted from a quarter system to a semester system in Fall 2003.

### ***Content Management System***

The new CMS has simplified the processes for updating and maintaining websites. A series of templates offer various designs. Continuity across websites is maintained by placing main links in similar positions on each page. All templates are consistent with Northeastern's brand identity and have been designed with an eye toward usability.

Allowing each unit to update its own content helps ensure that information stays current and accurate. A recent assessment of all websites showed that at least 99 percent are updated regularly.

The CMS templates are available to academic programs and departments. These websites are designated second-tier sites because they are housed within the web presence of a school, college, or business unit. Use of the templates assures conformity with University brand and design standards deep into the University's website.

Although there is no formal requirement for review of the content and design of second-tier websites, many divisions assign staff to assess content periodically. The CMS is also equipped to identify broken links. Because department websites are administered locally and updated frequently, continual centralized oversight would be cumbersome and is probably unnecessary as long as the individual responsible for the department's site is aware of University web standards.

### ***Statements of Degree Requirements***

Northeastern has worked to put in practice a one-source rule for degree requirements. College and department publications and websites are to send students and prospective students to only one source for information on degree requirements: the Office of the Registrar.

An informal assessment of practice shows that compliance varies. Some units comply completely; some present information with a disclaimer stating that in case of discrepancies between the department's and Registrar's versions of the curriculum, the Registrar's version should be followed; and some units list all requirements for their majors.

There appear to be at least two reasons for noncompliance. One is a lack of awareness of University policy, and this is being addressed by the Provost's Office through the Council of Associate Deans. In other cases, noncompliance reflects disagreement with the University policy; this is being addressed on a case-by-case basis.

### ***Statements of Exam Passage Rates***

Rates of success on licensure exams are listed on websites of the School of Law and the Bouvé College of Health Sciences.

Exam passage rates for accounting professionals in the College of Business Administration are compiled by the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA). Currently, NASBA reports to the College of Business Administration only that a student has passed an exam. Information on whether the student took only a part of the test or the entire test is not included. The college is working with NASBA to rectify this issue.

## **PROJECTION**

### ***Ease of Accessing Key Information***

Bringing greater awareness of Northeastern standards for publications and providing tools for supporting this goal are important steps in ensuring that University data are consistent across various media. Faculty and staff must know how to find these standards and tools.

One source is the Branding Toolkit, which appears on the Marketing and Communications website (<http://www.neu.edu/toolkit>). The toolkit contains information about editorial and graphic standards, print templates, and downloadable logos and images. However, the content of this web page is not clear from its name. The site should be renamed to generate greater awareness of the important information the site contains.

The University relies on the Common Data Set web page to supply internal and external audiences, including prospective students, with facts about Northeastern. The site should be more readily identifiable. In addition, information on retention and graduation rates should be listed in the Admissions web pages.

### ***Course List Updates***

Courses at Northeastern must be carefully planned because some departments and programs have one-division cooperative education schedules and others have two-division schedules. A course list review could be added to the annual revision process already in place for the *Undergraduate Catalog*. Requests could then be made to move courses from the current list to the online archived list, where they could be reactivated easily. This change should happen in the next catalog revision cycle, starting in January 2009. This process will become easier and more automated with the installation of the new Banner software modules.

### ***Website Oversight and Maintenance***

Although significant oversight must continue for the major catalogs, departmental websites need not be monitored beyond basic compliance. Information managers throughout the University do, though, need to understand that accuracy and consistency are even more important now than in the past. The advent of electronic media as the primary interface between departments and their on- and off-campus constituencies has significantly altered the size and composition of their audiences.

The individuals responsible for web and print communications do not always understand University standards and policies. Orientation for new chairs and directors should include a session summarizing University standards and policies for web and print communications and tools that are available to aid in upholding these standards.

In early 2008 the Provost's Office began working to ensure compliance with the existing one-source policy for all curricula statements. Associate deans and program directors have been assigned the task of attaining 100 percent compliance on this issue.

As the University moves toward electronic publications and away from print media, the maintenance of historical records of websites takes on increasing urgency. Northeastern Libraries staff members are currently exploring such software as ArchiveIt, which archives and preserves websites. The recommendations coming out of this exploration will be reviewed by the Provost's Office and a decision will be made about prioritizing the request in the budget process. The recommendations will be ready by Fall 2008.

## **INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS**

Ongoing reviews by individual units ensure a high degree of quality control even though Northeastern does not have a formal, systematic institution-wide process of periodic review to ensure that its print and electronic publications are complete, accurate, available, and current. Key publications are carefully and systematically reviewed prior to releasing a new edition.

The Division of Marketing and Communications maintains the University's primary websites. Admissions, Alumni Relations, and the Office of the Registrar have regular processes for the preparation and review of their print and electronic materials. Colleges, schools, and departments review their own print and electronic communications and all have developed an acute awareness of the importance of electronic media for internal and external audiences.

Roughly every three years, a communications audit, initiated by Marketing and Communications, reviews the publications and websites of the academic and business units that produce the largest number of external communications.