



Siena College

Website Redesign

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This **Creative Brief is an introduction to our vision for your project. It contains a list of project objectives, style characteristics, considered audiences, and a plan to measure success.**

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Creative Overview

While other schools have been struggling with falling enrollment, Siena has exceeded its registration goals for a few years running. It has a deeply engaged student population, alumni who sing the school's praises, and an incredible reputation in the surrounding area. So why now? Why would the site need replacing?

For its continued health and longevity, Siena has to find answers to questions that deeply affect its web strategy and website purpose, including:

How do you explain Siena's value? Modern students are more concerned than ever about efficacy and return on investment. Even more so, the Excelsior Scholarship requires private schools in New York to make persuasive arguments for their cost and ROI.

How do we reach students we don't fully understand? College demographics continue to shift, requiring nuanced and innovative approaches for finding students, nurturing them through their application process, and removing their barriers of entry. Business needs shift rapidly, rendering technical education obsolete before it can be codified into curriculum.

What does it mean to be a Saint? When asked to explain in a few short sentences what it means to be Franciscan, Brother Ed wryly said: "Welcome to the perennial problem." Explaining Franciscanism tersely is like trying to catch smoke in your hands – applying words to an ethos which is so deeply experiential feels futile. Franciscanism is deeply woven into the student experience, and shapes every element of its inclusive and diverse culture.

The truth is in its community. Being on location at Siena is a transformative experience because of how powerfully Siena's soul envelops the campus, demonstrating the meaning of Franciscanism in a way that words struggle to express. A successful redesign of Siena's site can't verbally encapsulate Franciscanism, but it can lower the barrier for Siena to make itself understood. It can foster the personal connections that define the Siena Experience. It can demonstrate Siena's mission to integrate, welcome, and serve. When words fail, to quote St. Francis himself, "The deeds you do may be the only sermon some persons will hear today."

Siena already has powerful answers to many of the above questions, but the current website is imposing limitations on its ability to tell stories. Making a compelling case for Siena requires a website capable of presenting an emotional experience.

Project Objectives

- **Saturate the entire website with the Siena community.**

Siena's community is its very soul, built into the foundational values of the Franciscan Tradition. The limitations of the current site, especially in the ability to create content-rich and applicable stories, has caused huge parts of this community to not be visible to external audiences. Part of this is solved by pushing harder with on-campus visits, but we also need to do a better job at showing the community visually.

- **Show Siena's innovative and valuable interdisciplinary curriculum.**

The education students receive at Siena is more than just an education: it prepares them for a wide variety of work and experiences. While there are specific interdisciplinary programs,

each program has a holistic, well-defined liberal arts core that challenges students to expand their knowledge and understanding of a broad range of content areas, encourages them to discover their passions, and invites them to address big questions and issues from a variety of perspectives, including the ethical-moral dimensions of choices made.

The education is far from easy or simple – liberal arts means richer, not less rigorous. This experience is underscored by the range of research options, variety of scholarships, and array of career options available to Siena’s students.

- **Live Siena’s commitment to be welcoming to all people.**

As a Franciscan institution, Siena’s spiritual heritage places it strongly within the canon of the Catholic tradition. Following an admonition of St. Francis, everyone is encouraged to be “conscious of their dignity” as a unique human being with the potential and call to become a person committed to developing their gifts and talents and discovering creative ways to put them in the service of the world’s many needs.

Siena’s tradition celebrates differences and distinctions as expressions of the Creators’ infinite goodness and generosity. It also celebrates the many ways in which diversity manifests beauty and goodness in a myriad of ways and forms. St. Francis’ teachings and Siena’s traditions together propel the College to be more diverse and inclusive.

Diversity initiatives are sometimes used by other institutions without integrating underlying core values, resulting in suspicion towards overly “diversified” photos or content. Siena should focus on messaging and content that implicitly communicates distinction and difference over imagery and photography that explicitly shows diversity.

- **Explain how Siena shapes well-rounded, sought-after graduates.**

Siena's strategic vision is to be an educational innovator, developing compassionate leaders who are deeply connected to a changing world. A student leaves Siena with far more than academic knowledge in their field – they develop a solid bedrock of values, teamwork, and an industriousness that makes them invaluable employees.

- **Keep alumni connected through diverse opportunities and channels.**

“They bleed green and gold” – so giving them a way to make that energy productive is a huge part of Siena's ongoing strategy. Siena's alumni are an integral part of the school's value offering through the network of relationships that are rooted in the “Siena experience”. This manifests itself in various forms of mentoring and job networking that reach across the country. We should be looking for specific ways to keep alumni engaged with students, with the school, and with each other.

- **Craft a site that creates an engaging and dynamic experience for its users, especially for prospective students.**

Siena's current site is deeply constrained by its CMS platform, information architecture, navigation, and inconsistent content strategy and governance. Using the site can be difficult and frustrating to end users because of a range of technological and stylistic issues that result in users abandoning the site's tools entirely and defaulting to using Google search.

The new site should engage and inspire students while accommodating their needs, both in content and in technology. While its main focus will be prospective students, the site is also a valuable repository of information for current students and other internal audiences, and will need to create a single, unified information architecture for those purposes.

- **Create a site that empowers Siena's staff to build modern, dynamic, and effective content.**

The limitations of the current CMS are strongly felt by all of the web editor staff. Creating good, engaging content is coming second to wrangling the technical elements of the CMS, resulting in pages with massive, unscannable blocks of text – or pages that struggle to integrate their text with other elements. Siena publishes a wide variety of stories to its site, but these limitations can obscure otherwise strong content.

A successful redesign will do more than just present a new style on the front end of the site, but will serve as a transformative agent for Siena's staff who do the work of maintaining the site. The new CMS should be easier to learn while being structured to provide flexibility for their pages so they can produce high quality content. This technical work will also be paired with a content and governance strategy that will enable the staff to spend their energy more effectively on their work instead of fighting the technology.

- **Surface the investment Siena makes in supporting and developing faculty.**

Siena invests significantly in its faculty and provides the encouragement needed, and structure required, to ensure the programs are fully utilized. The spirit of Siena's faculty development initiatives, and the inclusion of students in the resulting research, are yet another example of the fruits of Siena's supportive community. The new website should share these stories and direct internal audiences to pages that allow them to engage.

- **Help Siena differentiate the value of its education compared to SUNY schools.**

The Excelsior Scholarship is far from an insurmountable problem. While students are increasingly price sensitive, Siena has a long history of being committed to value by

providing scholarships and aid with a transformative college experience.

As a liberal arts institution with a heavy focus on the student experience, it's difficult to lead with an argument of efficacy – that's a big reason why students attend college but far from the only reason. Instead, Siena should leverage the critical elements of its community and differentiation, and then offer reasoning about why it is still a financially viable decision. Highlight key ROI outcomes: high graduation rates, student satisfaction, job placement, and potential salaries. Examples could include dynamic representation of distinctive academic and experiential opportunities available to students, stories of students who transferred from SUNY schools, and profiles of students, alumni and programs that convey the value of a Siena degree. It's a delicate balance to not seem defensive about tuition, but excited about what that tuition enables.

- **Establish Siena in a different class of competitors.**

Currently Siena competes well with other schools in New England, especially other liberal arts schools. As the admissions staff put it, “there are a lot of schools in Massachusetts that look like Siena on paper.” However, Siena’s rigorous academics, research, and results put it in a different class of competitors which needs to be clearly reflected by the site redesign.

- **Expand Siena’s excellent reputation into new areas.**

Siena has much to offer and is aggressively evolving its curriculum to remain relevant. The full Siena story is broad and nuanced, and is powerfully applicable to students across a range of backgrounds and futures. The breadth of this story should be captured by emphasizing the people who make up the school and showing that each academic program is thoughtful, rigorous, and effective.

Characteristics

It is important to have a set of guiding attributes and values that all creative decisions can be held to. This ensures that everything created for the new Siena website genuinely represents the brand, and is in service of the project's objectives, especially as the team that is contributing to this project grows and evolves. "Look and Feel" characteristics speak to the aesthetics of the site, as they relate to design, images, and the overall visual impression of each page. "Voice and Tone" characteristics relate more to the writing, content strategy, and Information Architecture; however, words and ideas from both lists can speak to the project as a whole. These characteristics have been informed by on-site meetings with Siena stakeholders as well as a materials review, and should summarize the feelings and impressions the new website elicits in its viewers.

Look & Feel

- Community
- Inviting
- Collaborative
- Connected
- Valuable
- Human
- Optimistic

Voice & Tone

- Communal
- Compassionate
- Person-centered
- Holistic
- Joyful
- Supportive
- Honest
- Grounded

Target Audiences

The new website should seek to be as user-focused as possible by serving each audience along anticipated paths, and providing the most relevant content and predictable navigation as possible. Although their roles on the site may be fluid, we must be mindful of what users are trying to accomplish and when. Below, we have prioritized the core website audiences. This prioritization will guide design and content choices to serve the variety and overlap of users' needs as they navigate the site, from seeking out and completing specific tasks, to wandering and exploring.

Primary Audiences

- Prospective Students
- Parents of Prospective Students
- Influences of Prospective Students

Secondary Audiences

- Current Students
- Faculty and Staff

Tertiary (Other) Audiences

- Alumni
- Local Community
- Sports Fans
- Camp and Summer Program Attendees
- Board and Other Stakeholders

Metrics & Indicators for Success

A variety of metrics will enable Siena to evaluate the impact of the new site on its target audiences. Fastspot recommends that metrics be analyzed as often as possible, with monthly reviews comparing month-over-month and year-over-year results. Google Analytics is the primary tool we recommend for gathering and analyzing site metrics.

Measurable Success Metrics

- A reduction in the bounce rate for the homepage
- Increased page views to the homepage and crucial pages of the site
- An increase of enrollments from outside the Capital Region

- An increase in website traffic from outside the Capital Region
- An increase in inquiries from the website
- Increase the yield from inquiry to application
- Increase in opportunity and capability to display engaging content across website
- Site content is correct, updated, and relevant
- A decreased need for pdf or paper forms, and a heavier reliance on the site for collecting information
- A decrease in site load time
- An increase in site stability, especially at crucial traffic times

Anecdotal Indicators of Success

As we develop the website for Siena, we'll work with the Core Web Team to refine this list, honing in on specific, measurable objectives for the site that can be tracked using data from Google Analytics. However, there are many ways to measure the site's success that fall outside of the hard data. Anecdotal indicators can be as valuable as quantifiable data in evaluating the success of the website and its content initiatives.

- The site feels like it represents Siena's identity, especially the community
- Hearing that the site captures what it's like to learn at a Franciscan college

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- Users report that things are easier to find
- Web editors feel that their pages are more adaptable and easier to maintain
- More editors feel empowered to change elements of the site instead of referring changes to more technically advanced users

Fastspot Reference URLs

We have compiled a list of reference sites that were discussed in design discovery. This site list is meant to create a baseline for discussions regarding web design trends and innovations, as well as to develop an overall understanding of aesthetic preferences. This list will not be used to guide design decisions, but rather to help frame design conversations.

Higher Education Sites

- Mississippi State University Admissions: <http://www.admissions.msstate.edu/>
- Goshen College: <https://www.goshen.edu/>
- Johns Hopkins University: <https://www.jhu.edu/>
- University of Portland: <https://www1.up.edu/>
- Bucknell University: <http://www.bucknell.edu/>
- The College of Saint Rose: <http://www.strose.edu/>

Non-Higher Education

- New York Times Interactive Feature: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/05/16/world/europe/17turkey.html>
- Virgin America: <https://www.virginamerica.com/>
- Netflix: <https://www.netflix.com/>
- Medium: <https://medium.com>
- Jimmy Johns Ordering System: <https://online.jimmyjohns.com/>

Competitor Websites

Note: This list represents primary competitor websites that our prospective students may be comparing Siena's website to, and should *not* be considered a reflection of all of Siena's competitors.

Public Website Competitors:

- SUNY Albany: <http://www.albany.edu>
- SUNY Binghamton: <https://www.binghamton.edu>
- SUNY Geneseo: <https://www.geneseo.edu>

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- SUNY Oneonta: <https://suny.oneonta.edu>
- SUNY Buffalo: <http://www.buffalo.edu>
- University of Connecticut: <http://www.uconn.edu>

Private Website Competitors:

- Fairfield University: <https://www.fairfield.edu>
- Le Moyne College: <http://www.lemoyne.edu>
- Marist College: <https://www.marist.edu>
- Quinnipiac University: <https://www.qu.edu>
- Syracuse University: <https://www.syracuse.edu>
- The College of Saint Rose: <https://www.strose.edu>

Aspirant Website Competitors:

- Fairfield University: <https://www.fairfield.edu/>
- Providence: <http://www.providence.edu>
- Fordham: <https://www.fordham.edu>
- Bucknell: <http://www.bucknell.edu>

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- Davidson: <http://www.davidson.edu>
- Villanova: <http://www1.villanova.edu/main.html>

Conclusion

Siena already knows who it is. The well-defined brand chapters have resulted in a strategy that will keep the school's communication strategy healthy and well-defined for the foreseeable future. Our goal isn't to radically change this direction, but rather to create a site that will underpin these efforts and bind them together into a useful whole, especially by bringing in more elements of Siena's strategic commitment to innovation and change. With clear, authentic messaging and better structures and tools to support content contributors, Siena's new website will serve for years to come.