

Internet Marketing

A guide to Internet marketing for universities:
current trends and case studies

By Jeremy Callinan

Executive Summary

The Internet is becoming the number one way for people to learn about universities. Although Pitt-Bradford may not have a large percentage of recruits from Internet leads, this situation is likely to change in the future. Even students who are not technologically inclined will use the Internet to help them evaluate colleges. High school counselors are even getting into the act.

Pitt-Bradford's current web presence is adequate, but there is work to do. College aggregator sites like Petersons.com have outdated or inadequate information to represent Pitt-Bradford, and there are other online opportunities to spread Pitt-Bradford's message. An attempt to search for colleges in this area online will not lead anyone close to 300 Campus Drive, without really digging.

Internet advertising and search engine accessibility is changing; pro-active web management is necessary to create a successful website. Analyzing possible web advertising methods is beneficial to the college. Search engines sites like Google have some affordable programs, and are successful in driving traffic to websites relevant to the user's requests. Several advertising methods are discussed.

Many universities are teaming with college aggregator sites to promote themselves. Examples of this process are given, and its relative effects on the colleges' web presence.

Our closest geographical competitor's sites are noteworthy for several reasons; many are not as good as Pitt-Bradford's, yet some have innovations and design techniques that we can learn from. University at Buffalo has done some exciting projects with their site, information about www.buffalo.edu and other competitor's sites are included.

Please review the closing section of this document for more formal and concise recommendations.

Section 1 General Internet Marketing Business Practices

Section 2 College Searching on the Internet

Section 3 Official University Websites

Section 4 Recommendations

Section 1 General Internet Marketing Business Practices

Overview

There is no doubt that generating targeted traffic to your Web site is the key to a successful Internet presence. Although this section does not in any way pretend to be an extensive guide to Internet marketing, it will hopefully provide you with some good tips and tricks to planning and executing your Internet marketing strategy. This information applies to any kind of website, not necessarily a University.

Search engines are changing...

Let's start with a quick look at the mother of all Internet marketing vehicles: search engines. How can you use them to generate good traffic (not just traffic) to your Web site?

Many people claim that search engines account for over 80% of the traffic that your Web site receives. For a university obviously this is not an accurate estimate; traditional marketing, reputation, word of mouth, and other means account for much more than 20%, but there is a potential now and in the future to see internet marketing encapsulate a large portion of the University's efforts.

Search engines, together with the Internet portals that use them, definitely represent a major traffic generator and therefore should be a central part of your Internet marketing strategy. The way search engines handle site listings, however, has changed dramatically over the last couple of years. The free search engines of the late 1990's have practically disappeared and a variety of paid services have surfaced.

Gaining visibility in a search engine today requires strategies much different than those you may have followed (or just heard of) even a year ago. To understand how you can generate traffic through search engine results, consider the following.

- Free search engines and Web site directories were not a viable business model on the Internet. That's because search engines were and are expensive to maintain (hardware, personnel, bandwidth), and typically do not produce enough advertising revenues through banners to cover the cost of maintaining them.
- Consequently, the vast majority of search engines, including **Yahoo!**, **MSN**, **Google**, **AltaVista**, **DirectHit**, **About**, **LookSmart**, and many others, started adding a variety of paid-for or "sponsored" links to the search content. These links complement (or in some cases replace) the results returned by the search engine's own database of Web pages.
- For example, many of the search results that you now see when you run a search on Yahoo! are actually coming from a pay-per-click advertising company called **Overture**. Similarly, many of the links that you see when reading an article on the popular portal About.com come from an advertising subsidiary of **About.com** called **Sprinks**, which also offers pay-per-click advertising programs.
- Therefore, to rank high on many of the Internet's leading search engines (and the portals that partnered with them); you will need to consider "sponsoring" links. In many cases, this can be

done by setting up an account with leading providers of payper-click marketing programs. Payper-click Internet marketing is discussed in the next section. In other cases, you will have to purchase subscription plans or other advertising programs.

About search engine optimization...

Continually optimizing your pages (text, **meta tags**, etc.) used to be crucial to attaining the highest ranking. Although this is not as important as it used to be due to the ubiquitous presence of sponsored links, making sure that your page content and meta tags are optimized is still crucial to achieving high rankings among non-sponsored links, which are still part of the search results on many search engines.

Google, for example, displays two sponsored links at the very top of its search results page and some sponsored links on the right side (in shaded text boxes), but the bulk of the search results come from Web pages that have been spidered by the search engine.

Don't forget about offline marketing...

It may sound to you as total nonsense, but an integral part of your Internet marketing strategy should Web-focused offline marketing. That is: driving people to your Web site by telling them about it when they are not online.

Most people (you included) often visit a Web site after reading about it in a newspaper, magazine, or somewhere other than sitting in front of their monitor. Off-line marketing can be a formidable generator of traffic to your Web site. Therefore, make sure that any public relations activities done by you or your PR agency include your Web site address in prominent position and talk about why it is such a great idea to visit your Web site.

Pay-per-Click Advertising

What is pay-per-click advertising? Simply put, it is a form of Internet marketing where companies pay for visitors that are delivered to their Web site. Because you only pay for the people that actually visit your pages (not just see your advertisement), pay-per-click can be a highly effective marketing tool.

Where do people *click*? You may not know this, but many of the searches that you run on the Internet's leading search engines (e.g. Yahoo!), return results (links) that companies are paying for. That is: some of the results are actually ads. In most cases, this works well for both visitors and advertisers: visitors find links that are relevant to their searches, and advertisers find targeted users.

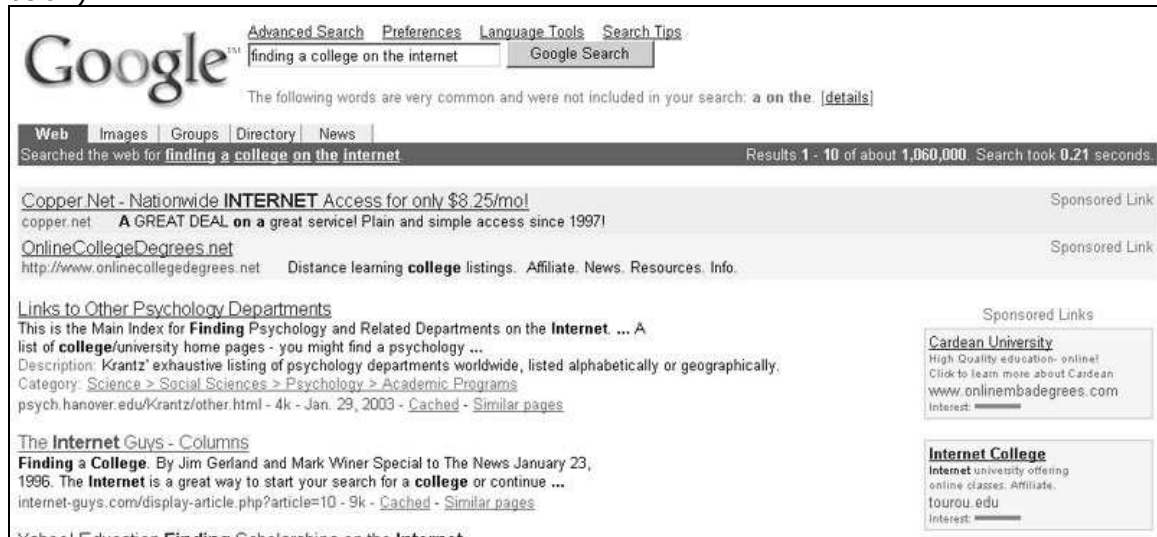
Overture

The biggest pay-per-click search provider is Overture (<http://www.overture.com>). Overture works directly with advertisers like you to bid for placement in search results on terms that are relevant to your business. This allows you to reach potential customers at the very time they are searching for your products and services.

These search results are then distributed to many of the Internet's busiest portals, including Yahoo!, Terra Lycos and AltaVista. As an advertiser, you pay Overture the amount of your bid only when a consumer clicks on your listing. This provides you with a cost effective way to drive targeted customers to your site.

Google

In April of 2002 Google started a pay-per-click version of their AdWords program, called **AdWords Select**. Whereas the original AdWords program let advertisers purchase ads on a Cost-Per-Impression (CPM) basis, now you can advertise on Google on a Cost-Per-Click (CPC) basis too. Listings appear in shaded areas on the right side of the search results (see picture below).



The screenshot shows a Google search interface with the search term "finding a college on the internet". The search results include several sponsored links on the right side, such as "Copper Net - Nationwide INTERNET Access for only \$8.25/mo!" and "OnlineCollegeDegrees.net". The page also displays organic search results, including "Links to Other Psychology Departments" and "The Internet Guys - Columns". The search results are displayed in a grid-like format with various links and descriptions.

Thanks to its size, Google was able to immediately sign an agreement with large portals such as AOL (*which includes Netscape.com*) and EarthLink to have AdWords Select links appear on their networks in addition to Google's own Web site. AOL had previously used Overture as their pay-per-click partner.

Due to the huge popularity of the Google search engine, this program could well become a big part of your Web marketing budget. The average cost-per-click for your campaigns can be pretty high, at levels similar to Overture's. Try it out and see if the average cost-per-click makes sense within your business model.

One advantage compared to how the Overture pay-per-click engine works lies in that you don't have to constantly monitor your bids to make sure that you are not spending \$0.30 more than the company right behind you (e.g. on Overture you can be ranked #1 for a certain keyword with a bid of \$0.85, even if number #2 is only spending \$0.55 per click).

Google created a system called 'AdWords discounter', which automatically changes your bids you to the lowest CPC necessary to maintain your position for each keyword. Visit <https://adwords.google.com/select/compare.html> for more details about how Google differs from Overture. However, note that this is a Google page, likely a bit biased.

Other Search Engine Advertising

In addition to pay-per-click advertising, there are a number of other ways to promote your site via search engines and Web directories, and allow Web surfers to find you. Some of the most traffic-generating programs are discussed below.

Yahoo! (Directory)

Unfortunately you can only submit your Web site to the Yahoo! directory by paying an annual fee of \$299. They guarantee that your Web site will be reviewed within 7 business days. If you are interested, or to learn more, go to: <http://docs.yahoo.com/info/suggest/>

By the way, the \$299 is only to be listed in the Yahoo! directory. You see, Yahoo! is not really a search engine (spidered Web pages), but rather a directory of listed Web sites. This means that if someone goes to the Yahoo! and navigates through their massive directory, you will show up. But since most people tend to do searches (versus navigating Yahoo's directory), I am less convinced that this is a wise investment, especially if your marketing budget is limited. Search results on Yahoo! come from both Overture (top 3 and bottom 2) and Google (the rest of the search results).

However, if you do submit your Web site to the Yahoo! directory, then you should check out their "Sponsored Site" program, which places your Web site at the top of your directory page for a relatively small monthly fee (typically around \$100). For more information on this program, see: <http://sponsoredsites.yahoo.com/>

Google (Yahoo! Web pages)

Yahoo! uses Google for their search engine results, so you can still show up in a Yahoo! search if you have submitted your site to Google, which is free (although unfortunately will take weeks, or even months in some cases). Your ranking in the Google search engine will be based on things like:

- How long your site has been around
- Your "link popularity" (see the Overview section of this document)
- Your pages' Meta Tags and other content (same)

Google attracts a large amount of traffic, both on its own and through the huge network of partners that have licensed its searches (e.g. Yahoo!). To register your URL with Google, go to: <http://www.google.com/addurl.html>

To further promote your Web site on Google, take a look at some of the advertising programs that they offer, which are moderately priced and do provide extra visibility. To learn more, go to: <http://www.google.com/ads/>

The programs are:

- **Premium Sponsorships** (the top two results, in a shaded area, with large font). From the Google Web site: "Your enhanced text link appears at the top of the Google result page whenever the keyword or phrase you have purchased is searched for by one of our users. Learn more or contact us today." Note: This is a CPM-based (Cost per Thousand) program, which means that the cost of the campaign is based on the number of times your sponsored link appears, not the number of times the link is clicked on. This program is for medium- to large-sized businesses with a monthly marketing budget of \$2,500 or more. To learn more about this program, visit: <http://www.google.com/ads/overview.html>

- **AdWords** (on the right side, in shaded text boxes). From the Google Web site: "The AdWords program enables you to manage your own account and ad text with no minimum deposit required. Your ads appear on the right side of results pages. No obligation to try AdWords." This is also a CPM program.

- **AdWords Select**. This is a cost-per-click version of AdWords, introduced in April of 2002. From the Google Web site: "AdWords Select™ combines all the features of AdWords with cost-per-click (CPC) pricing. And it adjusts automatically to keep you ahead of your competition at the lowest

possible price.” For more information about AdWords Select, see the “Pay-per-Click Advertising” section of this document.

Open Directory Project

The Open Directory Project powers directory-based searches on many large sites, including Google. Submission is free, but it takes them a long time to add a new site to their list (expect many months to go by before you see your site listed).

To submit, go to: <http://dmoz.org/add.html>

DirectHit & AskJeeves/Ask.com

DirectHit is another search engine that recently abandoned “free listings” in favor of a subscription-based service. DirectHit recently became part of a company called Teoma, a subsidiary of AskJeeves.

To get listed on both Teoma and AskJeeves, you have to subscribe to a service called Site Submit (<http://ask.ineedhits.com/>). The yearly cost is \$30 for the first URL, then \$18 for each other URL (up to 1,000). Your site should be listed within a week and refreshed weekly.

Section 2 College Searching on the Internet

The scenario

I attempted to pose as a perspective college student, to see the extent of possible uses for the internet. Here is my assumed profile:

- High school senior, 17 years old
- Interested in Computers
- 1430 on SATs
- 3rd in class
- From New York, looking for a school within a 5 or 6 hour drive from my hometown (Jamestown, NY)

From here I have two methods of action:

1. research the schools in my area using college search/informational sites
2. visit these universities' websites

Xap.com

To begin I started with option 1, using <http://www.xap.com>. After creating an account, Xap told me I can:

- **Scholarship search:** This module automatically tries to match you to thousands of scholarships resulting in over a million possible awards.
- **College recruitment:** If you want, your data can be released only to specific schools of your choosing, so that they can fight over you.
- **Update applications:** If your address, grades, test scores or interests change, you can update them here and the new information will automatically carry over to your applications in progress.
- **College planning:** Kick start your college planning by automatically filling in many of the planning modules on this site.

St. Bonaventure University (87%)
St. John's University (83%)
Touro College (83%)
University of Pittsburgh - Bradford (82%)
Alfred University (80%)

Xap.com offers some nifty features – I can store a list of colleges in my Xappack (simply a list of schools I am interested in that only I can access after I log in online), I can apply for schools, and Xap notifies me if there are any interesting events surrounding my interests or the schools I have picked. This site is a good example of personalization, a venerable

Amazon.com of college searching. But, I digress.

OK, so let's see how this works. I searched for colleges within New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. I said I had no preference to whether there was a large town surrounding the school, or in a rural setting. I also left all the preferences blank for college size, class size, along with preferences for sports offered, student body, and any other of the nine pages of search terms I was presented. I only chose Computer Science as a degree choice, making no other choices

This was, in essence, saying I don't care about the particulars, just find me the best school closest to me. 380 colleges matched. The grey table at the right is a small sampling of my results, (relevance in parenthesis, bolding my emphasis). St. Bonaventure University was first, with an 87% relevancy rate. The University of Pittsburgh at Bradford ranked 17 out of the 380 returned, with an 82% relevancy rate.


Remember, the only qualifications I expressed was a Computer Science degree, and only because I had to pick a degree of some kind to complete the search.

St. Bonaventure University

If I take my search at face value, I would continue to St. Bonaventure. I take a quick scan of the key facts, etc., noting nothing that strikes me as remarkable. The second thing I notice is that I can apply online directly from this results page (notice relevant graphic to right). 4 out of the 10 top ranked schools have this feature. I can click on APPLY, and be taken to an official St. Bonaventure application form. This is definitely a plus.

College	Key Facts	Apply Online	Campus Tour	Contact Info	Add to XapPack
St. Bonaventure University (87%)		APPLY			
Canisius College (84%)		APPLY			
St. John Fisher College (84%)		APPLY			
State University College at Brockport (84%)					
State University College at Oneonta (83%)					
State University College at Oswego (83%)					
Adelphi University (83%)		APPLY			
CUNY City College (83%)					
Long Island University - C.W. Post (83%)					
Manhattanville College (83%)					
Molloy College (83%)					
Pace University (83%)		APPLY			
Queens College (83%)					
Russell Sage College (83%)					
St. John's University (83%)		APPLY			
Touro College (83%)					
University of Pittsburgh - Bradford (82%)					

300 Campus Drive
Bradford, PA 16701-2898
800 872-1787 (toll free)
814 362-7578 (fax)
www.upb.pitt.edu



AT A GLANCE

Campus enrollment: **1,236 students**

School type: **college**

Location: **small town**

Percent of students from out of state: **10%**

While I can read information about the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford, it is outdated. Notice the enrollment numbers are lower than actual, for example. A minor detail (and of course, as a perspective student, it is not likely I would know that), but combined with the absence of an online application, Pitt-Bradford isn't being represented fairly, since these are things that can be easily corrected.

However, I can go directly to <http://www.upb.pitt.edu>, to learn about Pitt-Bradford, and apply online there. However, this disconnect is a disadvantage for the University. Also, it is worth noting that I can apply to the University of Pittsburgh online through Xap.com.

Xap.com reports that over 600 colleges use their online application. Xap can be contacted at 310.842.9800 or info@xap.com.

CollegeNET

Xap.com was fun, but it is never good to pick from only one source. So I decide to continue my college quest. I found Xap.com by using Google, so I return to Google and search for 'college'. On the top of my list, (after collegeboard.com, which seemed all about SATs), was CollegeNET.

This seemed interesting, although I wonder how Dartmouth, M.I.T., and Boston College got to the top 5. We will determine more about that later.

So, I visit CollegeNet, which also has a college search for me to try.

CollegeNet's search is awkward; I can either look through a list of colleges, or enter a keyword to search for.

I believe neither is effective nor convenient to connect a student with a college they would like to see. Nevertheless, I enter Pennsylvania as my search term, and return these colleges as my top listings:

1. Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania
2. California University of Pennsylvania
3. Cheyney University of Pennsylvania
4. Clarion University of Pennsylvania
5. Edinboro University of Pennsylvania
6. Indiana University of Pennsylvania
7. Kutztown University of Pennsylvania
8. Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania
9. Mansfield University of Pennsylvania
10. Millersville University of Pennsylvania

It seems that CollegeNet simply searches for colleges with the name that matches my search terms, with no relation to a college's popularity or stature. Sure enough, if I search for Bradford, I get two results:

Bradford School
University of Pittsburgh at Bradford

The screenshot shows a Google search results page for the keyword "college". At the top, the Google logo is visible, along with navigation links for "Advanced Search", "Preferences", "Language Tools", and "Search Tips". The search bar contains the word "college" and a "Google Search" button. Below the search bar, there are tabs for "Web", "Images", "Groups", "Directory", and "News". The search results are displayed in a list format, with each result including a title, a brief description, and a URL. The results are as follows:

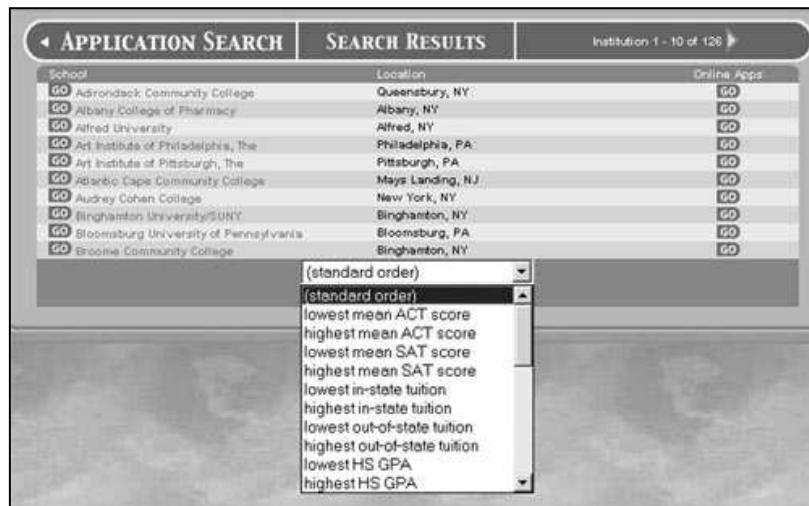
- News:** Indian-Born Astronaut's **College** Mourns Her Death - Reuters - 6 hours ago; Dramatic Increases Seen In **College** Students' Mental Health ... - Science Daily - 7 hours ago; Mental distress on **college** campuses - Seattle Post Intelligencer - 10 hours ago; New! Try Google News: Search news for college or browse the latest headlines
- collegeboard.com - Online SAT Registration, SAT Test Preparation ...**
... with real SAT questions, information about the Advanced Placement (AP), PSAT/NMSQT, and CLEP exams, online CSS/financial aid PROFILE, and college search tools. ...
Description: Organization representing hundreds of colleges responsible for the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT)...
Category: Society > Issues > Education > Standardized Testing
www.collegeboard.com/ - 30k - Cached - Similar pages
- CollegeNET - Online College Applications and Free Financial Aid ...**
With CollegeNET you can find the perfect college for you with the college search engine, apply to that college online, then get the funds to pay for college ...
Description: An online guide to colleges, universities, and graduate programs. In addition to information on college...
Category: Reference > Education > Colleges and Universities > Guides
www.collegenet.com/ - 5k - Cached - Similar pages
- Welcome to Dartmouth College**
A member of the Ivy League, Dartmouth is a superb undergraduate residential college with the intellectual character of a university, featuring thriving ...
Description: The smallest of the Ivy League colleges. Located in Hanover, NH.
Category: Reference > Education > ... > New Hampshire > Dartmouth College
www.dartmouth.edu/ - 16k - Cached - Similar pages
- College and University Home Pages**
College and University Home Pages - Alphabetical Listing (C)Copyright 1995,1996 Christina DeMello. Reproduction and distribution ...
Description: College and University Home Pages - Alphabetical Listing
Category: Reference > Education > Colleges and Universities
www.mit.edu/8001/people/cdemello/univ.html - 4k - Cached - Similar pages
- Boston College Home Page**
Boston College is a private, coeducational Jesuit university with 8500 full-time undergraduates and 4000 graduate students. ...

On the right side of the page, there are several "Sponsored Links" boxes:

- Find a College**
Search 100s of Colleges Near You. Request Free Info from Schools. college-info.org
- College Finder**
Find technical colleges. Select campus location. Get info. technical-schools-colleges.com
- Find College**
Use Smartpages Online Yellow Pages. Search the Phonebook Here! www.smartpages.com
- College Planning / Search**
Going to college online directory. Segmented guide by months/weeks. www.PlansForMe.com
- Looking for a College?**
Request more info on Culinary, Tech, Business, Design and Online Schools. degreeresource.com
- College**
Study part- or full-time, online or on campus - we'll help you choose. CollegeDegreeGuide.com

Bradford School is a career college in Pittsburgh, which for some reason ranks above Pitt-Bradford. If I click on Pitt-Bradford, I can receive more information, and a link to <http://www.upb.pitt.edu>, but, like Xap.com, the information is outdated. Current enrollment is listed as 935, for example.

I was quite underwhelmed with this search – my feeling is that a potential student would look elsewhere. However, I continued on to the Apply Online section, hoping to find some more interesting features. I

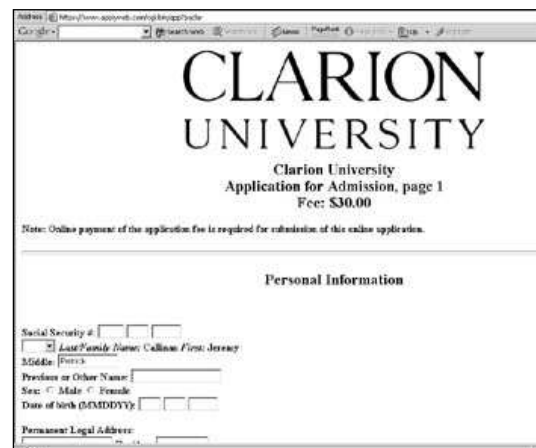


chose to create a customer search within my region, for undergraduate schools that let me apply online. My results here are also strange – schools are listed in alphabetical order, and it seems that there should be a better way to rank search results. I can refine my search by using the drop down, but Xap.com’s percentage rate is more likely to influence a student (especially

considering CollegeNET’s information is outdated also, ranking schools based on tuition seems unfair, it should be noted that contacting these websites and informing them of this fact is imperative).

Remembering that money is the driving force of life, I sort by lowest in state tuition. After I move past all the community colleges, one of the first universities I notice is Clarion University. After I click on Clarion, I am forwarded to a page that allows me to create an account and apply online.

CollegeNet only makes me create this account once, and I can re-use it for more than one application, which is one good feature. However, Clarion’s application looks like it was created without any appreciation for the Internet – it is long and wordy, and goes on for 5 pages, plus I have to pay a \$30.00 application fee.



Just to give Clarion the benefit of the doubt, I visit Mansfield’s CollegeNet application, and also see the same extremely long application. CollegeNet hosts these applications on their site, so they must develop a template for all universities to use.

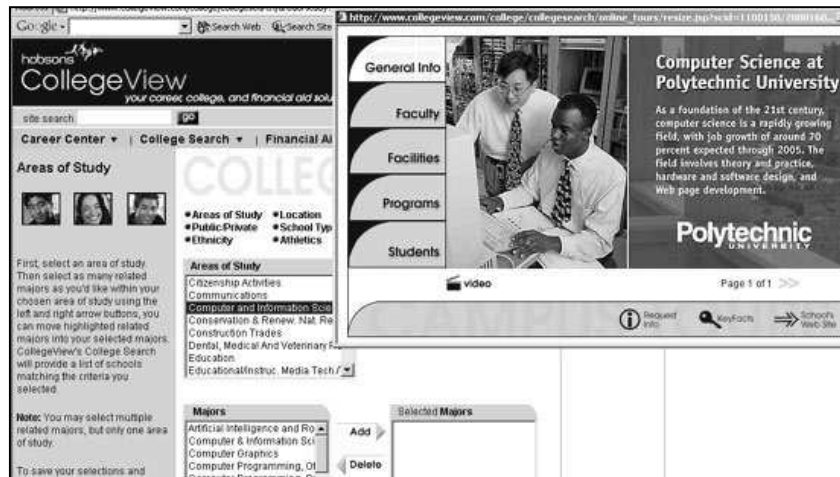
(Note: I visited both Clarion and Mansfield at their own sites; they have separate online applications at there sites also, in a different format. This seems like a maintenance nightmare.)

Collegeview.com

CollegeNet left me with a bad taste in my mouth for college portal sites – I was hoping for something better. I did find it with collegeview.com – a rich, information-packed portal with

searches, personalization, and featured schools (a nice co-branding opportunity). Collegeview.com does not have quite a slick graphic look as Xap.com, but I was impressed with its user interface, speed, and functional design. Even better, the simple fact of me registering for CollegeView allows me a chance to win a \$1,000 scholarship.

I began a search for schools in my region (I used PA and NY), that have Computer Science degrees. As I picked Computer Science from the list as a choice, a popup appeared that showed me a simple tour of a university that offers Computer Science – Polytechnic University (see graphic below).



This is advertising tailored specifically for the user, a perfect example of good use of a website's abilities for personalization. I saw an advertisement for something I was obviously interested in, and it was in a separate window, so I could close it at any time and return to my search, and best of all, it did not hinder my search results.

I found several surprising results. I saw two campuses of the University of Pittsburgh within the top ten– Main Campus and Johnstown, yet Pitt-Bradford was in second to last on the list. As seen in the graphic, these schools are part of the CollegeView network, which allows them to be part of a \$1,000 scholarship promotion.

Search Results
Number of schools :69

request info now! The schools listed in the following section meet your college search criteria and are part of the CollegeView network. Click here to request information from participating schools and be entered to win a \$1,000 scholarship.

	Key Facts	Campus Tour	Request Info	Ask Questions	Web Site	Printable App
Iona College (NY)	🔑	📺	📄	🗨️	➔	
Arcadia University (PA)	🔑	📺	📄		➔	📄
Clarion University of Pennsylvania (PA)	🔑	📺	📄		➔	📄
Lock Haven University - Main Campus (PA)	🔑	📺	📄		➔	📄
SUNY Morrisville (NY)	🔑	📺	📄		➔	
SUNY at Buffalo (NY)	🔑	📺	📄		➔	
Saint Francis University (PA)	🔑	📺	📄		➔	📄
Temple University (PA)	🔑	📺	📄		➔	📄
University of Pittsburgh-Johnstown (PA)	🔑	📺	📄		➔	
University of Pittsburgh-Main Campus (PA)	🔑	📺	📄		➔	📄

The schools listed above meet your college search criteria and are part of the CollegeView network. Click here to request information from participating schools and be entered to win a \$1,000 scholarship.

request info now!

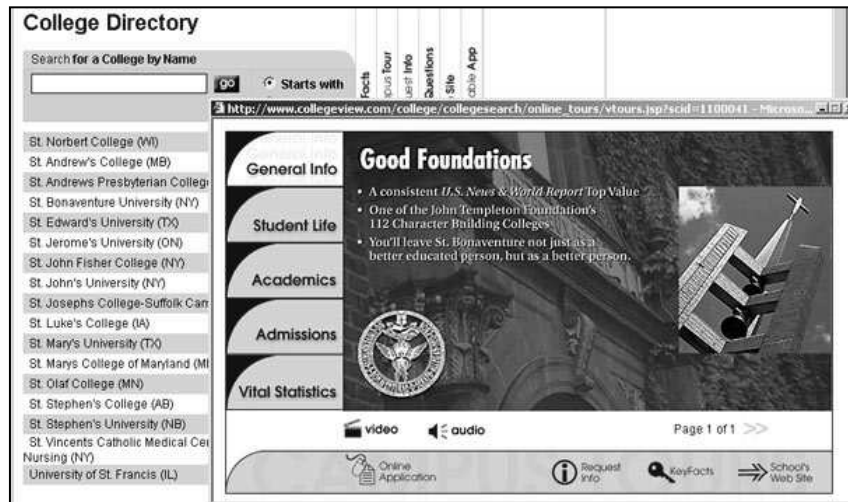
This is the most direct approach to college promotion I have seen on any site –

partnering with CollegeView allows a school a chance to not only be on top of their search results, provide more information to potential students, and be featured on the site, but they can also be a part of a scholarship sweepstakes.

This type of partnership makes the rest of the search results seem meaningless – obviously, any educated person will not choose a school based on that, but, the propensity to view these schools is definitely much higher than any other on the list.

However, oddly enough CollegeView does not have online applications – strange, since the site contains features that other sites have, along with many more. Most colleges do have a printable app available on CollegeView.

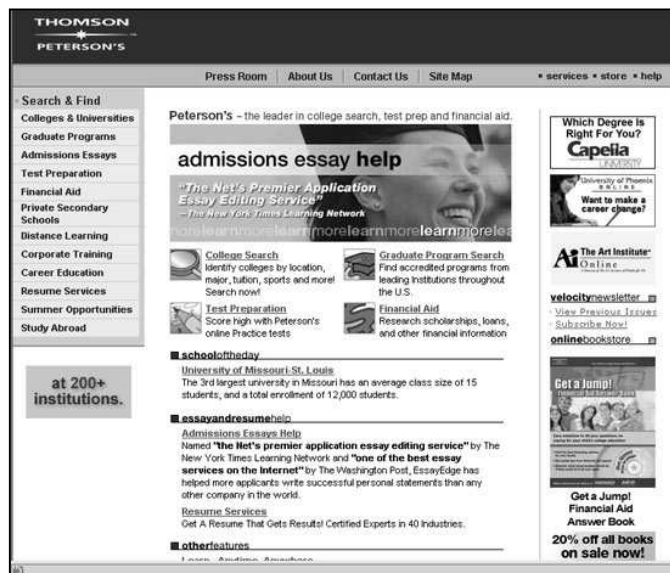
(Note: I also searched for St. Bonaventure, considering it was ranked number 1 on Xap.com, I would also like to see how it fairs on CollegeView. St. Bonaventure did not show up in my original search, so I searched for any school that starts with 'St.'. Bonaventure showed up forth on the list, but with no scholarship incentive. Although, it did offer more information than Pitt-Bradford's listing did – I could view a small tour of the campus information, and go to <http://www.sbu.edu>. St. Bonaventure is not partnered with CollegeView, so I would guess this impacted my results – I had to explicitly look for it on CollegeView, compared to Xap.com.



CollegeView is a Hobsons' product, contact information follows:

Hobsons Office

10200 Alliance Road, Suite 301
Cincinnati, OH 45242
Phone: 800-927-8439
Fax: 800-891-8531



Petersons.com

Petersons.com is the self-proclaimed 'leader in college search, test prep, and financial aid'. Peterson's reaches an estimated 105 million consumers annually with information about colleges and universities, career schools, graduate programs, distance learning, executive training, private secondary schools, summer opportunities, study abroad, financial

aid, test preparation, and career exploration.

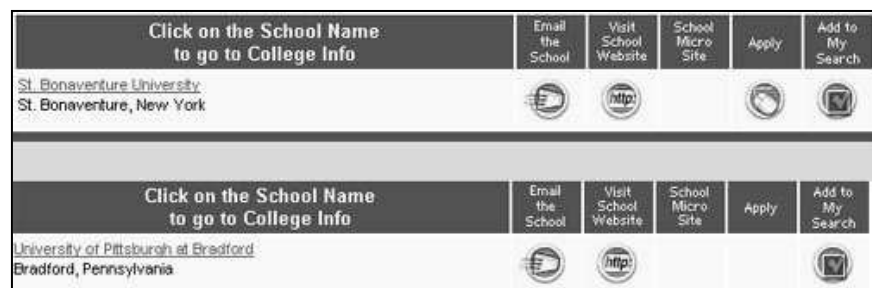
Petersons has a very nice, cleanly designed and fast website. From their abundance of information and help, to their nice graphics, they impart a great sense of respectability and trust due to their name, and establishment (they have been in the business since 1966).

I chose to do a college search, similar to the ones I have done on previous sites. Searching for NY and PA gave me a large alphabetical listing, but with the option to check BestCollegePicks, I could see what Petersons believes as the best picks for me. This was after registering and filling out an extremely long (7-page) survey about me. I attempted to be as 'plain' as possible, listing Computer Analysis as my field of choice.

Petersons would only let me list schools by a section geographically (Middle Atlantic), I was getting a list of schools that did not include our target area as much as I would like. Here are Peterson's recommendations:

1. Clarkson University
2. Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art
3. Johns Hopkins University
4. Lehigh University
5. Polytechnic University, Brooklyn Campus
6. Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
7. Stevens Institute of Technology
8. Union College
9. United States Merchant Marine Academy
10. Virginia Military Institute
11. Webb Institute
12. West Virginia University Institute of Technology

Petersons offers many different options to tweak our results, including school size, tuition rate, and type of school, such as a 'tried & true' name, a smaller 'hometown comfort', etc. Despite my efforts, the closest I could get to Bradford was Grove City. However a direct search for the term



'Bradford' returned Pitt-Bradford as first. I could see information about Pitt-Bradford (outdated just like the rest, enrollment at a steady 935), but I could not click on a button to apply.

However, a search for 'Bonaventure' returned a listing with an 'apply' button, allowing me to go to <http://www.sbu.edu> to directly apply. This is simple addition to Petersons we should inquire about. Beyond this difference, I see no advantage any other school has over Pitt-Bradford in this region on Petersons.com. This is a highly trafficked site, and is well respected by high school guidance counselors and the like (I remember reading information in print and on the web when I was looking at schools after high school that was from Petersons. My guidance counselor also directed me towards them). Here is an opportunity for Pitt-Bradford to partner with a site that does not seem to have any affiliations with anyone in the area.

Petersons also offers section area searches; for example, an 'IT Channel' with information about Information Technology schools and 2-year programs. I searched for a 2-year IS program in Pennsylvania, however there was no mention of Pitt-Bradford's 2-year program. This is another hole that should be filled.

P.S. – Google's rankings

I happened to notice the extremely high rankings of some official college sites when searching the web using simple terms like 'college' and so forth; I believe this is due to the following factors:

- The amount of pages Dartmouth has on their site; more pages equals better relevance, according to Google and most other modern search engines
- Updating of pages; fresher pages also equals better relevance, according to Google and most other modern search engines
- The importance of pages linking to this page – this is the core of Google's PageRank, which is what makes pages show up first in the search results

To replicate Dartmouth results, I would recommend:

- Encourage student to use their pitt.edu space, with links to Pitt-Bradford
- Encourage increased usage of the website for posting information, and insure timely updating
- Encourage professors to post research / tutorials / exhibits of students work / etc. – it is this kind of information that helps the PageRank also
- Encourage linking to other important sites and pages on the Internet
- Make sure that other sites link back to us, and encourage college sites to have correct information on Pitt-Bradford, along with links to our home page, online application, virtual tour, etc.

Summary

In my adventures in college website land, I learned many things:

- There is a lot of information available for potential students.
- Most of the data (like school size and tuition) are incorrect, in some cases severely outdated, unless you are looking at Harvard or Yale.
- Most of the text and information about schools is lifted straight from promotional information provided to the websites; I recognized the text about Pitt-Bradford instantly as lifted from the website in some cases, and brochures in others.
- Lots of sites make it easy to compare schools, and based on the site's ratings, Pitt-Bradford isn't looking as attractive as close alternatives.
- These sites are not extremely interested in being fair and having accurate information, unless you are their 'partner'. At Pitt-Bradford, we accept applications online, yet, there is no mention or availability of that according to the sites I visited. There is not even a link to a PDF.
- After some disclosure of personal information, it is pretty easy to apply online. As a potential student, I would be ready to do this in trade for the opportunity to apply online. If I was living in this area and could choose any school, I am apt to pick one that I can apply to easily. Being able to apply online, and learn a lot of information on a school online at one of these sites, would impact my decisions to a great degree.

- It is important for Pitt-Bradford to recognize and keep an eye on these sites and other like them; in the information age, they can greatly skew a person's attitude towards an institution.


Section 3 Official University Websites

After my observations, it is clear that there are many universities taken advantage of the potential leads that college websites offer. I figured that visiting the actual college sites would be the next possible point of interest a potential student would have. According to my searches, and the geographical area around our university, I created a list of potential websites to visit:

St. Bonaventure	http://www.sbu.edu
University at Buffalo	http://www.buffalo.edu
Jamestown Community College	http://www.sunycc.edu
Clarion	http://www.clarion.edu
University of Pittsburgh at Bradford	http://www.upb.pitt.edu
SUNY Fredonia	http://www.fredonia.edu
Alfred University	http://www.alfred.edu
Penn-State Behrend	http://www.pserie.psu.edu
Mercyhurst	http://www.mercyhurst.edu
Villa Maria	http://www.villa.edu
Edinboro	http://www.edinboro.edu

I evaluated each with the following points:

- overall look – ease of use, professionalism in design
- functionality – what can I do, personalization
- advertising – what do these universities do, and what do they feature on their site
- final rating – a rating of the universities overall efforts, either (A,B,C,D,F)

<p>St. Bonaventure St. Bonaventure is a Catholic university in the 750-year-old Franciscan tradition of learning. A regional University with a national reputation, the University is committed to developing tomorrow's leaders in an environment shaped by Franciscan values.</p> <p>Statistics Enrollment: 2,200 undergraduate, 650 graduate Faculty: 147 full-time; faculty/student ratio is 1:17 Majors/Programs: 31 undergraduate majors; 29 graduate programs Residence Life: 74% of students live on campus Athletics: NCAA Division I - Atlantic 10 Conference</p>	
<p>Overall look</p>	<p>A-; clean and easy to use, the page layout changed a bit too much from page to page, did not mention a consistent look throughout site</p>
<p>Functionality</p>	<p>B; nothing much besides information; one good feature is the search engine provided by http://www.academicengine.com/</p>
<p>Advertising</p>	<p>A; St. Bonaventure promotes very well, the information on their website is effective, and they must be working with some college websites also</p>

Final rating	A; an overhaul of their website to get everything in order is due, but beyond that, they are doing well
Comments	The search engine was innovate, should try something like that here

<p>University at Buffalo</p> <p>The University at Buffalo is New York's premier public center for graduate and professional education and the states largest and most comprehensive public university. A member of the prestigious Association of American Universities, the University at Buffalo stands in the first rank among the nation's research-intensive public universities.</p>	
Overall look	A; clean and easy to use, the page layout was consistent, nice to look at, and easy to read; the home page was excellent
Functionality	A; good search engine, and includes access to myUB, a portal for faculty staff and students; many web cams also
Advertising	A; Buffalo does a good job of making their school appear like a place that students want to be at.
Final rating	A; not any real faults
Comments	The home page and general site layout was excellent. This is one of the best university sites I have seen

<p>Jamestown Community College</p> <p>Jamestown Community College, founded in 1950 as a predominantly transfer, liberal arts oriented institution, was among the first community colleges within the State University of New York.</p> <p>The college has grown from an enrollment of 169 students attending classes at Jamestown High School to an enrollment of over 4,000 in a multi-campus institution.</p>	
Overall look	C; this site looks like it was designed in 1997 and carried through
Functionality	C; no search engine, just a list of links, only interaction or unique function was the web cam to see Cattaraugus campus work being done
Advertising	C; no real look to site, after a few minutes of browsing, many pages looked like simple text with some pictures thrown in
Final rating	C; no real reason to visit site
Comments	No real reason to visit here

Clarion

Clarion University of Pennsylvania, part of the State System of Higher Education, has a record of Investing in Lifetimes since 1867 and provides a safe environment with excellent facilities, resources, and services.

A comprehensive multi-purpose university committed to teaching, Clarion University offers more than 90 academic programs, including 78 bachelor's degree programs and 11 graduate programs leading to master's degrees in biology, business administration, communication, education, English, science education, special education, and library science. Students at the Venango Campus can earn a Bachelor and/or Masters of Science in Nursing or an associate's degree in seven areas.



Overall look	B; site design was fairly clean and nice, but the pages had too Spartan of a look for 2003
Functionality	A; iClarion portal for students, students can apply, pay, and access courses online
Advertising	B; no real look to site, after a few minutes of browsing, many pages looked like simple text with some pictures thrown in – similar to JCC,
Final rating	B; the functionality is there, the layout and look needs improvement
Comments	There is real potential for a A-class site here

University of Pittsburgh at Bradford

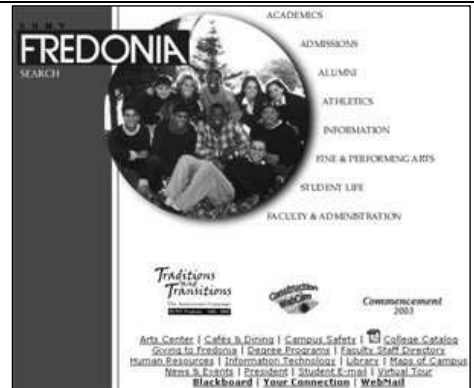
The University of Pittsburgh at Bradford is a distinguished undergraduate college offering 26 baccalaureate degrees and 12 professional programs. Students can also choose from 37 minors, two associate degrees, credential programs in education and nursing, or a number of one-year certificate programs.



Overall look	A; site is designed well, and same layout is carried through site evenly
Functionality	B; search engine is fair, web cams; virtual tour is good, links to accessing student information online. Need to highlight the portal better, and include some video
Advertising	B; definite look to site, but considering Pitt-Bradford showing on college sites, needs improvement
Final rating	A-; nice functional, clean site, still room for improvement
Comments	Homepage may need some reworking, starting to look a bit cluttered

SUNY Fredonia

Recognized by U.S. News and World Report as one America's best comprehensive colleges, and by Kiplinger's Personal Finance Magazine as one of the top 100 public college and university values in the nation, Fredonia offers academic programs that reflect traditional liberal arts disciplines, as well as innovative career and professional options. The Fredonia campus is located in Western New York where a variety of intellectual, cultural, social, and athletic opportunities are an important part of campus life.



Overall look	C; this site looks like it was designed in 1997 and carried through
Functionality	C; simple search engine not much else besides the standard web mail; possibly a portal, called 'Your Connection', but no information on contents
Advertising	C; no real look to site, although they do highlight their U.S News ranking
Final rating	C; no real reason to visit site
Comments	No real reason to visit here

Alfred University

Alfred University is a private, nonsectarian university, and one of the first coeducational institutions in the US. Alfred University is the #1 "Best Value" in New York State among comparable institutions, according to U.S. News and World Report's annual college guide, "America's Best Colleges."



Overall look	B; site design is a bit too simple, although pages do load fast and all functionality is correct
Functionality	A; search engine works well, web cams, students online journals, virtual tour is excellent,
Advertising	A; no real look to site, but a nice, welcoming atmosphere abound
Final rating	A-; site design needs something to make it stand apart, but everything else is exceptional
Comments	Students keeping online journals is an innovate way to connect potential students to perspective, and to get students involved

Penn-State Behrend

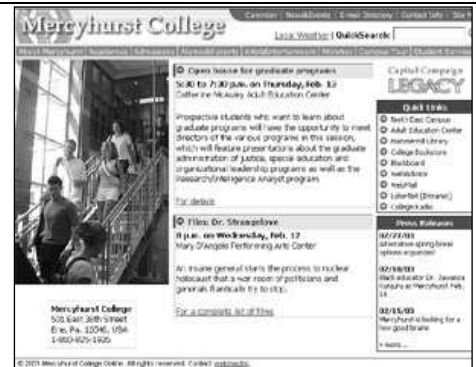
Penn State Behrend has offered four-year degrees for more than twenty-five years. Today, students can choose from twenty-nine baccalaureate majors and nineteen minors, five associate degree programs, a Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.) degree, and a Master of Manufacturing Systems Engineering degree (M.ENG.).



Overall look	A; they are just completing a site redesign, and the new look is good
Functionality	C; search engine, but I could not find much else, no tour, or any other interactive elements
Advertising	B; nice site look, and the content is easy to read and nicely supplemented
Final rating	B+; no real reason to visit site unless needing information, and not much reason to come back
Comments	No real reason to visit here, although they could be working on some new elements considering their recent site redesign

Mercyhurst

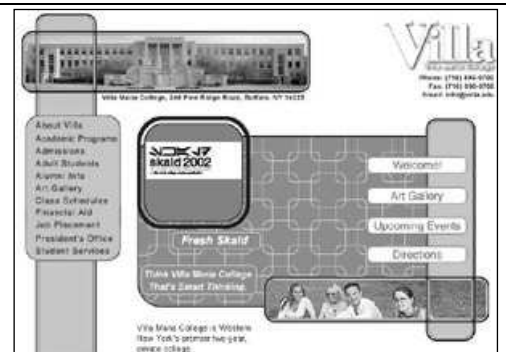
Mercyhurst College is a Catholic institution steeped in the liberal arts tradition. In the past two decades of the Third Spring, Mercyhurst has become one of the 20 top private liberal arts college in the North and the second largest Mercy college in America. It has grown its student body to a record 3,600 students, its faculty to 150, its endowment to \$12 million and its budget to \$60 million.



Overall look	A; nice clean look, fast, consistent
Functionality	C; search engine works very well, live broadcasts of college radio station available, ability to fill out survey about the site on any page, Blackboard available, and WebAdvisor (some kind of student information site)
Advertising	C; nothing exciting, but site was good looking and functional, but I have seen no advertisement for Mercyhurst on any college site, nor any extra information about them
Final rating	B; no real reason to visit site
Comments	Functionality to fill out survey about site was interesting

Villa Maria

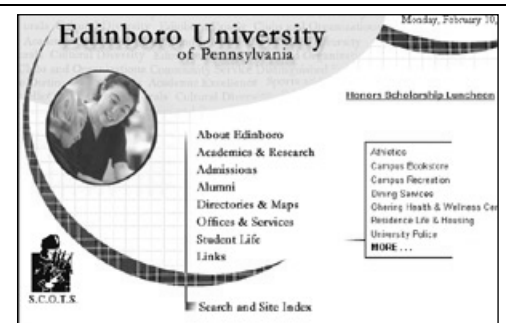
Villa Maria College is Western New York's premier private two-year college for both traditional and non-traditional students. Based in the Catholic and Franciscan tradition, Villa Maria College provides a holistic approach to higher education, addressing each student's intellectual, vocational, and spiritual needs



Overall look	B; strange design for a web site, looks more like a children's book
Functionality	C; no search engine, no interaction, 1995-97 functionality at best
Advertising	C; site does not look professional – at least not the look a professional would typically give a college site
Final rating	C; no real reason to visit site, strangest design seen so far
Comments	No real reason to visit here

Edinboro

Edinboro University, located in Edinboro, Pennsylvania, was founded by Scottish settlers in 1857 as a private teaching school. It was accredited as a public university in 1983 and is now a member of Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education. Edinboro University currently enrolls about 7,000 students and offers approximately 100 associate, baccalaureate and master's degree programs.



Overall look	B; a bit too simple, although fast and functional
Functionality	A-; they have a student portal, search, etc., all the typical functions for students, but nothing extra, and it is hard to find some features
Advertising	C; the site contains no real promotion, just simple information and not many real features to justify usage
Final rating	B-; nothing that was horrible, but not enough good content or exceptional features to warrant a higher grade
Comments	Was expecting more

Conclusion

From a review of close competitors, it seems that Pitt-Bradford ranks second. University at Buffalo tops us in several ways:

- Advertising: from the UB site, I could feel a sense that a lot of interesting projects were happening there; we can replicate this to a degree here
- Layout: UB's home page packs a lot of information in a small area, without looking congested.
- Functionality: they do not have any big improvements over us, but they promote and allow access to their online facilities in a better way

Section 4 Recommendations

- Implement a pilot online advertising program through Google (using relevant keywords) to gauge the college student's usage of this search engine in direct reference to the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford.
- Sustain reasonably quick turnover rates on the editing of key pages on the site, and the creation of new features; thus to keep the University's site current, and attractive to web crawlers.
- Continue evaluation of competitor's websites and online advertising efforts, gleaning lists of best practices and innovative ideas
- Implement improvements to the Pitt-Bradford site to move it to number one in ranking