



Southwestern College



Website Optimization

Strategy - November 4, 2020





Purpose

- Complete Phase 1 of the Project (Strategy)
- Share findings and recommendations to inform remaining 4 phases, with an emphasis on Phase 2
- Level set around what we need to do, and compare to what is outlined in scope to prioritize and distribute efforts

Covered in the Report

- Background
- Findings + Recommendations
- Scope Considerations
- Q + A
- Next Steps



Background *30,00 foot view*

Discovery Inputs

- Pre-Project Questionnaire
- Stakeholder Interviews and Web Ambassador inputs
- [Student Surveys](#)
- MyPath brief overview
- [Analytics audit](#)
- [Personas](#)
- [Customer Journey](#) [focused on Continuing Ed persona tasks]
- [User Testing](#) [focused on persona tasks related to the Non-Traditional Prospective Student and Continuing Ed Student]



Project Goals

- Find ways in which the website can better **support students** as they **register and enroll**
- Improve **access to services and resources** that will help students **complete their educational goals**



Findings + Recommendations



Overarching Takeaways

- The majority of prospective students have decided that they want to go to SWC and are looking for guidance and clear Calls-to-Action (CTAs) to help them transact.
- The biggest issue related to the project goals seems to be around how to present clear, prioritized, and trustworthy information to a multitude of audiences who are at varying stages in their educational journey.
- **Content, Context,** and **Consistency** seem to be the major challenges, and the current decentralized workflow without an overarching editor does not help.
- Some of the anecdotal information we received from interviews was contradicted by user testing (i.e., ability to find How to Apply and Priority Registration info).



Overarching Takeaways (continued)

- While quite a few internal stakeholders commented on the improvement of the site's Search function after SWC removed pages from the 2018 site redesign, student testing showed that students typically relied on the primary navigation bar to find the information they sought.
- The website cannot fix everything; students appreciate the added confidence of connecting with a counselor online (via chat, email, phone) to validate that the information they have is correct, or to inform the most relevant next steps..
- The current scope addresses most of the recommendations, however, there are some that we think may require SWC to make some changes.



Overarching Themes across Discovery

- Missing guidance (CTAs, links, context)
- Information is repeated across the site
- Hierarchy at the site map level AND page level does not support what students seek
- There is content missing or unfindable
- Content that is valued internally seems to be prioritized over what students seek
- Unfamiliar labels and terminology



Interviews + Surveys



Faculty & Staff Interviews

- Most students seek purely transactional information (only about 20% still deciding if SWC is right for them; and about 50% who consult counselors speak Spanish).
- Helpful Information for Students:
 - Apply is critical but not obvious from the homepage; needs to be more prominent
 - Fields of Study video on Programs and Academics page
 - Info on [Student Services and Campus Resources page](#) but students can't always find it; same with Priority Registration
 - Catalog has the best layout and is the most reliable source of information
 - MyPath checklist (which counselors use)
- Getting to Continuing Ed page isn't easy:
 - Most students who take Continuing Ed classes don't realize that "Continuing Ed" is what they seek.
 - They don't understand all of the labels (i.e., fee-based classes, credit vs. non-credit, community service classes, etc.) until after they get to the Continuing Ed page. All they know is SWC offers a class that they want to study.
 - "I live in the SWC community" button on the homepage doesn't seem right either.
 - MyPath will not include non-credit classes once it goes live and for the foreseeable future



Faculty & Staff Interviews

- Seek more help from the Web Team (recognize that Web Team needs to expand its staff)
 - Many expressed concerns about students not finding information because they weren't presenting the information on the site correctly / intuitively from the student's perspective.
 - The staff's comfort level is higher with small edits (like copy and date changes) but several expressed interest in being able to customize their pages more to tailor to their audiences' needs.
 - Some programs use outside sites because the swccd.edu doesn't allow them to do what they want (example: [Architecture Program](#)).
 - Some pages are out-of-date.
 - Staff do not feel qualified to update the website. They fear that they are doing it wrong.
 - It is especially challenging to update the site when you don't do it all the time; it requires refresher training.
 - Several mentioned wanting more guidance: "sometimes there is too much freedom that I don't know where to start" and others mentioned wishing the web team was larger and able to do more instead of having it be their responsibility.
 - Information on the [San Ysidro](#) page not reflective of all that the Subject Matter Expert (SME) wants to include

“We know the content we need to provide, but we don’t know how to present the information and there is even more pressure on us to get the info right on the website since more students need to get everything online [due to COVID.]”

— SWC Staff Member



Faculty & Staff Interviews

- The homepage does not seem to be directed at the Continuing Ed Student.
- Almost everyone mentioned their dislike of the sizing (too large) and amount of scrolling (too much).
- A few mentioned inconsistency and duplication of pages as causing confusion. For example, Photography and Digital Imaging Program was cited as a program that yields different results via search - [Career Education version](#) or [main page](#) - students get confused (catalog as single source of truth)



Faculty & Staff Ambassador Notes

- **Biggest obstacles to students being able to register or enroll -**
 - Duplicate pages / repeated information
 - Understanding placements and prerequisites
 - Information in Spanish
- **Biggest blockers to students knowing what they need to know to meet their educational goals -**
 - Access to counselors
 - Not all know what counselors do
 - Non-credit students have even less knowledge about counseling and education planning
 - Accessing tutors and other resources to help them be successful
- **How students usually find resources they need -**
 - Word of mouth
 - Social media
 - Students would rather call than read the website
 - If they are savvy, students would do a site search; if not, they ask someone for help



Student interviews

- Students are very focused on what they need at that particular point in their journey.
- When current students thought back to when they were prospective students, they indicated that they were seeking the info they needed first, and THEN stories and testimonials on homepage.
- Several indicated that it would have been nice to have a basic starter pack on the homepage, but indicated that it would be difficult to create one for each different scenario. One student suggested having a “I don’t know where to start” button on the homepage.
- Most current students do not use the main site anymore; they use MySWC instead; a few mentioned that there are useful app links in MySWC.



Student Surveys

“What makes something easily accessible for one person could be confusing to others”

- SWC Current Student

- **22** responses
- **35%** under age of 21
- **86%** planning on transferring to 4-year school
- **28%** thought info was straightforward and had no issues back when they had applied
- **52%** did not know anything about Jaguar Pathways
- **63%** said Jaguar Pathways are not easily understood on the website

For more details, view the [Current Student Survey Summary](#)



Biggest Apply / Enroll Challenges

- **Cannot find someone to ask for more info: 32%**
- Don't know how the information relates to their specific needs: 28%
- Don't know what they're looking for: 18%
- Don't understand the information on the site: 14%
- Can't find information they're looking for: 9%

Biggest Blockers Knowing What to Do to Meet Educational Goals

- **Don't understand the different steps to complete tasks / educational goals: 37%**
- Can't find someone to contact to ask more information: 28%
- Don't know how the information relates to their specific needs: 14%
- Don't know what they're looking for: 9%
- Don't understand the information on the site: 9%
- Can't find the information they're looking for: 5%

Students wished they knew more about

- **Degree Requirements: 19%**
- Career Info (job placement, which courses to take for specific career): 14%
- More specific info about Programs: 7% (two mentions of Nursing)

How the site can help with challenges

- **Make Chat readily and consistently available** - allows students to confirm that they understand correctly what to do next
- **Prioritizing steps** involving what students need to do based upon who they are and where they are in the process

For more details, view the [Current Student Summary](#)



*“Student aid was not too hard to find or apply but it would be nice if there was **more information on what is available and once you have those resources how to keep them.**”*

*“**Simple phrases** like ‘course lookup’ **about obvious basic things a student should get to know** about with descriptions like ‘enter a class name, code, or number to browse class descriptions, credit, hours, cost, and teachers available.’”*

*“If there were a tab that was easily accessible to **find all of the classes needed to take to transfer**, that would be great. All the information is there; it’s just hard to find.”*

*““Help **lead students to courses they must take**. Also there needs to be more **focus on finding counselors** for students.”*

*“A lot of students **don’t know what classes to take and how the different degrees / programs benefit them.**”*

*“It’s a college so the abundance of information needed is a lot so there will be people who get tired of looking for it. Maybe an emphasis on priorities in accordance to importance by categories and sub sections will help if topics are labeled with **‘What you should be looking for.’**”*

- SWC Current Students



Customer Journey



Casey Prospective Continuing
Education Student

From the perspective of a **Continuing Ed Student**

Cover the points of ease & difficulty along the path of discovering, registering, and paying for courses from persona's POV

Focus on ESL courses, with exploration of other non-credit courses

Explore thought process around transitioning from non-credit to credit



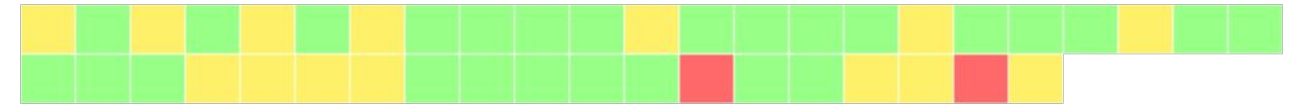
Customer Journey Findings

- Each of the 4 journeys is made up of the tasks that the **prospective continuing education student** persona had to accomplish
- Each step in each journey corresponds to a square, color-coded:
 - Green = easy
 - Yellow = less easy / a reason to pause
 - Red = a stopping point or failure

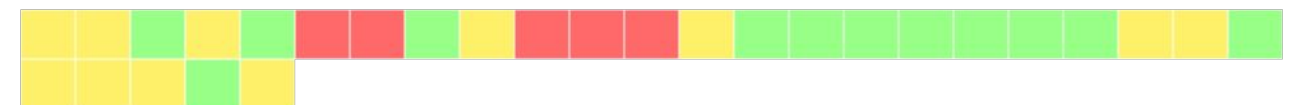
From the overview to the right, you can see that there is **less difficulty around getting student support and finding ESL courses.** There is **more difficulty around hearing from students & faculty and learning about the transition to degree programs.**

[User Journey Map – Full Report](#)

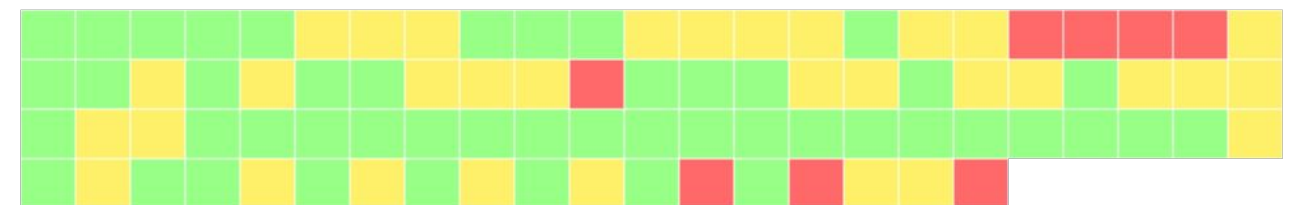
1. Find ESL classes and understand their logistics & important details



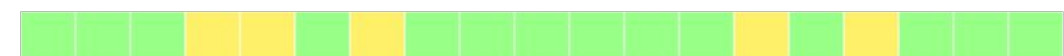
2. Hear about students and faculty in the program



3. Learn about the transition to degree programs



4. Find out about student support





Related Recommendations

The customer journey focused on the experience of a prospective continuing education student, so all of the recommendations are focused within this area of the site.

- Modify the current Continuing Education page to better guide new students to the right place
- Modify the sitemap and add pages about the following:
 - Information or highlights of the instructors & other students in continuing ed
 - Support & services available to continuing ed students
 - Information & processes about the transition from non-credit to credit (including guidance around how to find out about programs)

iFactory's scope includes modifying the sitemap, but does not currently include the creation of these pages



Related Recommendations (continued)

On helping students find the Continuing Education section of the site:

- Modify homepage “I live in the SWC community” button language to better prioritize continuing education / non-credit classes
- Add guided CTAs & cross-links to important pages which may catch sideways visitors (for example: “Classes & Registration”)

iFactory's scope does not include the addition of these CTAs & links



User Testing



User Testing Findings

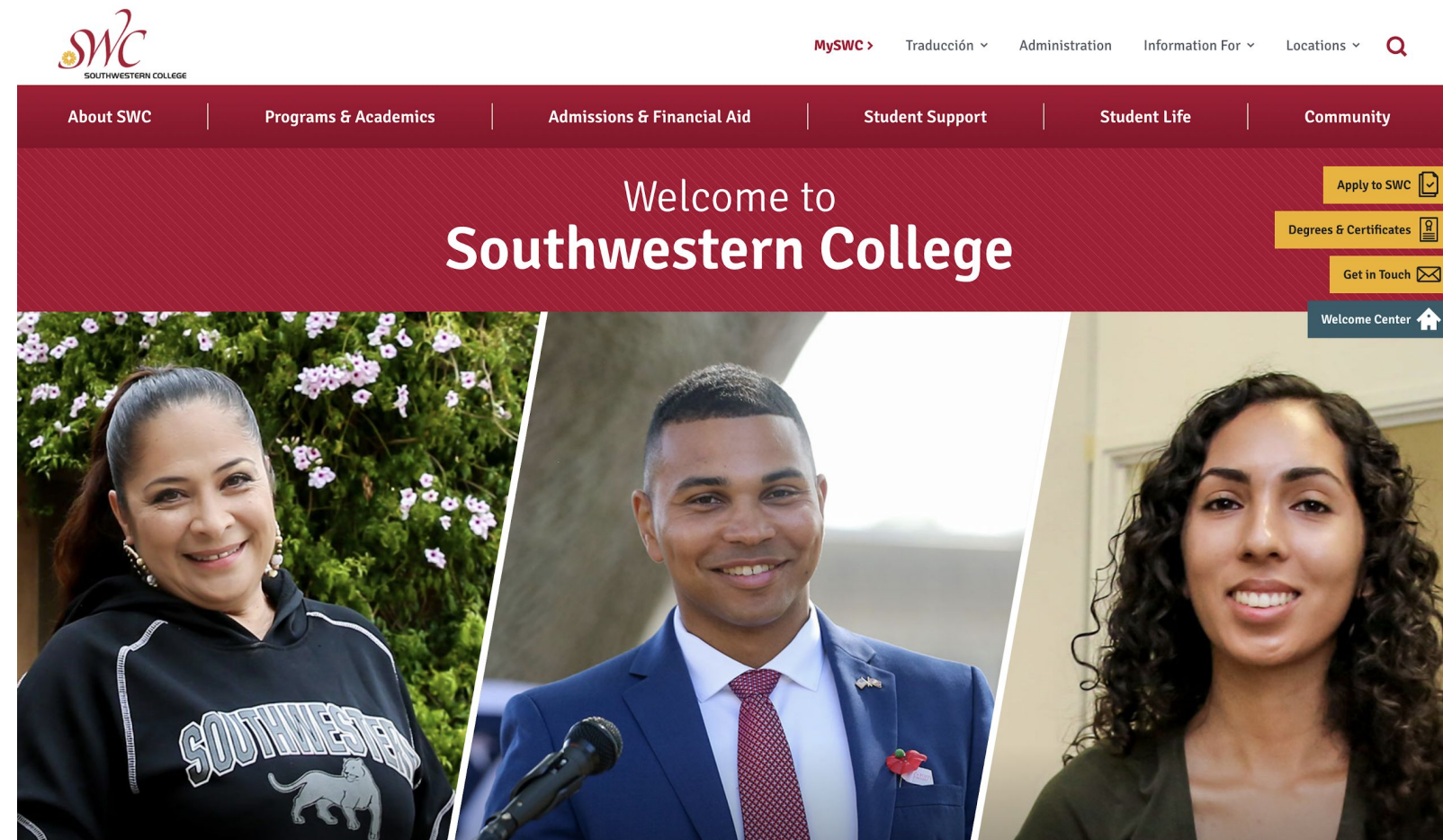
8 participants total

- 4 were told to approach the test as a current student
- 4 were told to approach the test as a prospective student
- There was a variety of experience levels, with some participants starting their first semester at SWC, while others were going on their 3rd year taking classes.

Findings are split into 3 sections:

- Current students overall feedback
- “Prospective” student overall feedback
- Main takeaways for each task

[User Testing + Usability Full Report](#)





Overall: **Current Students**

- All 4 participants relied on the main menu navigation to get around
 - No one used interior navigation – only in-context links & buttons
 - Search was the very last resort, and only used when prompted
- If a page was visible in the main navigation, it was easy for every participant to find
- Participants mentioned being easily overwhelmed by pages with lots of text or lists of links without context
 - All relied on skimming for keywords



Overall: “Prospective” Students

- Most participants who saw the homepage mentioned it felt too long + were confused by the 3 stories at the top
- None of the participants used the Fields of Study or individual pathway pages unless prompted
 - All participants went straight to the Degrees & Certificates page
- Program information was easy to find, but was missing content that students wanted to see
- None of the participants were able to find information on transferring into SWC with prior college credits



User Testing: **Main Takeaways**

- The homepage has the right content on it, but the order of the content should be modified to put task-based components first.
- Finding degrees is easy on the site; however, the current setup ignores the pathways structure. The program pages themselves need more context and less repeated information.
- Getting to application information is straightforward, but the content on the page needs to be re-ordered to put priority content first.
- Getting to costs information is straightforward, but the content on the page needs to be more visible to make it easier to find.
- While the content on the online support page is good, getting to this page could be tricky, whether attempted through the menu or through other links.



User Testing: **Main Takeaways** (continued)

- Finding information about transferring out of SWC is straightforward, though the content is not guided. Finding information about transferring credits in to SWC was not possible for those who tried.
- Getting to the Priority Registration page is easy, but the content on the page is out of order.
- It was simple to get to general tutoring information, but for students looking for specific help, it was much more difficult to find this information.
- It was simple to get to counseling information, and the content on the page was what users wanted to see.
- It was simple to get to general health services information, but looking for specific information was more tricky for users.
- It was difficult for users to find information about clubs on campus.



User Testing: **Related Recommendations**

In scope for iFactory:

- Homepage
 - Move the 3 stories further down the page
 - Create guided CTA block that lives in the hero area
- Exploring degrees
 - Create a new Pathways landing page (a template for each Pathway, listing its programs)
 - Restructure the Degrees & Certificates page to put more emphasis on exploring degrees by pathway/career
 - Create a new Program page template to eliminate redundant information and include what students want to see
- Sitemap updates
 - Move the “Online Learning” page to live directly under “Student Support” in the sitemap



User Testing: **Related Recommendations** (continued)

SWC does on their own:

- **How to Apply**
 - Move “How to Apply” information to be first on the page
 - Cross-link to info about picking a program/pathway
- **Costs**
 - Re-organize this page to eliminate the accordions. Use a table to show costs instead, and calculate them for the student, rather than make them do the math themselves
 - Use accordions to organize information that may be specific to individual audience types. Keep general information visible on the page
- **Online Support**
 - Create more context on the “More Services” page to ensure students do not get overwhelmed by lists of links
- **Transfer Information**
 - Restructure Transfer Center page to include information from PDFs & presentations on the page
 - Include a link on Transfer Students page to catch users who may be looking to transfer in to SWC
- **Priority Registration**
 - Ensure that the first content on the page is about how to get priority registration
- **Tutoring Information**
 - Reorder page to have links to specific tutoring types at the top
 - Make sure that there is information on how to sign up for tutoring step-by-step
- **Mental Health Resources**
 - Ensure there are clear links to the different resources Health Services provides
- **Clubs & Activities**
 - Modify the Student Activities page to highlight the different activities in a more visual way
 - Include all clubs and activities as a list on the site, which is linked to from this page



Analytics



Key Findings

- The three top landing pages from the Homepage support your goals: **Apply, Class Schedule, and Degrees & Certificates.**
- Your **overall bounce rate (57.80%) is higher than the average** for Jobs & Education, which is 54.42%. This indicates you may want to do more with calls to action or create more compelling content that encourages users to click on more than one page before they leave.
- As far as traffic sources go between 2019 and 2020, your **organic search percentage (49.8%) is lower than the norm.** Organic search is usually the biggest traffic driver to higher ed, at 61%. When your organic search percentage is low, it may mean that Google hasn't indexed all of your site or that your site's content isn't aligning with your users' search terms.
- Some of your pages are taking too long to load and three of your pages related to supporting students are well over the 3-second advisory:
 - [California Dream Act:](#) 69.35
 - [How to Apply:](#) 41.40
 - [LGBTQAI+ Resources:](#) 41.00



Related Recommendations

When you are thinking of what to track, once the key landing pages have been revised, remember:

- Analytics can go as deep as you want, which is a double-edged sword.
- Beware tracking so much data that the data grows meaningless.
- As with governance, start simple and expand based on what you can handle.

We've seen recommendations for businesses to track only 10 metrics at a time. Higher education is a different beast, but consider what information best serves your stakeholders.

This information could help you consider next steps:

- For your implementation pages, you will want to consider where you want users to go next.
- Make sure those paths are obvious to the user.
- Then set up tracking (either button clicks, or clicks on external links) to gather metrics and figure out if users are finding what they need.



Scope Considerations

Project Phases + Needs

- **Phase 1 - Strategy**
 - Collect data from Interviews, journey mapping + usability testing to inform recommendations (strategy report) for Phase 2 - Implementation. Also, update Personas and add 2 new ones
- **Phase 2 - Implementation [refer to slides 38 + 39 for specifics]**
 - Updates to Sitemap
 - Review + update Homepage (design + development limited per scope)
 - Review + update 2 Current Page Templates (dev not included per scope)
 - Design of 2 Pathways Templates (over two rounds)
 - Development of 2 Pathways Templates (capped at 43 hours)
 - Development of Site Governance Model
 - Functional Spec of Pathways pages only

Phase Two: Implementation Page Recommendations

In scope:

- Homepage – modify
- Pathway Landing page – create new template
- Program page – create new template
- Degrees & Certificates page – modify
- Continuing Education page – modify

SWC does on their own:

- How to Apply page – modify
- Tuition & Fees page – modify
- More Services page – modify
- Transfer Students page – modify
- Priority Registration page – modify
- Tutoring page – modify
- Health Services page – modify
- Student Activities page – modify
- Classes & Registration page – modify

Phase Two: Sitemap Updates

- Move Online Learning Support page to live under student support
- Modify the sitemap and add pages about the following in the Continuing Education section:
 - Information or highlights of the instructors in continuing ed
 - Stories or information around what it's like to be a continuing ed student
 - Information & processes about the transition from non-credit to credit (including guidance around how to find out about programs)

QUESTION: Are there other pages that Southwestern's team can identify that need to get moved in the sitemap, based on best practice / the themes identified in this report? If so, we can account for those changes to the sitemap as well.

Project Phases + Needs

- **Phase 5 - Copywriting**
 - TBD, but we have 33 hours of time to support copywriting needs.
- **Phase 3 - Learning**
 - Data and Analytics Review on the updated site. TBD if there is flexibility regarding timing on this phase.
- **Phase 4 - Transfer**
 - iFactory to hold a town hall. TBD as to when this might be beneficial or if needed. Potential to shift hours elsewhere.



Summary

- A lot of progress has been made by the SWC team already to support students on their educational journey by removing extraneous pages, investing in chat features and added counselor support, and the upcoming MyPath tool.
- There is still more to do around clarifying user flows across key pages, as well as optimizing key landing pages associated with these flows.
- The recommendations in this report address all three primary goals (onboarding students, supporting students, and clarifying educational goals), and most of the recommendations are covered in scope.
- Some work for SWC to do - especially around Phase 2 Implementation
- We recommend that SWC revisit staffing needs as we collectively revisit governance
- While this report informs rest of the project, there is still more for us to learn in Phase 2 (Implementation) that will inform the remaining phases' specific needs.



Q+A

A background image of a sparkler exploding against a dark blue night sky, with many bright sparks and light trails. The text 'Next Steps' is overlaid in white.

Next Steps

- SWC approves Strategy Recommendations, 11/9
- Based on approval, iFactory to start Sitemap updates, R1 Pathways templates, and Homepage modifications, 11/10
- Based on approval, SWC/iFactory to reach out to OU to start scoping discussion