

Statewide Communications Committee: Report to Council, April 2023

Since our report to Council in January, in which we outlined our short-term and long-term goals, the Statewide Communications Committee has focused our efforts on website design, including the Unit 17 campaign website and the redesign for ucaft.org. I am pleased to report that many of the internal communications issues identified in our previous report to council have been resolved and that, thanks to the leadership of our Executive Board, regular statewide emails to members are being sent. According to the available data from Action Network, which we have formally adopted as our primary email communications platform, we are consistently getting open rates of 40% and above – a significant improvement that indicates those emails are being well received. We are also making steady progress on the Unit 17 campaign website towards our goal of launching in June.

This report, accordingly, will focus on the Communications Committee’s biggest project at the moment: the redesign of our union’s website, ucaft.org. Since our January meeting, we have convened conversations about the website with a variety of constituencies, including the Executive Board, the staff, and campus leaders. We also conducted a [cross-campus survey](#), which we encourage all members of this body to complete if they haven’t already. Below, we offer our preliminary findings from that survey and update about how are plans for the redesign are taking shape.

Proposal to Redesign UCAFT.org

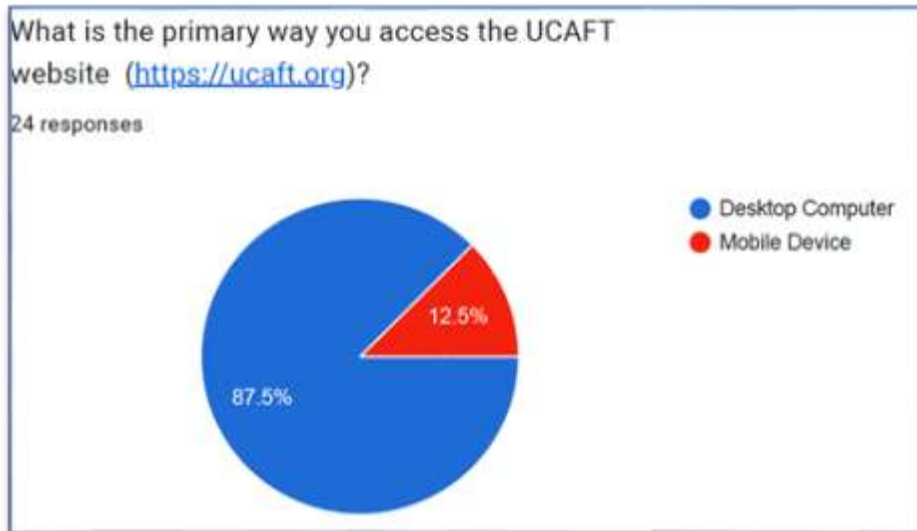
Preliminary Assessment: Where We are Now

In our preliminary meeting with our webmaster—Julia Van Der Wyck, who designed ucaft.org — the urgency of this redesign was made clear: our current website is built on the Droople 7 platform, which is going to be “end of life-d” soon. This means that there will not be any more security updates issued, that the site will start to break, and that we will have to pay at a premium to make necessary security patches and upgrades. The information available on the current site also raises some security concerns—for example, the listing of our elected officers’ personal emails may be, in part, why we’re having so many issues with spam—and includes some information that is now quite outdated like profiles of members who no longer work at UC. For these reasons alone, the time for an update to the site is long overdue.

Website accessibility has also come a long way since our current site was built. Over the course of the past few years, all of us have become more attentive and committed to providing better access to our differently abled students and the current site does not provide such access for our differently abled colleagues. As one member described, “As someone with an RSI (which I got working for the UC and can't recover from because I still work for the UC), the website is not usable. It's demoralizing not to feel "welcome" when I go to my union's website.” We want our website to be accessible to all and to reflect to best practices in this burgeoning field.

Accessibility just one way in which web technology and how we use it has changed since our website was originally built. The advent of mobile devices have fundamentally reoriented website design, as [web traffic on mobile phones has outpaced that of desktop computers in recent years](#). This has resulted in significant changes in design, particularly regarding navigation and mobile compatibility, changes that are not reflected in our current website. A majority of members surveyed reported

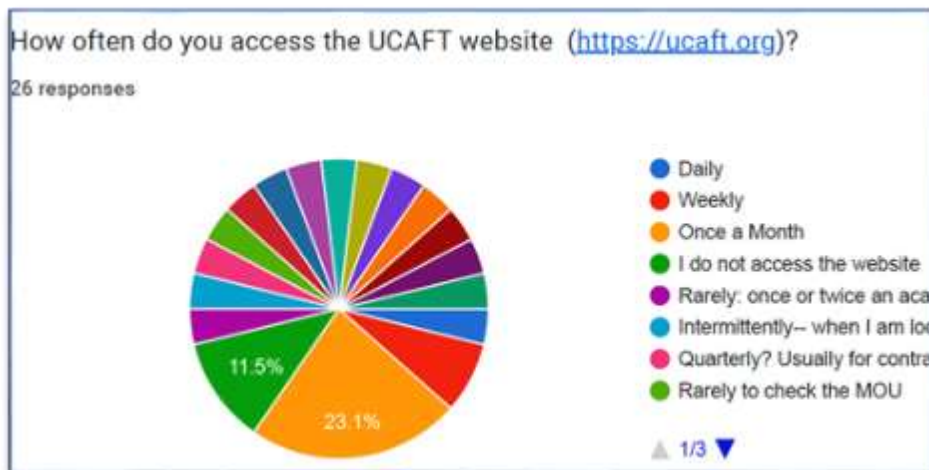
problems with the navigation and usability of our current site describing that, “if you are new to using the website, it is not intuitive... [making it hard to] find specific information.” And [while over 92% of internet users worldwide report](#) using their mobile devices to access the internet, 87.5% of those we surveyed reported that they primarily access UCAFT.org on their desktop computers.



These results suggest that we need to improve our website’s mobile compatibility and navigation so that we can use the site more effectively when we’re organizing in the field away from our desks.

Our current website was also built when we were a different kind of union, one more focused on servicing the contract than on building power towards more expansive social justice goals. As one member put it, the website “makes me feel like I’m drowning in bureaucracy.” Others reported that “it feels a bit dry,” that “it’s a little dull,” and that it needed “better visuals and interactivity.” We were particularly concerned by the feedback we received about the negative impact that the current website might be having on new and non-members of our union, as several leaders shared that the site doesn’t convey a clear image of who we are and why non-members should get involved. It is clear to us that we need a website that better represents the dynamic union we’re trying to become.

Perhaps the most troubling result of the survey was that members rarely use the website at all, most reporting they got their information about our union primarily from UC-AFT meetings and emails.



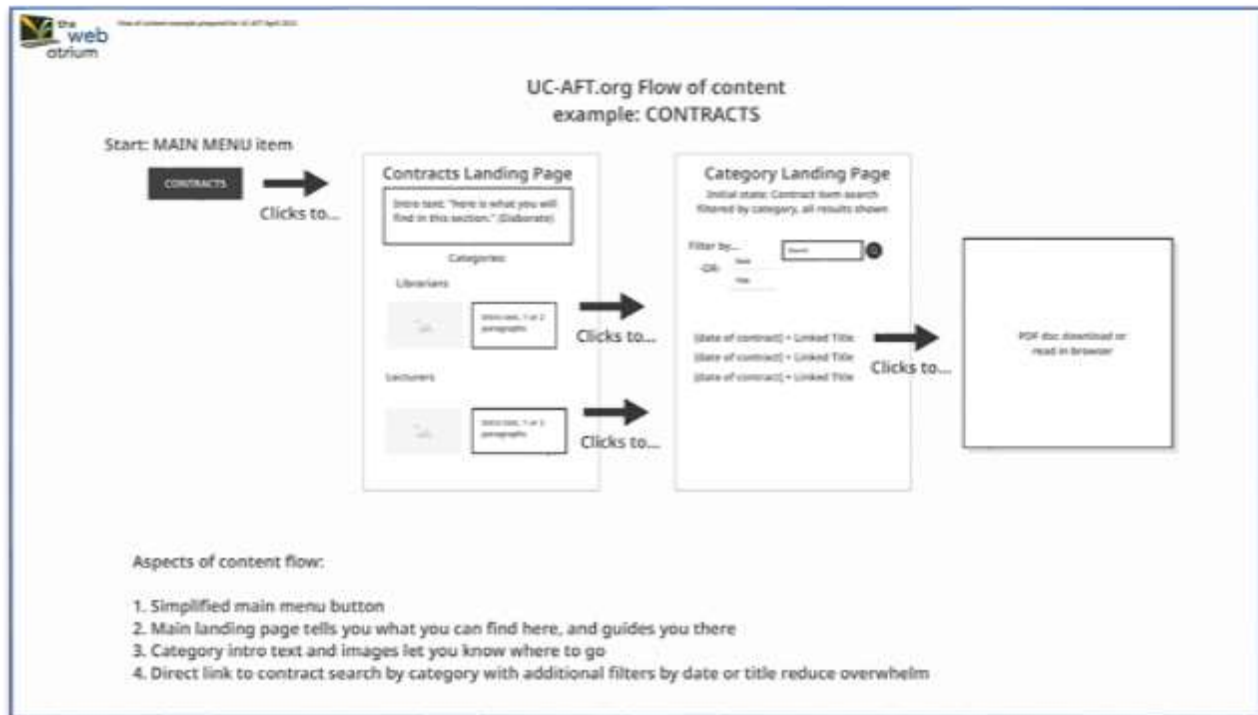
Of those who did use the website, the vast majority reported it was primarily to access information about our contracts. The website is clearly functioning successfully as a kind of archive: our staff and grievance stewards reported they rely on the pages related to both our past and present MOUs for sharing articles and relevant contract-related information. I, personally, take advantage of the archival capacity of the website to access old press releases when drafting new ones. But in all our discussions, and reflected in our survey results, it was clear that very few people – be they active campus leaders or rank-and-file members— are using the website for organizing, outreach, or any other purpose. We want our website to be the first place that members, non-members, and allies alike go to learn about our union and to get involved in the work that we do.

We believe these results reflect missed opportunities to reach the folks our union represents. By adding more obvious and easily accessible resources and “Know Your Rights” type information, we can both help our members and speak to non-members more directly, supporting our ambitions for growth and new member recruitment. By providing better, more up to date information about local chapters and how to join in their work, we can cultivate a stronger sense of community and plug people into our emerging organizational structure. As one member of the Unit 18 SOC put it, we need a “space to support member organizing development in a more organic way.” Our hope is that, drawing inspiration from our sister unions like [UTLA](#) and [CTU](#), we can develop a website that more clearly demonstrates how dynamic and active we are now and conveys a much stronger sense of our collective values and identity.

Preliminary Proposal: Where We’d Like to Be

The most significant improvements we would like to make to the website relate to the structure and navigation of the site. We want and need to preserve its archival function but also to improve access to those materials by designing a more intuitive information infrastructure. That way we can both provide easier access to information housed on the site and more proactively direct users to the information we want them to see and, by doing so, communicate to those users what our priorities and values are as a union. Based on the feedback we received, our preliminary recommendation is to make the “Join,” “Get Involved,” and “Resources/Know Your Rights” components of the site central to the home page navigation and reorient the rest of the content around those central access points. But our recommendations here are very preliminary, as our development of a wireframe for the new site is still in its earliest phases.

We also propose to restructure individual sections and pages throughout the site to make them serve our purposes more effectively. To demonstrate the possibilities here, Julia and I have been working on a mock-up of the Contract/MOU pages for the site. As described above, members and staff reported that this was the feature of the current site that they used most. But they also complained the contracts aren’t easily searchable in their current formats, which lists a series of links to specific articles (often redirecting to static images of documents that are not RDF compliant). Several members we spoke to reported frustration in their attempts to guess what specific articles might be relevant to a specific workplace issue and abandoning their searches for information after scrolling down the list. And since many workplace issues are addressed in several articles, displaying each article separately makes it very hard to find all the information that one needs. Staff members requested that we include a downloadable PDFs of our MOUs in their entirety on the site, as they would be more searchable, but there are ways we can make it easier to navigate the MOUs within the site itself. The mockup Julia has provided below anticipates developing a tagging system so that users can find all the relevant articles related to a given topic in a single click.



We will, of course, need to work with our staff, grievance stewards, and other contract experts to develop a controlled vocabulary to use in such a feature. But this mockup provides just one example of how we can improve navigation to make access to the existing information on the site easier and more intuitive. Such customized improvements are well-within our webmaster’s abilities, and, with the proper budget, she can create other custom features that work better for us, such as a “Join” page that will allow non-members to sign up with just a single click.

In other cases, we would like to add new features that better-serve our organizing needs. Several people that we spoke to offered creative ideas for resources that are not currently available (or at least, not obviously available) on the site. These include: information about how to sign up for unemployment; what to do when you have problems with UC Path such as late payments; and how to access disability resources. When we do offer such guidance, the pages often end up very long and unwieldy: several members mentioned (sometimes with anger and frustration) that they found our guidance page during the UAW strike to be impossible to sort through as time went on, suggesting we should work harder to bundle older information and flag for users what was new. Other ideas for resource pages we hope to create include:

- A page devoted to “Leaves,” addressing what kind of leaves we are eligible for, who to ask for them, and what kind of information you will need before approaching your chair.
- A page explaining the excellence review process - what to expect in your initial year, what to expect when your pre-6, how to prepare for your review, and how to advocate for yourself as you navigate through your career at UC, starting from your initial hiring.

We also want to better address the most fundamental question we often receive from members and non-members alike: “who can help me?” We received suggestions about adding flow charts and information about how our grievance process works and perhaps adding some kind of basic intake form to the site. We will work with the staff and grievance stewards to brainstorm these ideas further and develop tools that will improve their responsiveness and workflow.