

What Can I Do With My Major? Blog

majors.ucdavis.edu

Overview: UC Davis successfully launched and expanded a blog aimed at prospective and younger students covering topics relating to choosing a major, career exploration, alumni spotlights and career opportunities for specific majors. It has been a tremendously effective marketing and communication tool with both prospective and current students. The “What Can I Do With My Major?” blog is truly a comprehensive collaboration across the university with a wide range of committed partners. It has helped to solve many communications issues for advising and academic departments alike while raising the visibility of our programs and resources.

Objectives:

- To raise the profile and prestige of UC Davis through strategic SEO to rank for search results related to majors and use dynamic stories that highlight the strengths and distinctiveness of UC Davis education and how it connects to career outcomes.
- Engage and empower internal and external stakeholders to adapt and implement marketing and communications efforts. Help academic departments promote lesser-known or lower-subscribed majors.

Goals:

- Increase awareness of prospective students of UC Davis by increasing search rankings of our majors, even when they are not specifically looking for UC Davis. (This type of SEO is called Non-Branded SEO)
- Attract prospective freshmen and transfer students to learn more about UC Davis by showcasing our major options, the students and alumni who chose them and their career outcomes.
- Provide assistance to current students in preparing for a successful career. This includes current students who are unsure or undecided about their major, or for those seeking to switch majors or add an additional major or minor, by demonstrating the major options and opportunities at their disposal to help them prepare for their careers.

Launch Date: April 20, 2017

Number and Roles of Staff: 3 staff were the core staff on this project. Creators: Our director of web communications, web editor, lead interactive web designer. Production: The web editor, who organized, solicited and edited (with the help of four assisting peer editors) all written and visual content. She was also the key promoter, placing flyers and stories across campus and working closely with college faculty, alumni, students and staff to insert website links and use social media to reach their audiences. A student writer also helped with some stories while providing administrative support, documenting stories’ publishing dates and categorizing/gathering basic analytics. Strategy: The overall strategy was led by the director of web communications and the web editor.

Target Audiences: Prospective freshmen, transfer students and their parents; current UC Davis undergraduates and recently graduated students still seeking a job. We explore common issues such as whether or not to double major, how to tell your parents that you switched majors, what career opportunities are out there for a specific major, and how to get the job they want or how to crush that next interview. These have led to top search result rankings for common queries such as “I don’t know what to major in”.

What Can I Do With My Major? Blog

majors.ucdavis.edu

Problem being solved: In addition to increasing visibility of UC Davis majors and programs, the blog fulfills a mission the campus has not accomplished for decades: Connect our disperse and plentiful resources with students to help them develop successful careers. We are putting it all in one place while creating an easily searchable, enjoyably readable and useful blog.

Who was involved?: Beyond the core team outlined in the number and roles of staff, core partners were the main communicators from each college, from undergraduate education, graduate studies, and professionals from advising, human resources, development and alumni relations, internship and career center and student health. In addition to our core partners, extended partnerships have been quite comprehensive including coordination and cooperation with many faculty and communicators from over 30 academic departments and growing, as well as many administrative units such as the police department. After establishing enough content to provide as examples and sharing with a few departments, partners started coming to us faster than the managers of the project were reaching out. Examples are shared with prospective partners and they will write a first draft of the post before being reviewed and edited by the managing blog editor with the occasional story being sent back with suggestions on a new approach. After the stories are edited, a promotional plan is made for all departments related to the story to help push the story as far as possible shortly after publishing. To get regular content feedback, we organized an editorial board that includes our stakeholder representatives. We also create monthly analytics reports, get feedback from our contributors, and we have started using a behavioral research tool called hotjar to literally see how users interact with our site and content. **We are engaging and empowering internal and external stakeholders through the blog:** We have more than 90 collaborators (and counting) among our faculty, students, staff and alumni who have written the 100-plus posts so far, and another 30 are lined up through April.

Budget: \$900 for flyers. We used existing infrastructure to create the blog, so no new costs were allocated towards executing this project other than the print cost of promotional flyers.

Innovation in Thought and Execution: Majors are often referred to as a product a university offers, but rarely do we truly treat them as such. Majors and information about them are critical when prospective students are seeking the right university for their interests. The “What Can I Do With My Major?” Blog is a key element of our content strategy to reach our prospective students and help to equip them with resources as they become current students to have successful outcomes. We engage the range of university participants — communicators, academic advisors, students, faculty, alumni — in a collective blog that addresses a central, vital mission of connecting education to careers. Our blog deals with a major student anxiety about their future and offers reassurance in a straightforward, relatable manner. We also cover issues and solutions for current and recently graduated students, who often are not included in these types of university “majors” blogs. The effectiveness of this deep integration is demonstrated by the metrics shared below. This strategy as well as an intentional content strategy has enabled the blog to acquire top results in Google search nationally. We sought to deliver a university blog with useful information to students thinking about applying to college and current students planning a career, by taking advantage of the fact that “What Can I Do With My ‘x’ Major?” is one of the top questions in web search related to majors and admissions. We have paired this strategy with UC Davis’ 100-plus majors and our university’s broad spectrum of resources. We additionally reach current students where they are “being social” by promoting stories on the student portal, which has the highest concentration of current students online of any platform within the university. Through our own research for the new home site in 2016 with high school, transfer and current college student interviews and advice from Undergraduate Admissions, we know that high school and transfers students are shopping for colleges and majors. Once here,

What Can I Do With My Major? Blog

majors.ucdavis.edu

choosing a major is still an issue for students — 80 percent of college students change their major, according to national statistics. To capture audiences for longer engagement on the UC Davis site, the majors blog is thoroughly integrated into the home site from the home page to the heavily visited “majors” section and its individual majors pages. We also have these posts linked on departmental, college and individual website pages to create return visits to the blog. We create evergreen stories to get new readership and use SEO strategies to write headlines, utilize high visibility keywords and acquire links back to each piece of content.

Results and Metrics:

Our web architecture and SEO strategy is working: Over 200,000 pageviews since the launch on April 20 2017, growing in traffic every month with the exception of two months around the holidays, surpassing 35,000 pageviews/month in January, a high number for a new educational blog. Over 50% of viewers find our posts through search. Viewers are spending an average of more than six minutes on posts about the specific UC Davis majors (we have over 30), and more than two minutes for the remainder of the stories about career fairs, educational decisions and alumni stories. **We’re attracting new visitors and potential applicants:** We set out to address issues and provide resources our primary audiences are seeking information on. Our second goal is to have majors offered at UC Davis appear in search results even when a user is not searching for UC Davis. These two strategies combined have proven fruitful. 75% of viewers live outside of our university city, and 55% of the blog readers have never visited our UC Davis home site before, bringing in nearly 20,000 new visitors to UC Davis every month. This confirms that our goals and our outcomes are aligned. **We are also attracting current students:** The remaining 25% includes 13% of traffic from within the university network. 13% of overall traffic comes from the student portal where we promote blog posts with photos and links. **Partnering with collaborators to promote stories through social media is working:** Social media delivered 13% of the traffic, as we encourage our internal and external blog writers to help us communicate UC Davis’ strengths through their social media circles. **We are gaining authority in Google:** In late July, our story “3 Paths to a Major When You Don’t Know What to Do” became the top Google search item for the phrase “I Don’t know what to major in....” That placement has produced more than 10% of our total page views in the blog. Additionally, our efforts with the blog have increased search traffic coming directly to our majors by nearly 10%.

Purpose:

Our purpose is to increase the visibility of our programs while also equipping them with necessary resources as they become current students and guide them towards successful outcomes and careers. This creates a connection from the journey of going through university selection all the way through to becoming successful alumni. We have already seen tremendous engagement with the blog and we will continue to assess what additional problems we can address with this platform providing pathways and opportunity.

Head of Institution:

Chancellor Gary S. May

Handle:

@UCDavis, #ucdavis