

Use of external links on Wheaton web pages

Overview

An external link is a link from a Wheaton web page to information on the Internet provided by a person, entity or organization outside of the college. Web page authors and editors are encouraged to include external links that provide web site visitors with access to information that is useful, relevant and appropriate. This document provides guidance on the use of external links for those responsible for Wheaton College web pages.

Signaling to the site visitor

In order to indicate to web site viewers that they are leaving Wheaton's site, external links on Wheaton web pages should be made to open in a new browser tab or window. This can be done using a "target" in the link code. Anyone making links on a Wheaton web page who is unclear about how to do this should contact the Web Team. Any other treatment (an icon, unambiguous link text, mouseovers) that helps the visitor know that the linked page is not at Wheaton is encouraged.

Purpose and non-profit status

Wheaton College is a not-for-profit, educational institution chartered by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and recognized by the United States Internal Revenue Service. Any material on college web sites that is not consistent with the college's purpose and not-for-profit status is unacceptable.

Advertising

It is unacceptable for Wheaton web sites to deliver content whose primary purpose is to solicit or encourage a web site visitor to purchase goods, services or information from external persons or organizations. Wheaton web pages will not include banner ads, popup ads, search ads, display ads or any other type of advertisement. In general, college web pages should avoid layouts that might be misconstrued as advertisements for external organizations.

Related organizations

Sometimes the college contracts with external organizations to provide information and services. Links to these services are not considered advertisements for purposes of this policy.

If the terms of a contractual agreement require or request placement of an external link or posting of content on the Wheaton web site, then the Web Team, the Communications Office and the Business Office must approve of these terms prior to contract execution. Please contact the Web Team with questions on the use of the web site in this way. The use of the Wheaton name, wordmark or seal, or a reference to them, is subject to approval by the Communications Office.

In general, the Wheaton instances of these contracted services should be named ("branded") with a Wheaton-specific name, so that when it becomes necessary to change vendors the service does not need to be renamed. For instance, Wheaton's internal web site is named "insideWheaton". It is

currently powered by software from SunGard called Luminis, but we should never name the internal web site "Luminis". A discreet credit to SunGard and mention of Luminis somewhere on the site would be appropriate.

Payment for placement

It is unacceptable for Wheaton College, a college office or department, or a person to receive payment, goods, services or other considerations in exchange for placing either content (text, images, sound, etc.) or links to content on any Wheaton College web site.

Personal gain

The use of college resources, including web sites, for personal gain by college employees or students is unacceptable.

Credits

It is appropriate to credit content creators and tools on college web sites, using (small) icons or text links. It is excessive to duplicate this credit on multiple pages; a single credit on a main page or an "about" page is acceptable.

The use of icons for well-known services is a common navigation device. Placing an icon for Facebook on a Wheaton page and linking it to Facebook's home page, is functioning purely as an advertisement and would be unacceptable. The same icon linked to Wheaton's institutional Facebook page provides a useful, relevant service to our site visitors, and is therefore acceptable.

Judgment

While many cases are clear, there are other cases where content or links are a mixture of "useful external information" and "advertising", and in these cases the appropriate course of action is less obvious. It is sometimes helpful in evaluating a case, to place it on two scales: a scale of venality from "completely uncommercial" to "buy me now!", and a second scale of usefulness from "very relevant and useful" to "totally gratuitous".

	totally gratuitous	very relevant and useful
completely uncommercial	ask before linking	acceptable
buy me now!	unacceptable	ask before linking

Cases in the top right quadrant are clearly acceptable; those in the bottom left are almost without exception unacceptable. The remainder require judgment. If you have questions about a particular situation, contact the Web Team, web@wheatoncollege.edu, before you place an external link on a web page.

Examples.

A faculty member writes a book, puts an entry on her faculty profile for the book, and links the book's title (or an image of the book cover) to the book's page at her publisher's web site or an online bookseller.

If the publisher's site simply offers the book for sale, this case is at the far left and barely above the bottom (there is some convenience for the site visitor, so it's not quite a total loss, but still unacceptable.)

If the link is to Amazon, where a visitor could read the contents, index and sample pages, access reviews, and comment on the book, then the link becomes much more relevant and useful, and that might outweigh the fact that Amazon's purpose is purely commercial.

If the publisher's site provides errata, study guides, additional content, a discussion community that includes the author, and other ancillary materials, then the link's value to site visitors (and its value in promoting Wheaton's mission) would clearly overwhelm our reservations about the publisher's commercial purpose.

A staff or faculty member puts a link on his staff profile to a profit-making business that he runs on his own time.

In general, this would be unacceptable, falling at the bottom of our grid, and only in an extraordinary circumstance might the content be so compellingly relevant and overwhelmingly useful that an exception might be considered.

A staff or faculty member puts a link on her staff profile to her personal blog or Twitter stream, where there is no commercial content.

To the extent that the content is relevant to the employee's professional role at the college, and useful and appropriate for visitors to Wheaton's site, this would be acceptable.

A department site links to the web site of an outside organization that provides services for students.

Care must be taken to ensure that any recommended suppliers of goods or services meet rigorous quality standards. If the outside organization is reputable, provides a valuable service and didn't pay anyone for the placement of the link, then this would be acceptable.

Questions?

If you have questions about a particular situation, contact the Web Team, web@wheatoncollege.edu, before you place an external link on a web page.

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