

Cheyney University – Competitive UX Design Analysis

The overall online presence for Cheyney University is cluttered and has a lot of opportunity for improvement. It is our recommendation to rethink the organization of the site entirely and look for ways to highlight information on the site that will attract the type of students and entice them to take the actions you want them to. The competing websites listed below show strength in ease of use where we are not. On the bright side, we have a great opportunity to start from scratch and make each design choice with your ideal student in mind and get ahead with proper web design and execution.

TOP COMPETITORS

Howard University

<https://www2.howard.edu/>

- Important CTAs clearly shown in multiple places above the fold can increase the overall conversion rate.
- Clear labels on CTAs: “Apply,” “Give,” “Visit” simplify the conversion process for the user.
- The search bar’s results lead only back to links on the same website- making it easier for users to find what they’re looking for and potentially increase time spent on the site.
- Navigation is sorted in two different ways at the top. The main navigation is divided similarly to Cheyney’s existing navigation, but the second row of

navigation (near the top) is divided into the different audience groups that may visit the site- "Students," "Faculty & Staff," "Alumni & Friends," and "Parents & Families." This improves the user experience of a user who knows how they relate to the school but may not be sure where to start or where to find what they're looking for.

- The main Admission page is a great example of how to lead people through the other sections of that overarching navigation tab.
 - The "Explore" section divides up content from within the same navigation section for easy access and adds a visual element to the options- allowing the school to tap into the emotional parts of a student choosing a school.
 - The "Important Dates" section comes next. This is fantastic for several reasons.
 - Establishes credibility with people not attending the school.
 - When a prospective student clicks into the admissions tab- it's for the purpose of applying. Thinking about what information they would need to know and prioritizing that on the page is a great way to make the user experience as pleasant as possible for this audience.
 - The "Discover" section is a great way to lead a prospective student through other information you want them to know about the school before they make a decision about whether to apply.
 - The "Imagine Yourself Here" section content establishes a sense of community and shows that the University cares about the student's personal experience at the school. It acknowledges that it's not all about academics, but also about community, and building relationships.

- The floating menu to the right highlights all the important CTAs that the school wants to have a student on hand.
- Social media links above the fold add depth to site & strengthen the overall online presence.
- Additional links to the school News & Events and Contact add depth and reinforce the trust factor for site users.
- A clean & easy to use navigation menu will improve user experience and time spent on the because the content becomes more accessible and engaging.
- The use of business driving phrases, like ***The Howard University Department of Intercollegiate Athletics sponsors 19 NCAA Division I men's & women's varsity sports...*** , and digestible content, like showing performance gains, allow the user to easily read the pages and discover new information while conveying brand value to the visitors.

Harvard University

<https://www.harvard.edu/>

- Harvard's navigation very clearly established a hierarchy in its structure - what they want you to click/look at first, second, and third. This is a great way to guide a student/prospective student to the most important pages before diving deeper into other pages.
- As in Howard's site, there are two different organizations to the navigation. The main navigation is divided similarly to Cheyney's existing navigation, the second row is for less-important links, and the third row (near the top) is divided into the different audience groups that may visit the site- "Faculty," Alumni," etc. This improves the user experience of a user who knows how they relate to the school but may not be sure where to start or where to find what they're looking for.

- Going deeper into the site, you'll find that most pages have a very simple structure, similar to Cheyney's. The difference is in the ease of use of the sidebar navigation. Simplifying and clarifying the user's options will go a long way in helping guide a user through the site and ensure they have the tools they need to find information they're looking for.
- The self-promoting search bar improves the user experience by providing an easy way for users to find what they're looking for and potentially increase their time on the site.
- The Social Media feed at the bottom of the site provides a humanized presence and give visitors a sense of the campus life and all activities related to the university.
- Each school has it's own custom page under the Main Website guidelines, using the same colors, fonts and content hierarchies, which breaks monotony on the vast amount of pages the university has and gives a sense of uniqueness to each school.
 - Some of the schools and dependencies have a secondary navigation located on top of the page with quick access to their most visited pages, providing specific information for different audiences (E.g. <https://www.gse.harvard.edu>)
 - Other sites completely break the mold of the aesthetics (fonts and colors) serving as a landingpages to attract certain types of users with a modern look and feel (E.g. <http://www.gsd.harvard.edu/#/academic-programs/career-discovery/index.html>)

Stanford University

<https://www.stanford.edu/>

- Stanford's homepage highlights information from various different categories of information on the site.
 - Throughout, they highlight achievements that the school is well-known for. The "Stanford Today," "Research," and "About Stanford" sections bring attention to the things Stanford does best. Curating this information carefully and concisely brings a great deal of credibility and bolsters the perceived reputation of the University.
 - The "Academics," "Campus Life," and "Admission" sections do a great job of chunking up a lot of content into easy to digest options. The images they use throughout these sections show the visitor the spirit of the school and its student body. This speaks to the desire for community that a potential student would have, and strengthens the sense of community in a current student and even among alumni.
- Main pages in the navigation are segmented in the same way as the homepage. This consistency not only establishes a strong brand look, but also makes the site easier to navigate. Once a visitor has experienced one of these pages, they'll immediately understand how to navigate through the others without problems.
- The footer of the site shows a quick view of important links on the site as well as the most important CTAs. Though the site could stand to have this kind of clarity above the fold, this organizational structure makes it easy for a visitor to decide where to go next after reading through a page.
- As in Howard's and Harvard's sites, there are two different organizations to the navigation. The main navigation is divided similarly to Cheney's existing navigation, the second row is for the different audience groups that may visit the site- "Students," "Faculty & Staff," "Parents," "Alumni." This improves the user experience of a user who knows how they relate to the school but may not be sure where to start or where to find what they're looking for.

- The overall layout of the sub-pages and content hierarchy creates a really easy to navigate flow across the whole website, providing an extremely easy way to understand content in a very solid and consistent way, increasing the sense of trust.
- As other competing sites, like Howard's and Cornell, the use of statistics and hard numbers on progress in small capsules, allow users to easily read the pages and discover relevant information at a faster pace, requiring less time to digest more content which improves the conversion rates, inviting them to make faster decisions on whether apply or not.

Cornell University

<https://www.cornell.edu/>

- A clean and easy to use navigation menu improves the user experience and time spent on the site because the content becomes accessible and engaging. Cornell also incorporates partial siloing in their navigation menu and site architecture. This can greatly increase domain authority & organic rankings.
- As in Howard's, Harvard's, and Stanford's sites, there are different organizations to the navigation. The main navigation is divided similarly to Cheyney's existing navigation, the second row is for the different audience groups that may visit the site- "Students," "Faculty & Staff," "Parents," "Alumni." This improves the user experience of a user who knows how they relate to the school but may not be sure where to start or where to find what they're looking for.
- Strong imagery upon landing on the site sets a tone for what the school is like and can make or break a student's first impression of the school. The imagery is dynamic in that it shows action in each shot. Because they're not posed shots, a candor is shown that makes a prospective student trust the

school and the images. In contrast, stock photography can appear phony at a quick glance.

- Main site pages are organized in a fantastic manner
 - Important links are organized into a siloed structure at the very top. This improves the user experience by making navigation easier.
 - Further on, images are used to lead through to other sections and create an easy way to navigate. Within these section boxes, Cornell asks the question, “What are you looking for?” and offers a dropdown of quick shortcuts. Phrasing things in such a conversational tone sounds friendly and starts to establish a sense of trust between the viewer and the University.
 - Links are worded in terms a prospective student would be thinking about/searching for: “What Cornell looks for,” “More about Cornell University,” and “Incoming Class Profile.” This makes it easier to navigate through the website content & can also help with organic rankings.
 - Near the bottom, the visitor is lead through to other sections of the site in an organized manner. This does two things:
 - Shows that the University understands the needs of the visitor.
 - Can increase the length of time a visitor spends on the site.
- The use of hard numbers and statistics in small capsules reinforce trust among visitors and provides an easy way to consume information, increasing the brand awareness and reach.
- The constant use of links, CTAs, related content and interactive imagery constantly invite visitors to engage and explore, allowing them to discover and dig deeper on the website.

Overall

In Summary, the common themes we're seeing in competitor sites are:

- A segmented, siloed navigation where one navigation section focuses on school characteristics and the other on potential site audiences.
- Strong imagery to communicate the brand identity the University is going for as well as giving the visitor a peek into what their experiences at the school could be like.
- Clear CTAs, making it easier to get the site visitor to take the actions you want them to take.
- Some of the competing sites are utilizing siloing techniques, which can have a positive impact on domain authority & organic rankings.

Here are a few areas where almost everyone is failing!

- Responsive Design- In 2016, the digital marketing world saw a large shift in mobile research being conducted on mobile devices. In 2017, we saw another industry shift, users started to not only conduct research on mobile devices, they started to convert as well. Many of the listed websites are not completely mobile friendly. This can drastically decrease the conversion rate.
- Visual consistency- At first glance, these sites look very polished and elegant. However, if you navigate into deeper pages of the site, the site design changes entirely! It's like the universities updated their main pages and forgot about the rest. Depending on how different the site looks, it can seem like the visitor got linked to an entirely different website. This decreases the sense of trust a visitor might have built up before this.

On a positive note, many of universities are struggling with these issues and by fixing them, Cheyney can get ahead of the competition and can expect to see a climb in conversion rates.

Reference Information

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<https://searchengineland.com/everything-not-blog-post-start-using-silos-242508>

From an SEO standpoint, it is also very important to format the site correctly. Please see our recommendations below:

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- Meta Titles & Descriptions.

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- Page name (length 3-5 words).
- Separate page title keywords by hyphens.
- Use primary keywords from the page title.
- Descriptive URLs are great for rankings.

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- Only 1 h1 tag per page.
- States what the page is about.

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- Use at least one image per web page (avoid using duplicate images across the site).

- Alt image tags (use primary keywords to name images).
- Properly sized images (site speed is very important).
- Set featured image.

Internal linking

- Links to related pages, blogs or homepage.

Mobile-friendly design

Responsive design

- Responsive web pages are becoming crucial for a positive user experience & mobile rankings.

Structured data

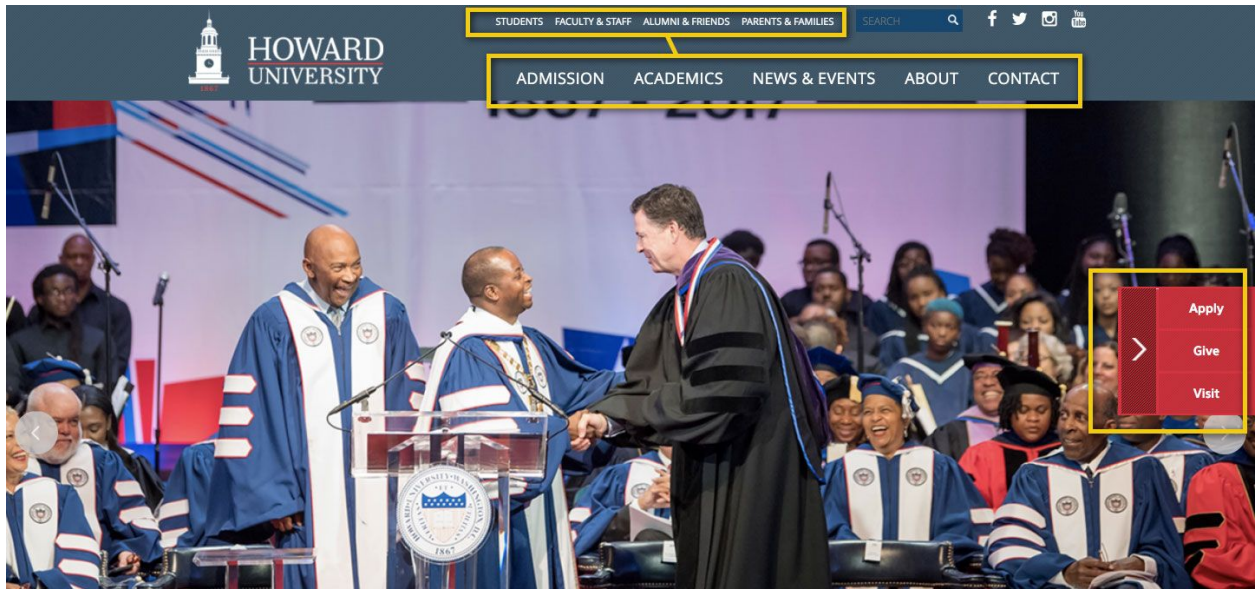
- Can strongly increase CTRs by displaying microdata from the page on the SERPs (visit: www.schema.org).

XML Sitemaps

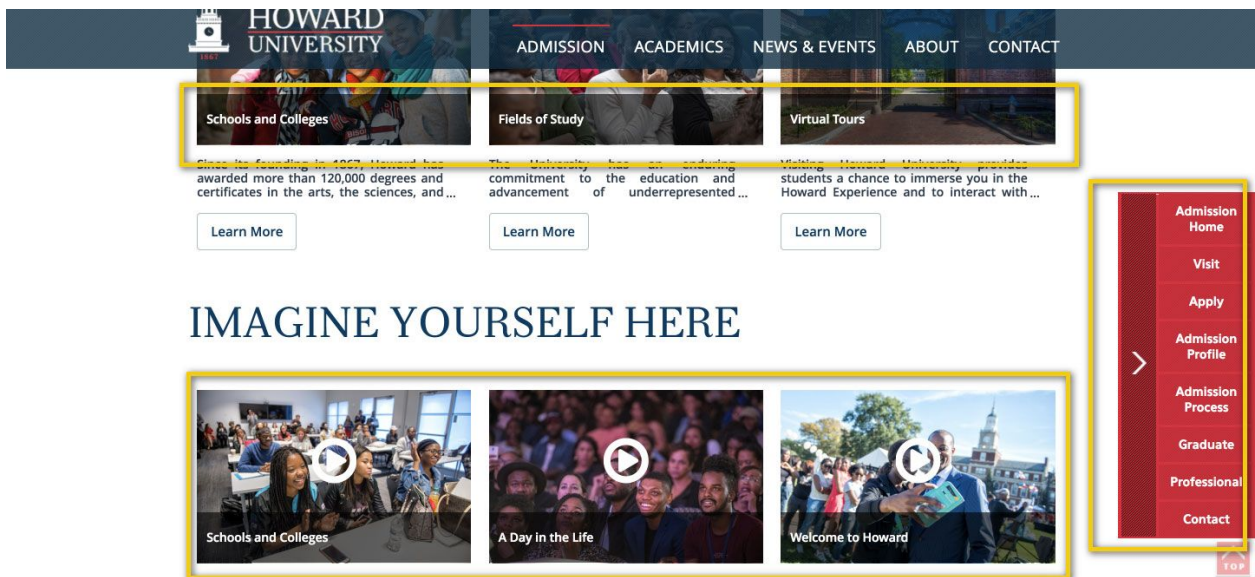
- Proper & up-to-date site maps are crucial for rankings & visibility on SERPs.

Supporting Screenshots

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- Navigation segmentation
- Floating CTAs

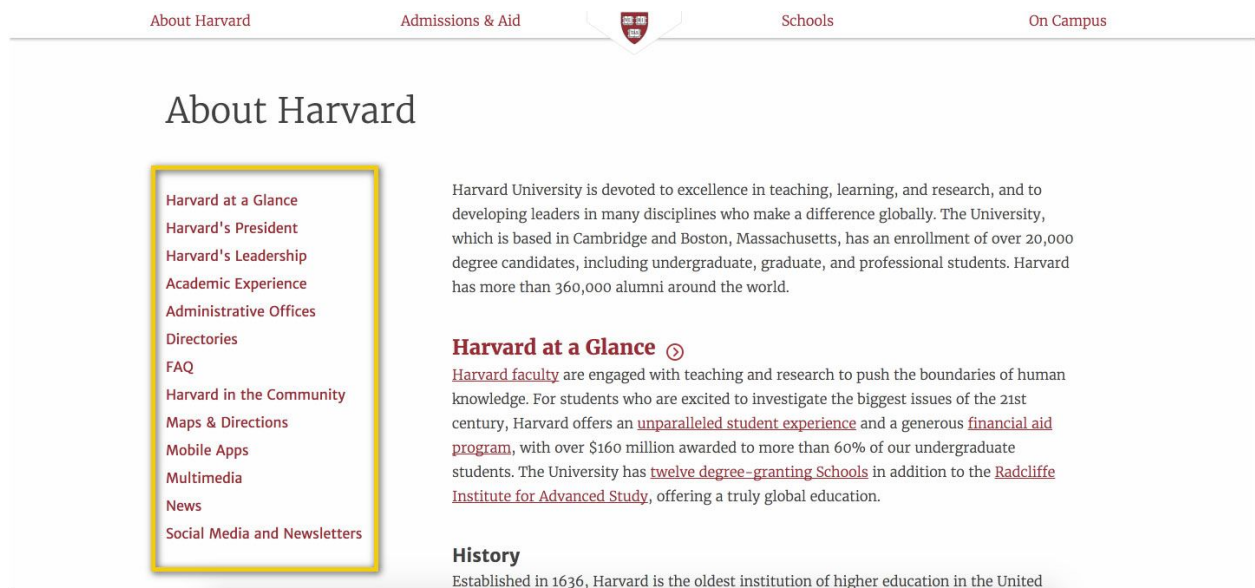


- Section creation within main nav pages
- Creating a sense of community in “Imagine Yourself Here” section
- Floating CTAs- easy access

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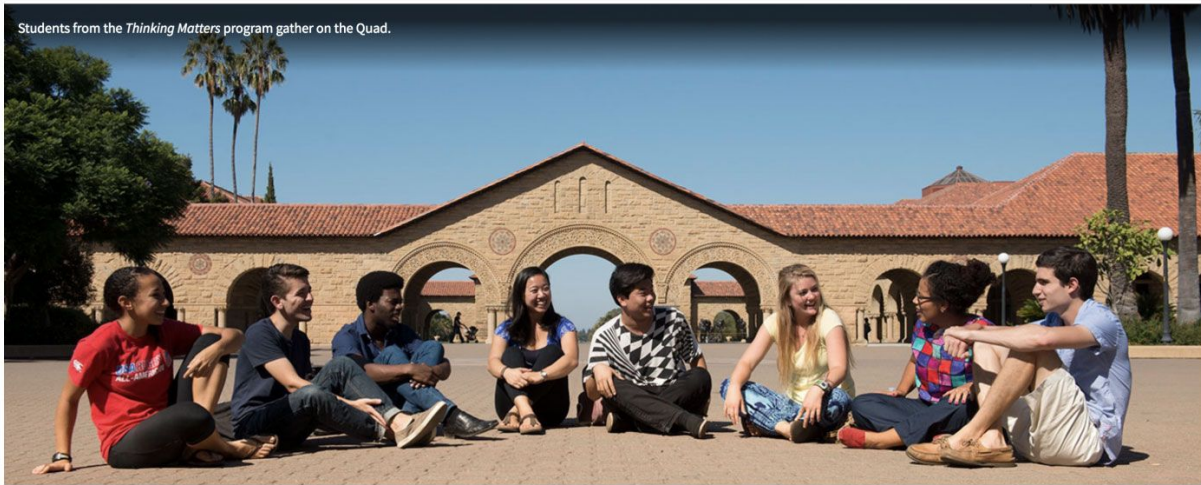


- Segmented navigation- three levels
- Self-referencing search bar



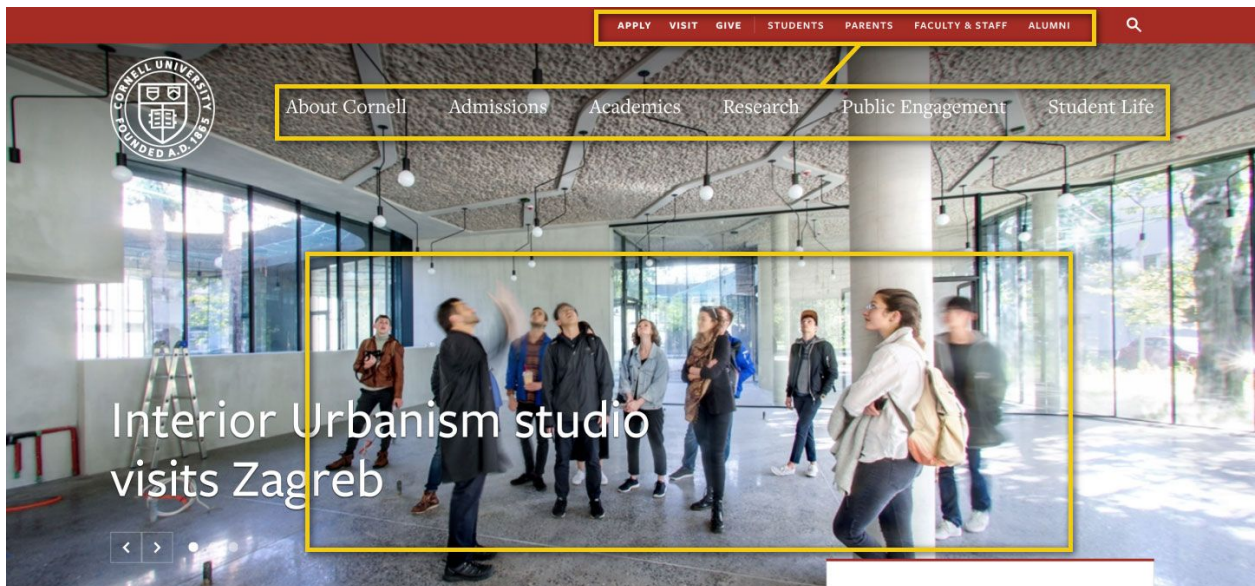
- Clear sidebar navigation options

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- Strong imagery, creates sense of community, adds atmosphere

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- Segmented navigation

