Quinnipiac.edu

Website evaluation

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary

The Site

Quinnipiac.edu is the repository for all information related to Quinnipiac University. Its diverse audience includes students, prospective students and former students as well as populations with no direct connection to the school. In addition to 50+ undergraduate majors and 20+ graduate programs, the university comprises 3 campuses, 13 residence halls, 21 sports teams, numerous institutes and centers, and a nationally recognized polling operation. Catering to such a wide variety of uses presents a significant challenge for the site's architecture. The site as it exists is replete with duplicated information, pages not housed where the user would expect them, important pages missing from navigation, and a catch-all "More" menu that forfeits the battle of categorization. The site also has several sub-domains (QU Online, MyQ, Athletics and Alumni) that are outside the scope of this report.

Methods

To evaluate Quinnipiac.edu, I first created a persona I felt represented an under-served cohort of site users: transfer students. I conducted cognitive walkthroughs of several scenarios with this persona in mind. I then conducted a heuristic analysis using Jakob Nielsen's 10 Usability Heuristics for User Interface Design. Finally, I recruited users to test the existing site with a series of hypothetical tasks. User testing was facilitated by materials from *Rocket Surgery Made Easy* by Steve Krug.

Results

The results of my research confirmed many of my assumptions about the site navigation. Important and common tasks, such as requesting an academic transcript, were difficult to complete. Information about residence halls was comprehensive, but users weren't inclined to dig into it for relevant details. On the other hand, a couple of aspects that were tested—the relatively hidden bookstore page and confusion between the academic calendar and events calendar—weren't borne out by user testing.

Solutions

Following my analysis, I designed a site map and wireframes for an improved Quinnipiac.edu. My primary objective was to eliminate the "More" category and ensure logical paths to all information on the site. I refocused sections of the site on the populations they should serve. For example, I rebranded "Student Experience" to "Students" to decrease the emphasis on recruitment and create a valuable portal for users currently enrolled in the university. I combined pages with overlapping information in most instances, but in certain situations I preferred to duplicate data to better communicate it to different user populations, for example, the admissions section. I recommend a careful content audit to evaluate existing site material as the next step in this site redesign.

Persona
Personas are created from user research to put a specific human face on the intended audience throughout the course of site design.

Patty has a bachelor's degree and some credits toward her master's degree in communications. She spent several years after graduation in the work force, so she's now in her late 20's. For family reasons, she needs to relocate to Connecticut even though she recently began her graduate work. She was happy with her program and received excellent grades in the courses she completed, so she's looking for something similar that will allow transfer credits. She is very familiar with college websites, considering she recently researched and went through the application process for her current school. She's comfortable with online research and prefers to find things on her own rather than give out her personal details to solicit information. She wants to finish her education quickly and apply her new skills to a better career, but she has many other things on her mind, such as moving to a new state, finding a new job, and fulfilling family obligations. These other commitments won't leave her much time for extracurricular activities, either.

Patty Transfer
Prospective transfer student from another graduate program

Objectives and motivations

- Compare graduate programs with her current program
- Find out application and admissions requirements
- Investigate feasibility of receiving transfer credits
- Learn about class schedules and tuition

Concerns

- Doesn't want to end up on a bunch of mailing lists
- Has lots of life events occurring simultaneously
- Wants a clear, straightforward application process
- Little to no interest in non-academic activities

Scenarios

- Patty has already been through the graduate admissions process before but knows there are a lot of differences in the requirements between schools. She's particularly concerned about whether she needs to take the GRE, since her last school didn't require it. She goes to the graduate admissions page in search of a list of requirements, including any special instructions or exceptions for transfer students.
- Patty anticipates working full time and taking care of family members in addition to going to school, so she wants to know in advance how flexible her course schedule will be. She visits the program page to find a list of the degree requirements, then looks for the registrar's page, expecting to find course schedules for previous semesters so she knows when required classes are generally offered.

"This school may be new to me, but I've been through this whole process not that long ago."

Heuristic Evaluation *Heuristic evaluation is the process of analyzing a site based on a series of research-based standards of usability.*

Visibility of system status

Pros

- Almost all links have underline on hover (except topmost menu, which changes color).

- Breadcrumbs at the top of most pages.

- The virtual tour displays a "YouVisit" scrolling wheel while loading.

- Campus + facilities pages use +/- toggles to indicate section expansion.

- Image scrollers have dots indicating which page the reader is on.

Cons

- No indication when the reader is heading to a different domain (http://www.quinnipiacbobcats.com/) or sub-domain (https://quonline.quinnipiac.edu/).

- The breadcrumbs don't always reflect the path the reader took to get to the page.

Match between system and real world

Pros

- Most of the top-level items on the main menu are self-evident: About, Academics, Admission, Student Experience, News + Events and Athletics.

- The quick links below the search bar are clear and concise.

Cons

- Institutes + Centers isn't self-explanatory and doesn't offer a clear definition. What's a center?

- *More* is a catch-all that gives no clue what the reader will find there.

- On the undergraduate admissions contact form, the error message doesn't match the fields shown.

User control and freedom

Pros

- The reader can use arrow keys to scroll through the image sliders and navigate the virtual tour.

- Colleges, Schools and Departments pages have a "University Home" link under the search bar because clicking the logo takes the reader to the school's main page.

- Most pages have a "back to top" link.

- Breadcrumbs can help users backtrack.

- Each page has capacity to increase or decrease font size.

Cons

- Pages with accordion elements don't scroll using arrow keys.

- Athletics and Alumni pages take the reader away from the main site without a clear path back.

- Font size alteration only affects body text, not menus.

Consistency and standards

Pros

- Some of the right-hand menus, e.g. the pages in the About section, clearly reflect the hierarchy of the section.

- Search bar is on the top right.

- Menus at the top and the right-hand side.

- Logo takes the reader back to the home page (except as mentioned above).

Cons

- Images as links are inconsistently applied. About page has images that aren't linked, Academics page has no images, Institutes + Centers page has linked images.

- Some pages (e.g. *Graduate Studies*) drop the previous menu.

- Terms such as "Program" and "Studies" are used interchangeably and inconsistently.

- The "Commitment to Teaching" header on the Academics landing page is inconsistent with the rest of the layout.

- The site map contains a section (*G.A.M.E. Forum*) that isn't navigable from the main menu.

- The virtual tour offers the option to "register" to keep in touch with one of the campuses. Registering doesn't make sense in this context.

- Image sliders don't have a clear beginning and end and don't scroll in a fluid manner.

Error prevention

Pros

- Required information on the undergraduate admissions contact form is indicated.

- The Apply Online page notes prominently which applications are being accepted along with links to deadline information and how to apply.

Cons

- On the request information form for graduate admissions, none of the required fields are marked. They are highlighted only after submission is attempted.

Recognition rather than recall

Pros

- Gloss menus show all the subsections of the major site divisions.

- Links in blue below menus show helpful links user might be looking for, even if not in that section.

Cons

- Inconsistent right-hand menus make it difficult to tell whether the reader should look there for new information or a repeat of old.

Flexibility and efficiency of use

Pros

- Quick links at the top of the navigation bar lead to frequently used areas.

- Directory offers browse by department and search by name options.

- Links are placed in multiple locations on navigation menu.

- Key phone numbers, campus address and directions are displayed prominently if the reader knows where to look.

Cons

- Login to MyQ is a two-step process.

- *More* is a poor indicator for the quick information located in the gloss menu.

Aesthetic and minimalist design

Pros

- When the section landing pages are used as envisioned by the designer (About, Academics, Admissions) it's clean and easy to navigate.

- Pages with content accordions (e.g. *Activities + Organizations*) allow users to see major sections at a glance and choose which to view without loading separate pages.

Cons

- There is **so much** repeated information and information on multiple pages that should be combined (e.g. *Visit Quinnipiac*, *Campuses + Facilities*, *Virtual Tour* and *Directions + Travel Information*).

- Gloss menus are so extensive that it actually takes longer to find what the reader is looking for.

- The splash photos on the home page are so large that the headline isn't visible above the fold.

- Lots of unnecessary filler text makes it difficult to quickly glean information.

- Facebook like button is redundant to Share link.

Help users recognize, diagnose and recover from errors

Pros

- Contact forms let the reader know when required information hasn't been provided.

- 404 page offers list of links and includes the site navigation.

Cons

- The undergraduate admissions form has a pop-up for missing information that doesn't match the field descriptions.

- The links on the 404 page are redundant to the main navigation.

Help and documentation

Pros

- Calendar login screen explains what credentials to use to log in along with why it's necessary.

- MyQ login page has helpful instructions and links to more information about how to access the portal.

Cons

- No indication on calendar that certain events aren't visible until the reader logs in.

Cognitive Walkthrough *The cognative walkthrough of a site evaluates the process required to complete a number of hypothetical scenarios.*

Scenario 1 (Failure analysis)

Patty has already been through the graduate admissions process before but knows there are a lot of differences in the requirements between schools. She's particularly concerned about whether she needs to take the GRE since her last school didn't require it. She goes to the graduate admissions page in search of a list of requirements.

Step 1: Patty loads the Quinnipiac.edu home page.

1. *Will the user know what to do at this step?* She scans the headings and hovers over the menu items. She looks under "Apply" and "Admissions," both of which have "Graduate" underneath. She clicks on "Admissions" under Admissions > Graduate.

2. *If the user does the right thing, will they know that they did the right thing, and are making progress towards their goal?* Patty is a graduate student looking for admissions information, and the link takes her to a landing page with similar information. She did not notice the "QU Online" section of the Admissions menu.

Step 2: Patty scans Home > Admissions > Graduate Admissions page.

1. *Will the user know what to do at this step?* Patty scans the links on the page. She's not interested in programs, financial aid, campus visits or the local area. She's not a student yet, so she doesn't think she needs student services. There are two options for contacting the school, one for learning more about programs and another for help with graduate admissions, so she knows she can come back to the latter if necessary. She decides to click "How to Apply."

2. *If the user does the right thing, will they know that they did the right thing, and are making progress towards their goal?* The landing page takes her to a list of links titled "Apply Online," which sounds like a path to the application form. She scans the list and doesn't see the program she's interested in. She has no idea if she's in the right place.

Step 3: Patty looks for her program.

1. *Will the user know what to do at this step?* She scans the page, unsure whether general admissions requirements are elsewhere. She decides to look for her program and clicks on "complete list of graduate programs." She finds "MS in Interactive Media (online)" under School of Communications and clicks on it.

2. *If the user does the right thing, will they know that they did the right thing, and are making progress towards their goal?* According to the bread crumbs at the top of the page, Patty has left the Admissions section and is now in Academics. She still has no idea if she's going to find what she's looking for here.

Step 4: Patty scans the Interactive Media landing page.

1. Will the user know what to do at this step? Patty scrolls all the way down the page to a heading called "Admission Requirements." There are only three sentences, the second of which tells her to "Discuss admission requirements with your admission counselor." She doesn't have an admission counselor or know yet if she wants one. "View details" isn't a particularly descriptive heading, but it's the only link offered.

2. If the user does the right thing, will they know that they did the right thing, and are making progress towards their goal? Nothing about this page suggests she's in the right place. She doesn't even appear to be at the same school, as the logo has changed from Quinnipiac University to Quinnipiac University Online and the top-level navigation is completely new. The links after the main body text seem to indicate that the page ends there, when the requirements are further down. The copy implies she won't find out about requirements until she speaks with someone. The link is vague.

Step 5: Patty finds admission requirements.

1. Will the user know what to do at this step? Strangely, the vague link led her to exactly the page she was looking for, a description of admissions requirements with a list of supporting documents.

2. If the user does the right thing, will they know that they did the right thing, and are making progress towards their goal? The page does not explicitly state that no GRE score is required, and the copy leading into the list of supporting documents says "include," implying there are items on the list not included. However, she is reasonably certain she will not need to take the GRE, and also that she will not find information for transfer students on the website.

Scenario 2

Patty anticipates working full time and taking care of family members in addition to going to school, so she wants to know in advance how flexible her course schedule will be. She looks for information about when required classes are generally offered.

Step 1: Patty loads the Interactive Media home page.

1. Will the user know what to do at this step? She knows from the top of the page that 36 credits are required for the degree. She expands the accordion for "Programs of Study & Curriculum" and sees a number of options. She doesn't know exactly which concentration she's interested in yet, so she chooses the first one on the list.

2. If the user does the right thing, will they know that they did the right thing, and are making progress towards their goal? The page she lands on, after a brief description of the concentration, has a list of required courses for the degree and the number of hours for each. All courses are 3 credits, so she calculates that she needs to take 12 courses.

Step 2: Patty looks for course descriptions.

1. Will the user know what to do at this step? When she clicked on a concentration, she finds a helpful menu that wasn't accessible on the Interactive Media home page. There's a curriculum link that shows the requirements for all concentrations on the same page. There's also a link to course descriptions.

2. If the user does the right thing, will they know that they did the right thing, and are making progress towards their goal? Patty is off the trail here. She isn't looking for course descriptions; she wants course availability.

Step 3: Patty reads the course descriptions.

1. Will the user know what to do at this step? The course listings on this page are no longer sorted by core and concentration, but numerically. Before she does anything else, she has to backtrack to the curriculum page to remind herself which courses are required for which concentration.

2. If the user does the right thing, will they know that they did the right thing, and are making progress towards their goal? Patty is surprised by finding the information she wants right in the course descriptions. At first she didn't even know she had found it, as the first course she clicked on said "Every Year, All" and she didn't realize it was referring to fall, spring and summer semesters.

Step 4: Patty reads ALL the course descriptions.

1. Will the user know what to do at this step? Patty needs to load a separate page for each course description, even though it is only a paragraph long and there is at least a column's worth of blank space on the landing page.

2. If the user does the right thing, will they know that they did the right thing, and are making progress towards their goal? After checking the last few words of each course description, she comes to the conclusion that all courses are offered at least in fall and spring, and most in all three semesters. Assuming the information is accurate, the courses she needs will almost certainly be offered in the semester that she needs to take them. She will have to look elsewhere to find out whether courses meet at specific times.

Usability Report *The usability report details the results of the user testing performed on the site in which participants were asked to complete specific tasks.*

Summary

Three users were offered five tasks to evaluate and diagnose problems with various aspects of the Quinnipiac.edu Tasks assigned were: finding out how to request a transcript, locating a faculty member's contact information, researching campus housing options, determining the start date of a semester, and purchasing a gift from the campus bookstore. The first two tasks proved the most difficult, as there is no direct navigation to the *Registrar* page, and faculty information is not available even on the page called *Departments + Faculty*. Problematic areas included the site's organization and ease of navigation, the distinction between the QU and QU Online sections of the site, and general design issues including an image slider that cuts off parts of the content.

Task 1

You recently completed your undergraduate degree at Quinnipiac University and are applying to graduate schools. **Find out how to request an academic transcript from the Quinnipiac registrar.**

This task was quite difficult for two of the three users. Only user #3 immediately made the connection to the *Alumni* link at the top of the page, and she still thought it took too many clicks to find the information. Both users #1 and #2 looked for the registrar's page under *Academic Services + Resources* first. User #1 then turned to the *Campus Directory* to find the registrar and was disappointed to find contact information but no links. User #2 found the *Alumni* link, but when she didn't see it in the hover menu, she thought she was in the wrong place. When she found her way to the *Registrar* page, she was overwhelmed by the amount of information provided about requesting transcripts and wished it was broken down further. According to the breadcrumbs on the *Registrar* page, it is a sub-section of *About*; however, there are no links to the page in this section.

Recommendations: The registrar's page should be linked to on the main site menu and included under *Academic Services + Resources*. On the *Alumni* page, transcript requests should be part of the main navigation, and it should be included in the drop-down *Alumni* menu on the main website. The instructions for requesting transcripts should be streamlined and easier to interpret.

Task 2

You're a student in one of Quinnipiac's online programs. You're planning to be in the area and would like to stop by and meet your advisor in person. **How do you locate the head of the Interactive Media program?**

None of the users successfully completed this task. All three users found their way to the QU Online sub-domain through the Academics or Admissions menu and found the MS in Interactive Media page via the Online Programs link. Once on this page, however, they had no success finding any faculty information. User #1 went back out to the Campus Directory and browsed for Interactive Media faculty, but the head was not listed there. User #2 clicked through a variety of links and was frustrated by the confusing links and changing menus. She also missed the distinction between the MS in Interactive Media and the BA in Interactive Digital Design because the School of Communications page only lists undergraduate programs. User #3 became frustrated quickly and wished for a faculty drop-down menu. All three noticed that the menu options had changed, but none investigated far enough to find Our Faculty under About Us.

Recommendations: Even though this task was simplified from its initial parameters (the original task intended for users to locate the physical office space), it demonstrates the problems in the structure of the *Academic* section. The information about each program should be specific (including faculty), relevant both for prospective students and current students, and the path to find it unambiguous. Although the QU Online sub-domain is outside the scope of this project, there should be a clearer path for users to return to the main site.

Task 3

You're an incoming freshman planning to live on campus. **Research your housing options and decide where you'd like to live.**

Each user found *Undergraduate Housing* under *Student Experience* and clicked on it before reading the rest of the links. (User #3 first checked under *Admissions*.) They all took a very similar approach. They scanned the list of residences on the page and then clicked into several of the accordion menus and perused the copy to find out whether it was available to them as a freshman. Interestingly, none investigated past the sixth link. User #2 was most concerned about the cost of each option and eventually decided she would rather live off-campus. Once there, she noticed the *Residential Rates* link, but was again disappointed that it wasn't broken down by grade level.

None found their way to the *First-Year Residential Experience (FYRE)* page, which contains the following information: "First-year students live in one of the following areas: Commons, Ledges, Larson, Perlroth, Troup, Irma and Dana."

Recommendations: The list of residence names with no additional information is daunting to users. Users should be offered more information about the halls up front, particularly which students are permitted to reside there, how much it costs, and how the rooms are set up. *Residential Experience* is not a very descriptive link, and the information for freshmen should be more prominent.

Task 4

When does the spring semester start?

This task was easiest for all three users. User #1 remembered seeing the *Academic Calendar* link in the *Academics* drop-down menu earlier and goes directly there. Users #2 and #3 both clicked through to the *Academics* landing page, then *Academic Catalogs + Calendars*, then clicked on the link in the main body rather than the side menu. Once confronted with the calendar, users experienced varying levels of confusion about the layout and content of the calendar, most significantly with the overlap between the January term and the spring semester. Only user #2 referenced the asterisk next to the date. She also wished for a downloadable or printable version of the calendar.

Recommendations: The author expected confusion between the academic calendar and the events calendar linked below the search bar and, even though it was not borne out by testing, recommends a link to the academic calendar on the event calendar page. The academic calendar should be streamlined and better formatted, and an explanation of the January term should be included.

Task 5

You're the parent of a female Quinnipiac student. **Find her the perfect QU-branded Christmas gift.**

All users found the link to the bookstore under *More*, but expressed confusion about why it was located there. Users #1 and #3 went directly to *Shop Womens* [sic], but user #2 wanted sale items. She wished the sale items were broken down by gender, and she gravitated toward a shirt that she then noticed was a youth size. All three opted for apparel items.

Recommendations: Even though users found the link without too much difficulty, the bookstore link should be more prominently located in a descriptive category. Ideally, the *More* category should be eliminated entirely.

Other observations

During their initial survey of the home page, both users #1 and #2 quickly noticed the "grainy" or "low-res" photo in the image carousel and commented that it looked unprofessional. These two users were also concerned about the image slider below and the stories on each side of the page that appeared to be cut off. They commented on this before scrolling down further to recognize it as a slider. User #3 commented on the above-the-fold copy being cut off and did not scroll down past the image slider. User #1 was impressed by the hover menus in the main navigation. Only user #2 seemed to notice the links below the search bar.

The transition between tasks 2 and 3 required the users to navigate from the *QU Online* sub-domain back to the main site, and this proved problematic for users #1 and #3; both tried to click on the main logo, which only took them back to quonline.quinnipiac.edu. User #3

expressed frustration that she had to go back to the home page so many times throughout the test.

User #1 was adept at using the hover menus and selecting links from there, but users #2 and #3 frequently clicked on the main menu link instead and had to navigate the landing pages instead, which were more difficult to scan.

Recommendations: A low-resolution photo should never be the first thing a user sees, no matter how important it is. In the case of this speaker, her professional head shot would have been a better option. The image slider should be redesigned not to show half of the stories on each end. The QU Online sub-domain should be better integrated with the rest of the site. Include a standard, scannable menu that replicates the hover menu on the landing page.

Participants

All three participants were college and law school graduates between the ages of 25 and 35. Each works as an attorney. Users were not familiar with the site, but each spends at least 30 hours per week using the internet: #1 reported 84 hours a week, #2 said 30 hours a week, and #3 estimated 50 hours a week. User #1 was male, and users #2 and #3 were female. User #2 was youngest and graduated school most recently. User #3 is a busy mother with two small children, and she grew frustrated quickly with the site. User #1 is an avowed user of the search feature on any website and found browsing the navigation inherently frustrating.

Background

Tests were performed on the author's PC laptop and recorded using Camtasia Studio software. User #1's test was completed in the user and author's home in a quiet, low-distraction environment. Users #2 and #3 were tested in the home of user #3, and the environment was not well controlled because user #3 was putting her toddler and infant to bed. Each test was interrupted at least once, but it did not significantly impact users' concentration. After signing the consent form, each user was asked a series of questions about his or her internet use. Users were then asked to survey the home page without clicking on anything, followed by a series of five tasks designed to evaluate various aspects of the website and diagnose problems with the design.

The tasks were presented in random order (the same order for each user). They were given written copies of each task in addition to hearing them out loud, and they referred to their copies as they attempted each task. Users completed tasks 3–5 successfully, but none completed task 2.

Task #	Successful completion		
	User #1	User #2	User #3
1		✓	✓
2			
3	✓	✓	✓
4	✓	✓	✓
5	✓	✓	✓

Appendix: User testing timeline and observations

User #	Task #	Observation
1	0	User immediately notices the low-res photo.
1	0	User concerned about odd spacing with part of story cut off, thinks frame is too large for content.
1	0	User scrolls down farther and realizes it's a slider bar.
1	0	User appreciates drop-down menus from scrollover.
1	0	User comments on ugly, useless map showing Hamden.
1	0	User doesn't know why WordPress is included with the social media links.
1	0	User can't immediately find contact info and doesn't know why it's under *More.*
1	0	User wants to use the search bar.
1	1	User looks for registrar under *Academic Services + Resource.*
1	1	User looks under *Undergraduate Studies* because it's an undergraduate degree.
1	1	User tries *Campus Directory* to find registrar after menus are unhelpful.
1	1	User finds phone number for registrar and decides to call registrar for information.
1	2	User finds *QU Online* under *Admissions* even though already an admitted student.

User #	Task #	Observation
1	2	User notices top menu is generic to online programs.
1	2	User tries clicking QU Online link to go back to Quinnipiac home page.
1	2	User goes back to campus directory and searches for Interactive Media.
1	2	User thinks a working search function is the best bet for web design.
1	3	User finds *Housing Options* link under Student Experience menu header.
1	3	User clicks through some of the residence hall accordion, but only in top portion.
1	3	User reads descriptions to find out freshmen aren't allowed in certain halls.
1	4	User finds *Academic Calendar* link under *Academics* menu, remembers it from earlier.
1	4	User notices that spring semester overlaps with January term.
1	5	User finds *Bookstore* link under *More* and notes books are only small percentage of what bookstores sell.
1	5	User goes directly to *Shop Women's*.

User #	Task #	Observation
2	0	User notes grainy, unprofessional photo on the home page.
2	0	User notices she can't see the sides of the image slider.
2	1	User looks for registrar under *Academics*.
2	1	User scrolls somewhat quickly past main links on *Academics* then scrolls all the way down to the bottom links.
2	1	User checks *Academic Services + Resources* and reads through descriptions.
2	1	User reads links at the bottom of the page in more detail.
2	1	User finds *Alumni* link at the top, but reads hover menu and doesn't think she's in the right place.
2	1	User clicks through FAQs and finds the *Registrar* page.
2	1	User thinks there's too much information on the page and wants links for "online" and "in person."
2	2	User finds *Online Studies* on *Academics* landing page.
2	2	User finds *MS in Interactive Media* under School of Communications heading.
2	2	User checks top headings.
2	2	User clicks *School of Communications* under *About the School* accordion.
2	2	User finds Message from the Dean.

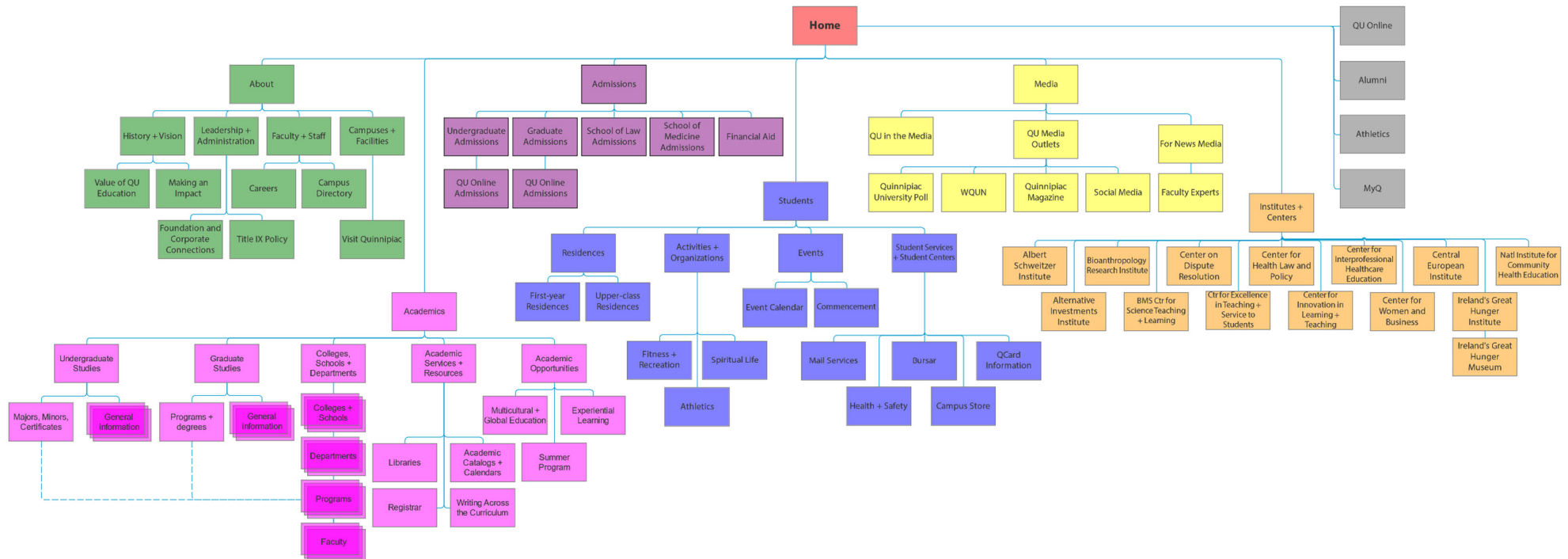| User #	Task #	Observation
2	2	User finds BA in Interactive Digital Design.
2	2	User notices the top menu has changed.
2	2	User ends up back at the *Departments + Faculty* page.
2	2	User clicks *Department of Interactive Media + Design* on the side menu and ends up somewhere different.
2	2	User clicks *Learn more…* and ends up back at page she's already visited.
2	3	User finds the *University home* link on the menu below the search bar.
2	3	User goes to *Housing Options* under *Student Experience*.
2	3	User clicks on *Undergraduate Residences*.
2	3	User wants to see prices.
2	3	User wants them to break it up by grades.
2	3	User decides she'd rather live off-campus.
2	3	User finds residential rates on side menu, but she wishes it was first.
2	3	User again wants to see housing options broken down by years.
2	3	User reads descriptions to find out freshmen aren't allowed in The Commons.
2	3	User doesn't want to go through all descriptions to find out which ones are allowed for freshmen.

User #	Task #	Observation
2	4	User clicks on *Academics* menu to find *Academic Catalogs and Calendars* link.
2	4	User finds calendar setup confusing.
2	4	User wants a downloadable and printable calendar.
2	5	User looks for bookstore under *About*, then *More.*
2	5	User looks at sale items first.
2	5	User wants items on sale broken down by gender.
2	5	User picks out a youth item at first, then realizes it probably won't fit.

User #	Task #	Observation
3	0	User finds text chopped off by fold stressful.
3	0	User doesn't scroll past second image slider.
3	1	User goes directly to *Alumni* link and accidentally clicks.
3	1	User would have put "Request transcript" in the header because it would be a common request.
3	1	User thinks it took too many clicks to find information.
3	2	User looks for a *Faculty* link on main navigation menu.
3	2	User clicks *QU Online* link from *Academics* menu.
3	2	User finds *MS in Interactive Media* under
3	2	User just wants a faculty pull-down menu.
3	2	User tries *Quick links*.
3	2	User gives up quickly and decides she'd use the search bar.
3	3	User tries to click *QU Online* logo to go back to main home page.
3	3	User looks for housing under *Admissions*.
3	3	User finds *Housing Options* under *Student Experience*.
3	3	User clicks two housing options and decides she'd call Admissions.
3	4	User clicks through to *Academics* to find academic calendar.
3	4	User is distracted by January term but finds spring semester easily.
3	5	User finds bookstore link under *More*.

Prototypes

The site map and wireframes illustrate a proposed redesign of the site, with accompanying rationales for the proposed alterations.

Site Map

Rationale

Cognitive walkthrough

- Make the graduate admissions requirements easier to find.
- Better organize the course descriptions and degree requirements for degree programs.

Usability report

- Include registrar's page on main site navigation and *Academic Services + Resources*.
- Streamline transcript request information and organization.
- Improve organization of program and school pages.
- Reorganize residential information.
- Make bookstore more prominent.

Heuristic evaluation

- Make the sub-domains (*Athletics, Alumni, QU Online*) distinct from the main navigation.
- Give better categorization to *Institutes + Centers* section.
- Re-organize *More* section.
- Consolidate repetitive information (eg Visit Quinnipiac, Campuses + Facilities, Virtual Tour and Directions + Travel Information).
- Clarify *Calendar* and *Academic calendar* sections

Admissions

I eliminated *QU Online* as part of the top-level navigation. The distinction between QU and QU Online is somewhat blurry (even to a student who's been part of it for several semesters) and a prospective student is probably going to consider the degree type before the program format when beginning a search for admissions information. I included *QU Online Admissions* child pages for graduate and undergraduates. I added a new top-level *Financial Aid* section. Not all prospective students will require financial aid, prospective students will consider paying for school separate from getting into school, and much of the information will be the same whether undergraduate, graduate, medicine or law.
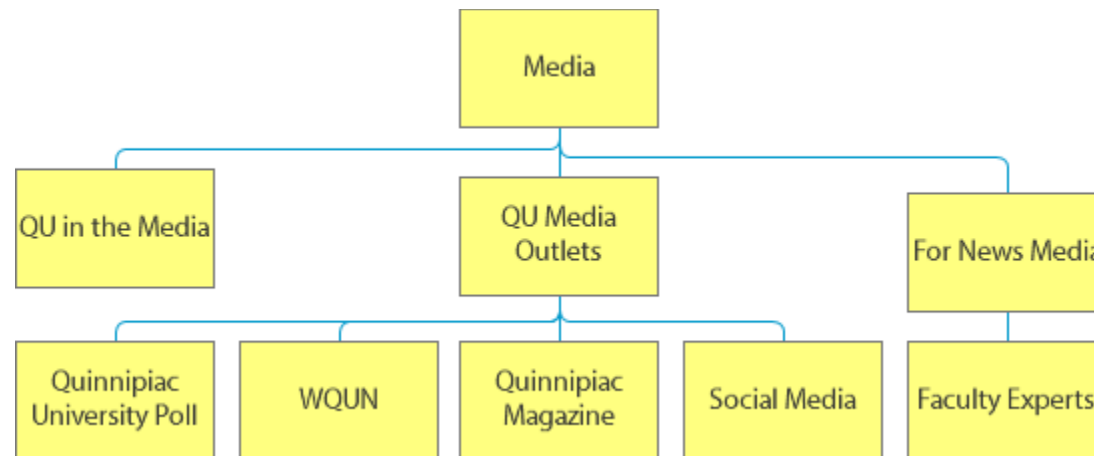
About

I moved four sections over from the *More* navigation category: *Careers*, *Campus Directory*, *Foundations and Corporate Connections* and *Title IX Policy*. I decided on four top-level categories: *History + Vision*, *Leadership + Administration*, *Faculty + Staff*, and *Campuses + Facilities*. *H+V* will house everything promotional about the school and its endeavors, including the previously top-level pages entitled *Value of a Quinnipiac Education* and *Making an Impact*. *Leadership + Administration* encompasses not only the people who embody those roles but the matters entrusted to them, e.g. *Foundations and Corporate Connections* and *Title IX Policy*. *Faculty + Staff* has been added to include *Campus Directory* and *Careers* (the latter being an option that most users expect to find under *About* but does not seem to be a common enough use of a university site to put it in the main section navigation). Finally, *Campuses + Facilities* will contain everything related to the physical campus, excluding residence halls but including directions, scheduling visits, maps and virtual tours.
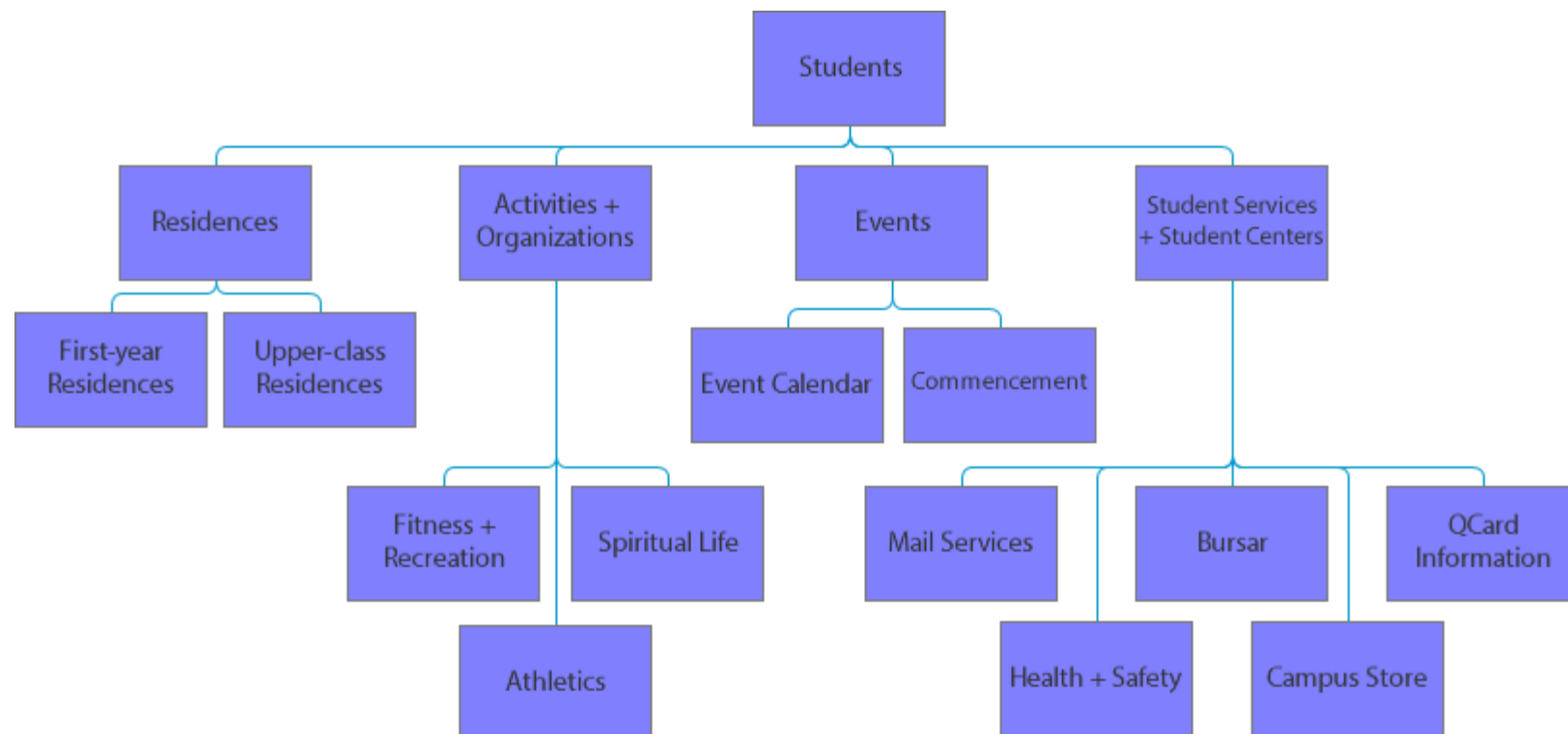
Media

I changed the name of *News + Events* to *Media* and refocused the category on three types of media: media about the school (*QU in the Media*), media produced by the school (*QU Media Outlets*, a temporary name that should be revisited), and future media (*For News Media*, another temporary name). I considered placing the last category underneath *QU in the Media*, but the content could also be useful for internal QU media professionals. *Faculty Experts*, however, clearly belongs under *For News Media*. It will also include press releases, public relations information, copyright permissions and stock photos/media. *QU Media Outlets* include the radio station, the magazine, the poll and social media.
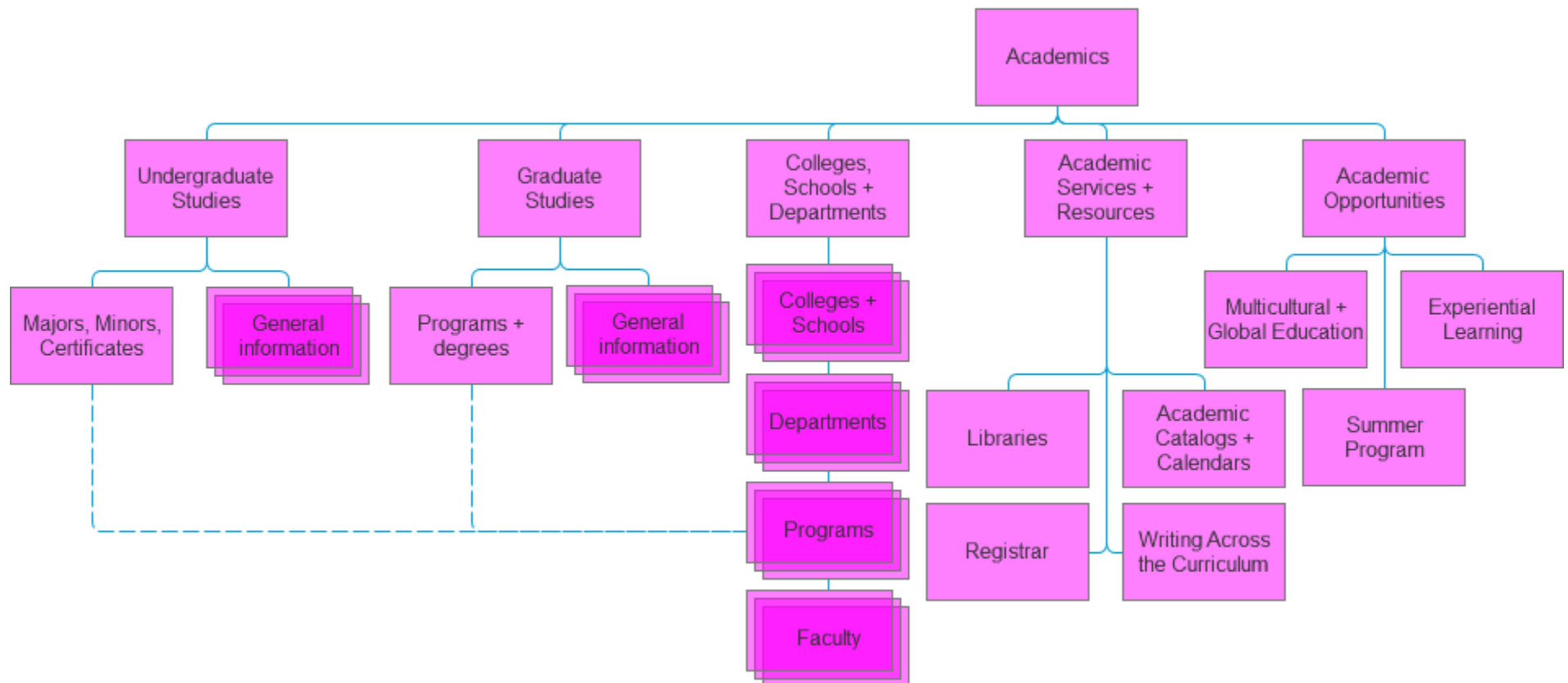
Students

Student Experience sounded like recruitment jargon, so I changed the name to *Students* to make it more of an informational category. The four top-level pages are now *Residences* (changed from *Living at Quinnipiac*, which also sounded like marketing), *Activities + Organizations*, *Events* and *Student Services + Student Centers*. *Residences* will be sub-divided into *First-year* and *Upper-class* to make freshman halls easier to locate. Residence hall pages will be linked to from each page if both freshmen and upperclassmen are permitted in that location. *Activities + Organizations* will encompass all non-academic campus activities, including *Athletics*, *Spiritual Life* and *Fitness + Recreation*. *Events* will include a separate page for *Commencement* because it's recurring and arguably the most important event on campus. *Student Services + Student Centers* will include any other services that aren't explicitly academic, e.g. *Bursar, Mail Services, Health + Safety* and *Campus Store* (since it sells more than books, I've changed the name from *Bookstore*).
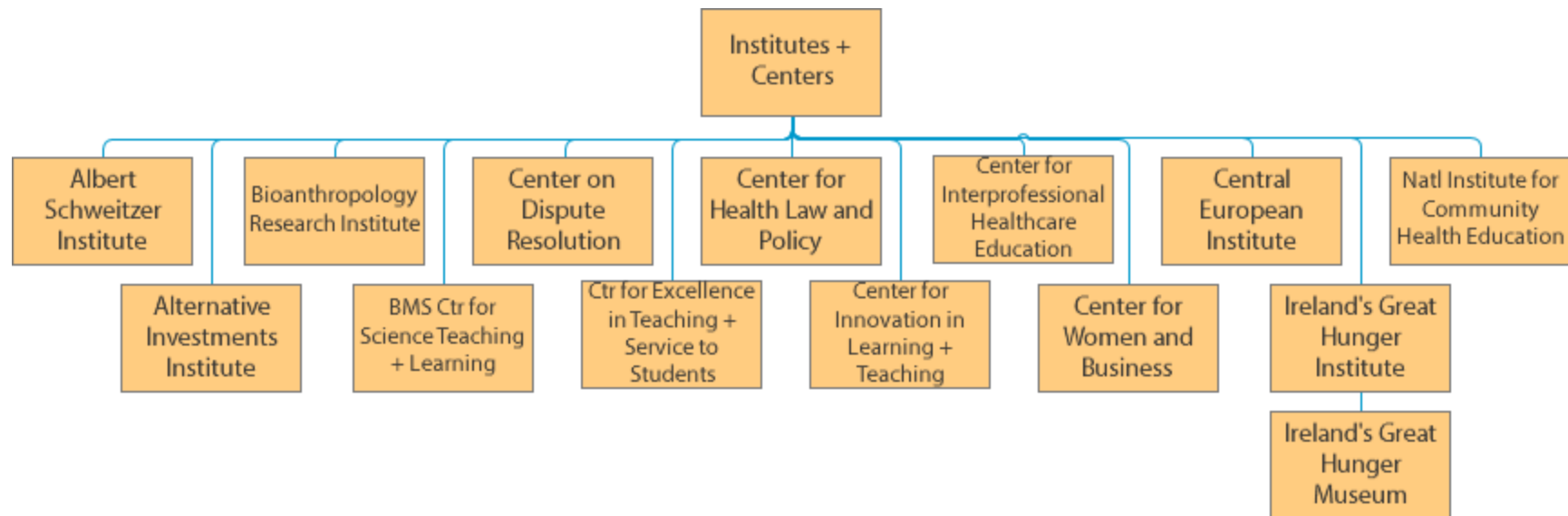
Academics

This section proved challenging because *Colleges, Schools + Departments* includes both graduate and undergraduate programs. I decided to create a division between program-specific and general information. I changed *Undergraduate Programs* to *Graduate Studies* to be consistent with *Undergraduate Studies*, and included pages to list the programs offered at each level. These will link to the page under the *Department* page for the applicable program. Pages under *Colleges, Schools + Departments* will have a fluid progression from general to specific to avoid the confusion experienced in user testing. *Academic Services + Resources* will include a prominent link to the *Registrar* page, as well as *Libraries, Academic Catalogs + Calendars* and *Writing Across the Curriculum* (moved from *Institutes + Centers*). Finally, I created an *Academic Opportunities* section (name tentative) to house alternative learning program that may apply to more than one degree or department, e.g. *Summer Program, Experiential Learning* and *Multicultural + Global Education*.

Institutes + Centers

I made the fewest changes in this section because the limited information provided on these pages doesn't give me a sense of how I could better integrate them into the rest of the site. The biggest change I made was placing *Ireland's Great Hunger Museum* underneath *Ireland's Great Hunger Institute* because presumably the latter operates the former. Otherwise, I simply arranged them alphabetically.

Sub-Domains

The sub-domains are out of scope for this project, and they should be more distinct from the main navigation. Therefore, I've set aside QU Online, Alumni, Athletics and MyQ as a secondary navigation menu (most likely below the Search bar as in the current site).

Wireframes

The general layout of the existing Quinnipiac website follows the standards expected by most users, including the logo in the top left, the search box in the top right, the menu across the top and secondary navigation along the left-hand side. I retained these positions in the design.

I placed links to the sub-domains in the footer, where they are easily accessible from every page but do not interfere with the navigation of the main site.

Links

For the landing page of each section, I chose to amend the vertical image-and-link layout to a horizontal one, enabling users to more easily scan down the text on the page while preserving the aesthetics of the original design.

These links will mirror the structure of the side navigation, to eliminate any confusion about whether links lead to different information. Users will have a preference for one navigation type over the other, but won't be required to use both.

The image and text are contained within a box to clarify their association and discourage the pervasive issue in the original design of some images functioning as links and others not.

I have included two versions of this element, a full-width and half-width version, which are shown in a variety of combinations. An even smaller, third-width version with the link and text stacked might be used; however, at the point at which this is deemed necessary, it might be worth evaluating and reorganizing the content. According to my site map, no landing page besides *Centers + Institutes* requires more than five such links on the landing page.
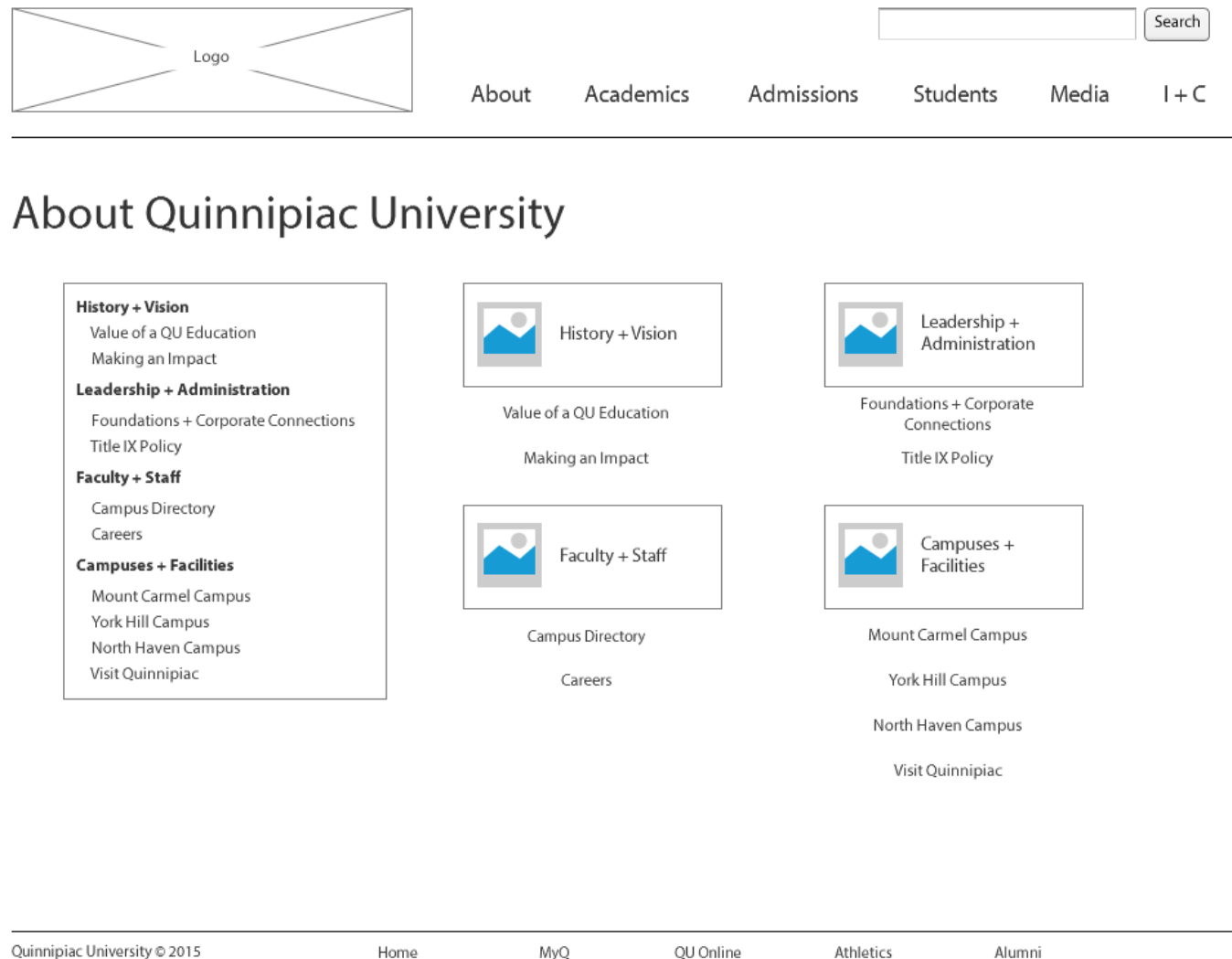
There should be a selection of images available to use in these links, as well as an option for administrators to upload custom versions.

Conclusion

The purpose of this layout is to provide a clean and intuitive interface that provides visual interest without compromising the user's ability to locate information quickly. It offers a flexible template with various options to meet unforeseen needs in the development process. The top-level pages will be standardized, but subsequent pages can incorporate the image-link element to carry through the university's brand identity.
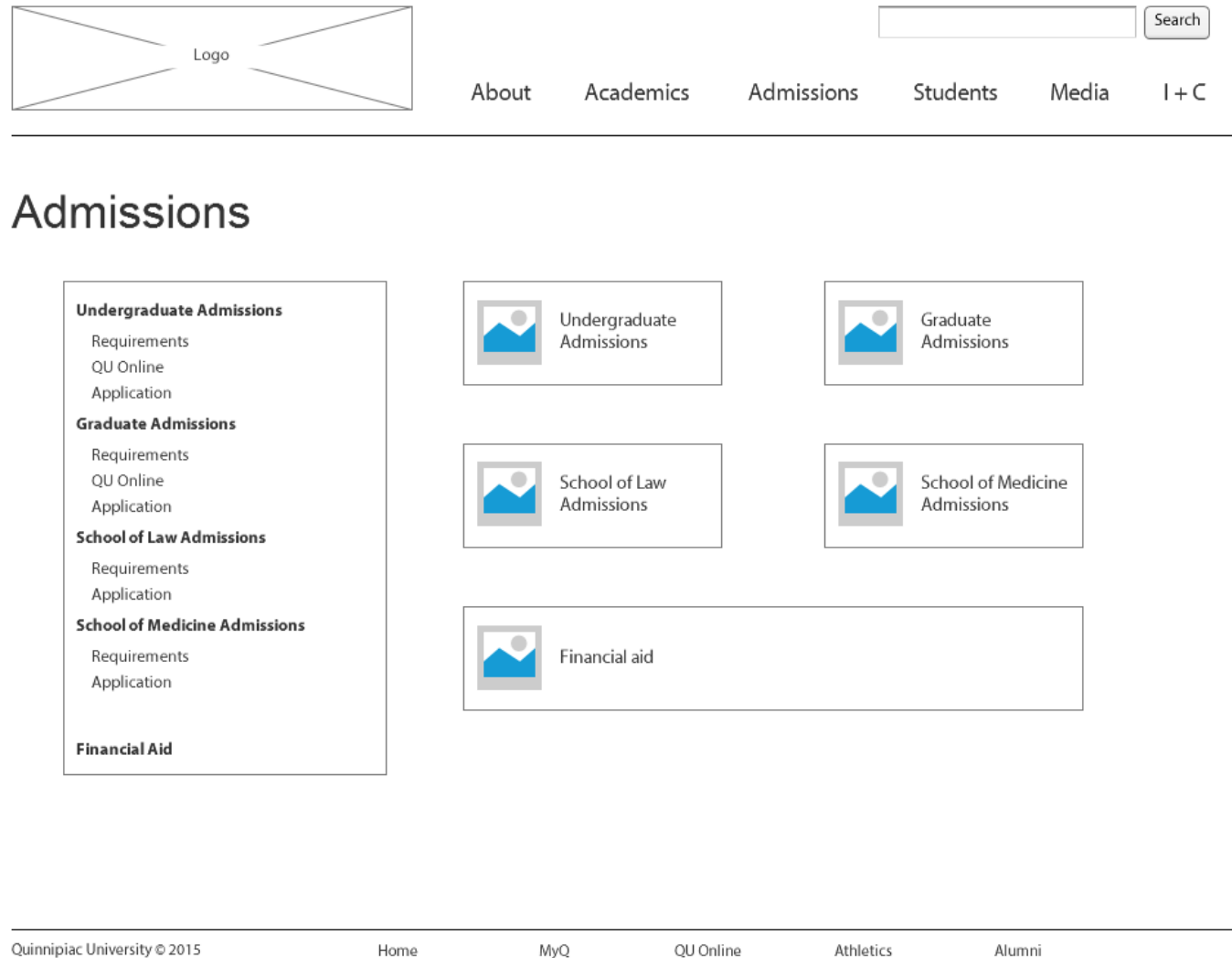
Layout 1: About

This wireframe shows a two-column layout of the links with secondary links in a single line beneath. This layout works well in a section with numerous sub-pages and diverse information.
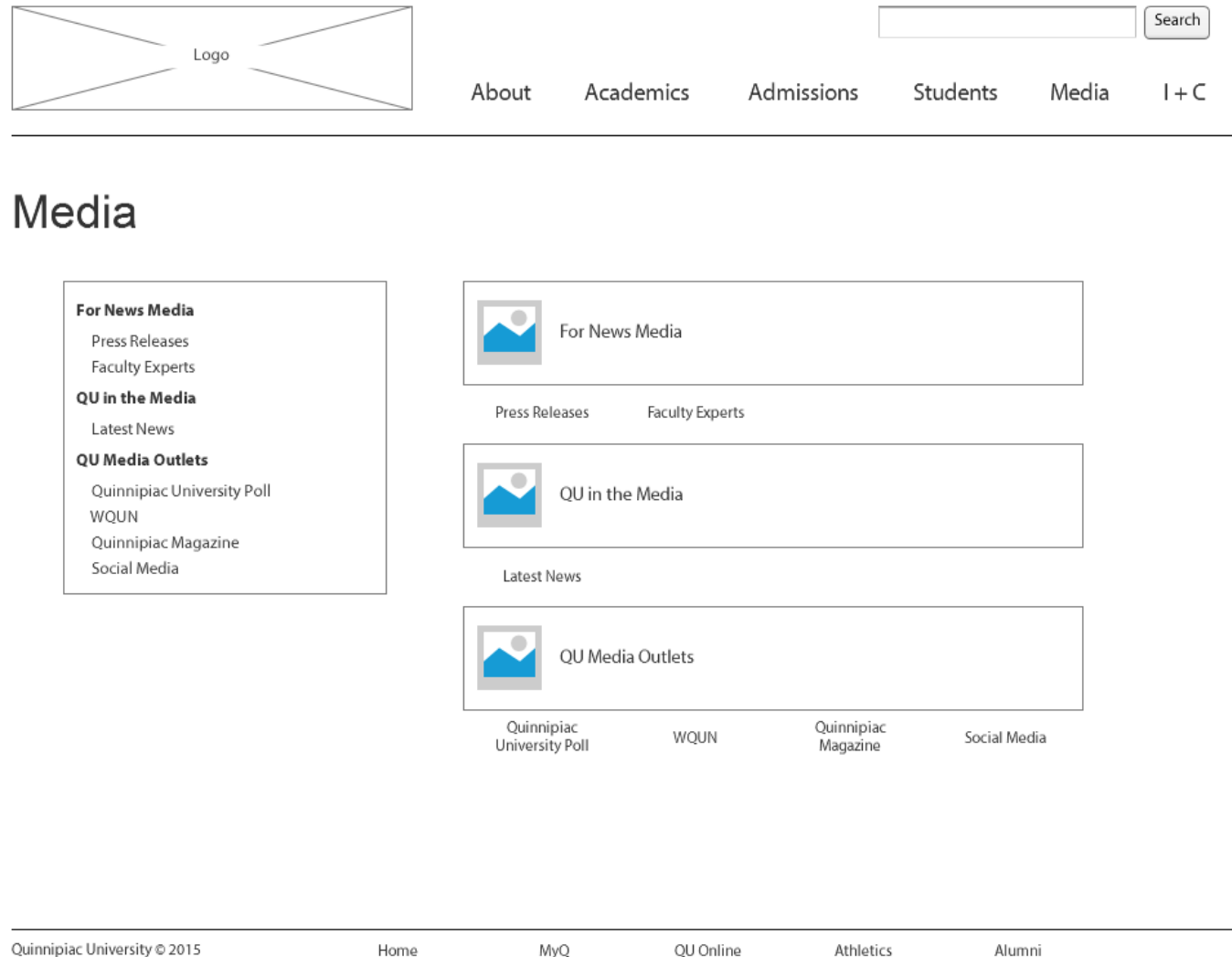
Layout 2: Admissions

Admissions

Undergraduate Admissions
Requirements
QU Online
Application

Graduate Admissions
Requirements
QU Online
Application

School of Law Admissions
Requirements
Application

School of Medicine Admissions
Requirements
Application

Financial Aid

Undergraduate Admissions

Graduate Admissions

School of Law Admissions

School of Medicine Admissions

Financial aid

This wireframe uses a combination of half- and full-width links with no supplementary links. The side navigation offers such direct routes, but in this section the landing page is more of a bridge to the true landing page, as determined by which class of prospective student the user falls under.

Layout 3: Media

Finally, the Media page utilizes the full-width links with secondary links arrayed horizontally underneath. This page also acts as a bridge depending on what type of user is visiting, but it offers a more direct route to frequently used links. While prospective students are likely willing to devote the time to reading the information in detail and clicking through multiple pages, media is a section more suited to quick navigation.