

EVALUATING DEPARTMENT WEBPAGES: A CHECKLIST

Common pathways for finding a department homepage at a given university:

Pathway A:

Main homepage
 Academics
 College of Arts & Science
 Departments
 Chemistry

Pathway B:

Main homepage
 A-Z index
 Department of Chemistry

General:

- Is the downloading time for any files acceptable?
- Is the font size of all text selected to facilitate easy reading on screen?
- Can any of these files be downloaded to disk including graphics?
- Has the web designer accounted for possible printing of any documents according to standard protocols (8.5 X 11" (letter size) or 8.5 X 14" (legal size) paper, removal of excessive framing, standard margins, removal of excessive colour)?

Most homepage designers don't check to see if the material they put up on the web can be easily downloaded or printed according to minimum computer standards!

- Do department rosters give full names of their faculty or do they use initials and surnames?

Note this poses difficulty in identifying women faculty members that may be sought after by women students. It is also a matter of common courtesy to properly identify faculty names so that they be addressed properly in the form of correspondence.

- Is the chair of the department clearly identified in the faculty roster?
- Is there a "message from the chair" statement?
- What is the rank of the chair?

Note that some departments have chairpersons that either do not have Ph.D. degrees or are not at the rank of professor. This may give clues about the inner workings and culture of those particular departments.

- What is the general tone of the writing throughout the webpage? Does it pique your interest to learn more? As a student does it invite you to seek out a faculty member?
- Is there a current directory of graduate and post-doctoral fellows in the department with contact information?

- Is there an update date given as to the last time information on the webpage was revised?
- Are there any broken links?
- Are there any forbidden links?

Some faculty members' pages restrict access to descriptions about their research. This may mean that they are not that interested in using their webpage as a recruitment tool for potential students. You need to verify this yourself.

Curriculum vitae information:

- Is the Ph.D. year and location stated?
- Are the post-doctoral years and locations stated?
- Are the former Ph.D. and post-doctoral advisors names given?
This is often not given.
- Is their current rank given?
- Is there a full address contact: mailing address, e-mail, telephone and fax numbers?
- Is there a recent photograph of the faculty member clearly identifying the faculty member?

Note some faculty supply group pictures where it is not always possible to identify the group leader particularly when they are young faculty members.

- Are any recent awards or titles stated?
- Are these awards consistent with their scientific achievements in the published literature?

Note that sometimes awards and titles of high merit are given that are inconsistent with a faculty members' publications track record. You need to verify this yourself.

- Are these awards from government funded agencies, corporations, or foundations?
- Is their most recent teaching course load stated?
- Do they give a statement of "teaching philosophy"?

Research descriptions:

- Are the headings to divide projects clearly marked?
- Are the descriptions detailed enough for you to make a decision about that advisor's research?
- Are there representative references given for each project heading?
- How recent are the references?

Note that Ph.D. and post-doctoral advisors can be identified for new faculty hires.

- Do the projects match the advisor's previous work as a graduate student? As a post-doctoral fellow?
- Are the publications consistent with the projects described?

Note that some projects may be hyped and or inconsistent with their previous research track record. This is particularly true of biologically relevant projects. You need to

investigate if these are new areas in their research group and if their past knowledge is adequate for them to be successful at these stated projects. Check their scientific pedigree and collaborators.

- Does their stated name correspond to the name they use in their publications?

Some faculty members' names appear misspelled on the department faculty roster when compared to the spelling they use in their publications. This will pose additional difficulties when doing author literature searches.

- Is there a keyword list for each topic?
- Are the graphics appropriate or excessive?
- Are funding sources stated?
- Are current group members (students and post-doctoral fellows) mentioned with appropriate contact information?
- Are past group members mentioned showing their career paths from that advisor's group including full contact information (company names, job titles, university names, ranks)?

This information is often not given on faculty pages and is difficult to find without directly contacting the faculty member themselves. This encounter will speak volumes about how a faculty member regards career management as an issue for their students. As a student your future career prospects may be easily determined from the successes of past group members. Your best sources are previous group members!

Final note:

Personal homepages of faculty are not restricted to being the same format as the standard department webpage. Faculty members are free to develop their own webpages as they see fit to advertise their research to potential students and collaborators. It is often the case that the few faculty members who take this initiative are also the same faculty who are supportive of their students professional careers and take responsibility in guiding their students.

As representative examples check the webpages of the following faculty members and compare them with those from the rest of their respective departments:

Prof. Cathleen Crudden, Queen's University
 Prof. Steven Holdcroft, Simon Fraser University
 Prof. Scott Taylor, University of Waterloo