

Campus website receives writing, design awards

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UNC Asheville's communications and marketing team won three awards, including one for best website.

"We were pleased to be recognized by our peers. It's always nice to have people that are in your business, in the PR business, to say 'Yeah, that was a good job you did,' so that was nice," said **Debbie Griffith, director of communications and marketing.**

UNCA won awards for best website design, best public relations writing and best recruitment tools.

According to Griffith, designing the website took eight months of planning and research before finalizing the design.

"The website is really our visibility to the world and the way that we attract a lot of students," she said. "The first step a prospective student makes, we've heard, is they check the website out. So we wanted to really make a good impression."

The Public Relations Association of Western North Carolina, representing all PR firms in the region, holds an annual contest for various categories of PR.

Jill Yarnall, university writer and editor, won for the fourth time in a row for best public relations writing for her coverage of UNCA history professor Dan Pierce's book on the history of car racing.

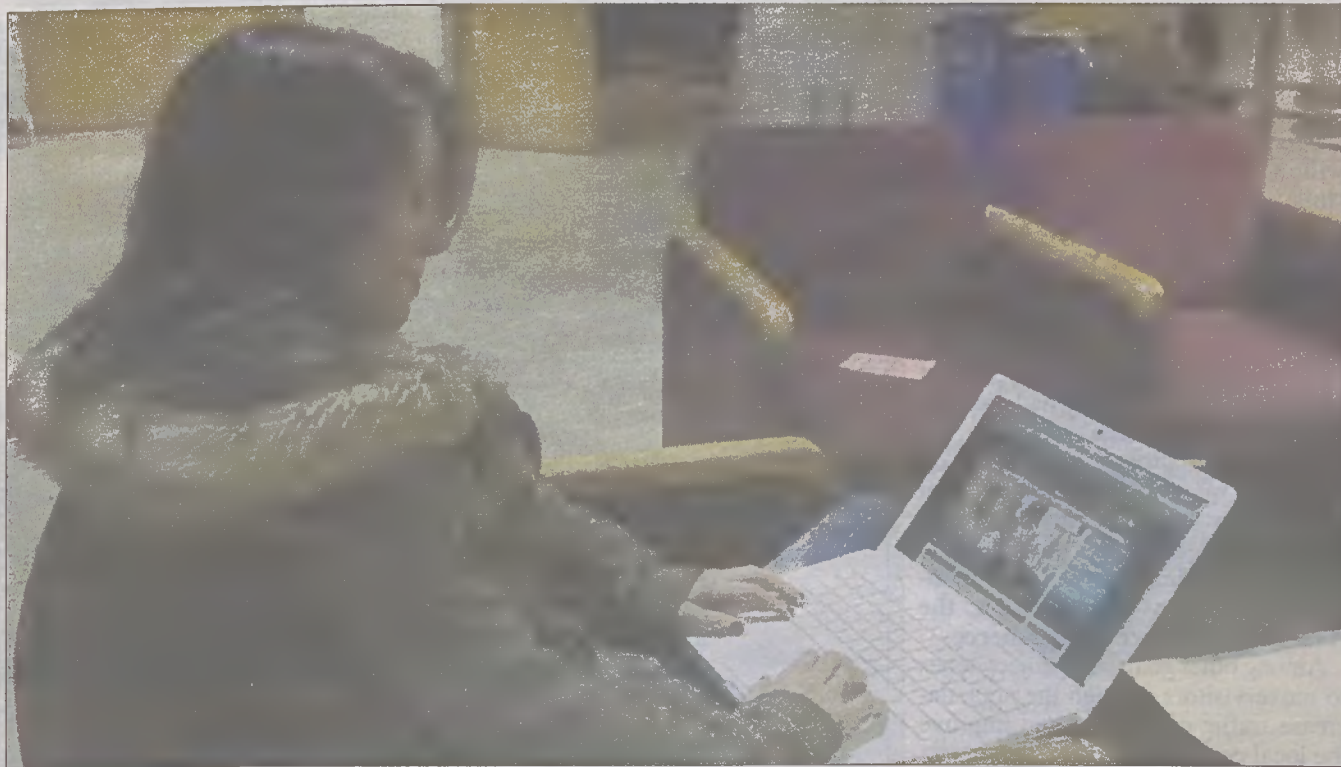
"After winning for three years, I really thought there was no way I could win for a fourth," she said. "When they called my name, I was just stunned and really so proud to represent the university in that way."

Yarnall said UNCA's interesting atmosphere helps her produce the work she does.

"I think what made them great stories was not my skill necessarily but the subject matter. They were all about great things that were happening at the university," she said. "What's not to love? Fast cars, moonshine and folk heroes. It's going to be hard to do a bad job at that."

UNCA also submitted their website for review, a new category this year, and won due to the results of the new web design and the way it improved the university's goals.

"We had to state our objective, who our target audience was, what we did in the process of organizing it and the



Kate Santos/staff photographer

Emmy Hunnicutt, 20, psychology student, looks at the campus website before class.

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budget, and they put a pretty good emphasis on showing results," she said.

The association only awards deserving content, which leaves some categories without an award from time to time, according to Yarnall.

"This is the first time that PRAWNC gave an award in the website category," she said.

According to Yarnall, UNCA competed against hospitals, ad agencies and city and county entries when they won the awards.

"It's been really fun to work with a creative team that can help envision telling the story of the university," she said.

Since the release of UNCA's new website design, visits to the site increased, with the admissions page showing triple the amount of visits.

"The website was serving a good purpose before we redesigned it, but

the problem was that no one person was in charge of it, so it just got neglected a little bit," she said. "So we have now hired a webmaster."

UNCA alumnus Luke Withrow began working for the university four years ago and now works for ITS as the new webmaster. He graduated with a double major in computer science and multimedia arts and sciences, and served on the committee designing the new website.

"I think really a key thing to the website being successful is the content being fresh," he said. "Capstrat, the company we worked with, did a great job at making it very easy for us to keep the content fresh."

The committee, comprised of ITS, communications and stakeholders such as alumni and admissions, took part in the design process. They worked with Capstrat, a public relations design firm

that recently designed the UNC Chapel Hill website, to create the new interface for UNCA, according to Griffith. The total cost of the project was \$150,000.

"We tried to figure out how people navigate the site, what they want to find quickly, and really appeal to both an internal audience and an external audience," she said. "It took us nearly a dozen different designs before we settled on the design we're using."

In designing the new website, the committee considered how people navigate the website and focused on making it easy to find topics such as cost of attendance and other student learning programs, according to Griffith.

Withrow said he maintains tech support for the website, offering help in terms of graphic design and content implementation.

"Of course, the real work is done by Jill, the communications team," he said. "No amount of technology is going to make a good website. You have to have good people writing it, good photography and good content," he said.

Withrow currently focuses on teaching different departments how to use the new program and said he hopes to begin integrating them with the main website.