

CMS in Higher Education

***SELECTING
THE PLATFORM
THAT MAKES
THE GRADE***



Digital experience pioneer Acquia and leading Drupal web design company ImageX have partnered to develop this examination of the comparative benefits of the leading open source content management platforms.

Introduction

Along with nearly every other industry, the world of higher education is facing unprecedented transformation, driven by evolving technology and changing behaviors. The goal of higher education—to develop knowledgeable citizens who will contribute to society—remains unchanged. But the methods for attracting those individuals and maintaining solid relationships with them throughout their educational journeys and beyond are shifting rapidly.

Today, current and potential students expect access to the information and services they want when they want them. It's a huge demand. Determining

which platform offers the tools to create and maintain a significant level of content will be key to the success of any higher education institution.

While WordPress is a well-known content management choice, it can present challenges in meeting the unique needs of educational institutions. Key capabilities and features for educational institutions, including functionality, accessibility and security, are all areas in which the Drupal platform excels.

DRUPAL AND WORDPRESS: A COMPARISON OF KEY CRITERIA

The two platforms vary — sometimes significantly — with regard to the features and qualities of a content management platform that are most important to higher education institutions.

SECURITY

As in many other sectors, security is crucial in higher education. While the core WordPress offering includes security protocols, users are left to manage the security of any incorporated plugins. Additionally, attributable to its simplicity and widespread usage, WordPress has encountered a range of security challenges.

Drupal's inventor, Dries Buytaert, is also the founder of Acquia, whose team continues to contribute important code to the Drupal community. Acquia is an active participant in the Drupal Security team and an integral part of the effort to keep Drupal security patches current and maintain core network security to minimize risk.

Drupal is also the CMS of choice for many government organizations, where security is of the highest priority.



GOVERNANCE AND PERMISSIONS

Drupal's higher level of security and site-governance tools are well suited to higher education sites that support a large number of departments, which are responsible for developing and maintaining a substantial amount of content.

Individual departments within an institution can easily manage their own sections and establish simple processes for approving content changes. Drupal's highly flexible permission system enables site administrators within departments to customize the site's workflow to suit their specific needs, while maintaining the content structure necessary for consistency. As a result, teams are able to edit and update content faster, and brand integrity is preserved.

ACCESSIBILITY

Higher education institutions seek to provide a user-friendly experience that adheres to compliance guidelines and is accessible to all. Drupal was designed for accessibility and offers robust tools to ensure the highest level of accessibility. Drupal distributions such as OpenEDU offer a built-in accessibility checker, helping to ensure issues are discovered and addressed in real time, before launch.



SUPPORT FOR CUSTOM CONTENT

Higher education sites often require customized content such as news, events and faculty profiles. While WordPress does offer functionality for creating these types of content, Drupal provides more powerful, flexible content-structuring tools that do not require coding. Drupal also offers a robust taxonomy system, which empowers content editors to connect content and expose it to search, which aids in content discovery and improves the user experience.

ROBUST PERSONALIZATION

Drupal offers personalization tools that lead to deeper relationships with users. Educational institutions can adjust the site interface to specific user types and enable the site to “learn” what users want—and don’t want—to see.

Personalization tools built to support Drupal, such as Acquia Personalization, help organizations learn about their users and offer them relevant content. This level of personalization is a powerful way to overcome the challenge of balancing the differing needs of multiple user types, offer a customized experience for each user and ultimately deepen individual relationships.

MULTILINGUAL FUNCTIONALITY

International students are often a key audience for higher education institutions. Multilingual capabilities can be a meaningful differentiator for parents, enabling them to evaluate the institution in their native language. While WordPress is capable of multilingual content, Drupal offers more depth and flexibility and includes comprehensive built-in translation and multilingual capabilities.

OVERALL VALUE

While WordPress is often less expensive initially, when considering the value of greater security and scalability and the flexibility to create personalized experiences at an enterprise level, Drupal provides longer-term value and is able to adapt and expand as requirements evolve. Additionally, WordPress lacks critical capabilities for user engagement, mobility and more.



DRUPAL 8: A WIDER RANGE OF BENEFITS

It is important for higher education institutions considering a move to the Drupal platform, or those currently using Drupal 7, to understand the advantages of the latest edition of the platform. Drupal 8 represents a change not only in the technology but also in the benefits it provides to any higher education institution.

1

Improved Architecture

In a significant change to the core architecture of the platform, the underlying function and class libraries have been replaced with a robust range of functionality, provided by Symfony. Because it is no longer confined to the Drupal community, the development ecosystem is more widely supported, and developers from outside the community can ramp up more quickly.

Additionally, the large selection of existing classes/libraries accelerates development time for a range of features, including the integration of APIs using a variety of connections and protocols. Symfony also offers full cache-control at various levels, leading to a smoother, faster user experience.

2

Comprehensive Mobile Readiness

According to Google, more than 50% of search queries globally now come from mobile devices, and higher education audiences make up a large proportion of this population. Drupal 8 was developed to provide a great mobile experience for site visitors and site administrators alike.

Rich media support for images, audio, videos and other files, including embed support for videos hosted externally (such as on YouTube or Vimeo) makes Drupal 8 a robust media management platform. Media entities are editable and reusable across a site and contain data for categorization, display, storage and many other uses.

3

Entities are at the Core

In Drupal 7, many solutions to unique requirements made use of nodes to store everything from content to media to data. In Drupal 8, “everything” is an entity. Now, custom entity types can be created for virtually any purpose, such as facility information, courses, programs and faculty directory data.

This also means libraries of components can be created and reused across multiple pages, including elements such as slide-shows, menus, content snippets, media, locations and more.

4

Enhanced Administration and Workflow

Drupal 8 includes a host of new tools for content and site administration, including a media browser for adding images or video, making it easy to upload or to filter and search for the right item. “Workspaces” allow new content to be staged and finalized before being released to users. Contributed modules provide methods for scheduling of publishing (and unpublishing) of content, such as embargoed press releases or events.

Individual pages can be completely customized by using Layout Builder to select layout and content blocks as needed.

FINDING THE WAY: HOW ACQUIA AND IMAGEX CAN HELP

As higher education institutions adapt to keep pace with the changing needs, expectations and behaviors of those they serve, selecting the right content management platform will be one key to their success. The clear advantages that Drupal offers—increased security, flexibility and scalability—make it the ideal choice for any institution seeking to position itself as an innovative leader in digital experiences.

Acquia and ImageX are the pioneering partners that can help educational institutions of all types and sizes assume that leadership role, while building deeper, more personalized relationships with their students, faculty, alumni and communities.

To learn more about how Acquia and ImageX can help your institution transform its digital experience, contact us today.

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