

A photograph of the Iowa State University campus during autumn. The foreground shows a paved walkway with several people walking. The middle ground is filled with trees displaying vibrant orange and red foliage. In the background, a large, classical-style building with a prominent dome is visible. To the right, a tall, white water tower stands out against the sky. An American flag is flying on a pole near the water tower. The entire image is partially covered by a large, semi-transparent red overlay on the left side, which contains the text.

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

# Web Style and Story Guide

Updated: Oct. 1, 2024



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# Introduction

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

**Our story is not entirely ours to tell.** It lives in the hearts and minds of Iowans, and in the world at large. **Our challenge is to tell it anyway.**

**We must tell the story of Iowa State in a way that resonates with everybody, whether their conceptions have been informed through generations of experience or if they are seeing the words “Iowa State University” for the first time.**

This guide was developed to provide focus, context, and a voice for the Iowa State story as told through its website, launched in 2022. It seeks to clarify an accurate, consistent sense of who we are, with specific guidelines for how we communicate. We encourage you to refer back to this document when developing web content.

Within this document, you’ll find guidance for crafting the Iowa State story, including best practices for content that will serve the unified feel of the new website while also delivering on key aspects of performance such as search engine visibility and user engagement. Use this document to produce, edit, update, and publish content across the Iowa State University web ecosystem.



# Audiences

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While the Iowa State website ([iastate.edu](https://iastate.edu)) serves an entire universe of information to a wide array of audiences, its primary (nearly singular) purpose is as a tool for student recruitment. Even content that's clearly intended for other audiences, such as media requests or faculty position listings, should be viewed through the lens of student recruitment. Doing so will help maintain a consistent tone and sense of purpose across all web properties.

Who are our audiences, what do they need, and what do they respond to?

## **Audience 1:** Prospective Students (Undergraduate)

- **Need** to *feel* what it's like to attend Iowa State
- **Respond** well to Iowa State's humanistic approach to science, arts, and technology education, as well as learning communities and faculty/peer support
- **Should** feel included and welcomed by the user experience of exploring the Iowa State website in a manner similar to their inclusion in the University itself

## **Audience 2:** Families of Prospective Students (Undergraduate)

- **Need** to find relevant information as easily as possible
- **Respond** well to plain language, clear instruction, and scannable layouts
- **Should** feel immediately confident in their ability to navigate the website successfully

## **Additional Audiences:** Prospective Graduate and Professional Students, Current Students, Faculty, Staff, Employee Recruiting, Alumni, Media, Vendors

- **Need** a clear path to the specific information they seek
- **Respond** well to a sense of community and involvement
- **Should** feel urged to participate in the Iowa State community



# The Iowa State Story

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

IN THIS SECTION

**Platform**

**Promise**

**Support**



# Platform

The Platform is a distillation of Iowa State’s key messaging – from a brief description to a more detailed, evidence-based explanation of value. It’s meant to be simple, memorable, and moving. We use a clear hierarchy to organize the messaging into three levels: Promise, Support, and Proof Points for key audiences. How far you go down the flow chart depends on the audience you’re addressing, the channel you’re using, and what you hope to achieve.

## Promise

Provides an easily referenced and precise summary of Iowa State’s desired audiences, the world we operate in, and the specific value we can provide that competitors can’t. Its function is to guide and focus executions of the Iowa State story, but is not necessarily intended for consumption by external audiences.

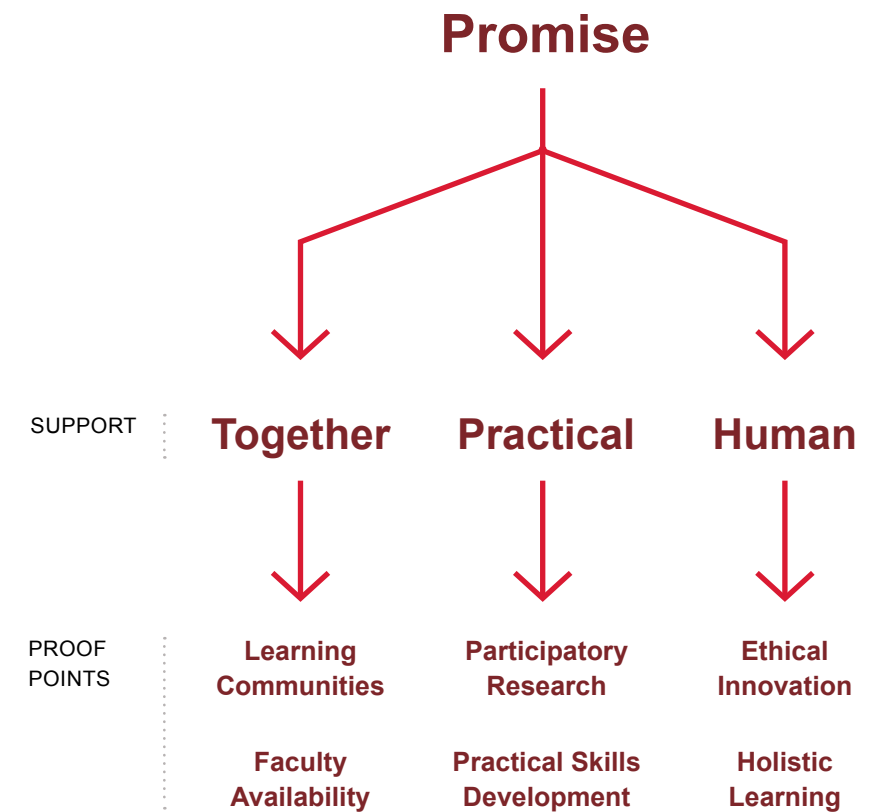
## Support

Explains how Iowa State delivers on its promise. These may be used in whole, in part, or in summary throughout messaging.

## Proof Points

Provide context for Support based on the messaging content and target audience. Since the details are specific and nuanced, they’re best chosen by the author. It’s important to remember that these details must align with the statements at the Support level.

PLATFORM HIERARCHY





THE IOWA STATE STORY

# Promise

A promise statement is as unique as Iowa State itself.  
But it generally answers the following:

**CLIENT/PRODUCT:**

Who are we?

**AUDIENCE:**

Who are we talking to?

**COMPETITIVE SET/CATEGORY:**

Who do we compare to?

**REASON TO BELIEVE:**

What can we offer that's unique?

**Iowa State University** is the heartland land-grant university that supports student discovery of practical knowledge and technical skills for the betterment of the world, while always focusing on the human impact of its work.



THE IOWA STATE STORY

# Support

## Together

Iowa State is a community that welcomes, includes, and supports students in their development because we believe in working together.

### Audience 1 (Prospective Undergrad) Proof

**Learning Communities.** Finding your friends is just as important as finding your passion. Iowa State Learning Communities are supportive peer groups based around shared interests and are open to every student. They help ensure that you will never feel lost or alone on the way to where you're going.

### Audience 2 (Prospective Undergrad Families) Proof

**Faculty Availability.** Professional and academic guidance must extend beyond the classroom. Iowa State faculty and staff are dedicated mentors, teachers, and collaborators who are willing to go the extra mile to spark the curiosity of engaged students. They help ensure that new knowledge and skills are always accessible.

### Additional Audiences

**Community for learning, working, and living.**



THE IOWA STATE STORY

# Support

## Practical

Iowa State is a research hub that guides learning toward practical innovation because we believe the purpose of science and technology is to improve quality of life.

### Audience 1 (Prospective Undergrad) Proof

**Participatory Research.** When you're motivated to make a difference in the world, you need to learn how to make it happen. Research and service opportunities at Iowa State are open to undergraduate participation. Start right away, and graduate with practical experience.

### Audience 2 (Prospective Undergrad Families) Proof

**Practical Skills Development.** Career success goes beyond the first job after graduation. Iowa State emphasizes practical learning experiences that develop the professional skills that can only be gained by doing. Through opportunities in research, service, and experiential learning, Iowa State students hit the ground running in their field of choice.

### Additional Audiences

**Making discoveries together.**





# Support (cont'd)

## Human

Iowa State is an institution that shares discoveries and solutions for the sake of making positive contributions to humanity.

### Audience 1 (Prospective Undergrad) Proof

**Ethical Innovation.** Innovation should not exist simply for the sake of innovation. Classes, research, and the community of Iowa State are all focused on ensuring that our students understand the human impact of both the work they do and *how* they do it. Build a better world by learning what “better” means to people.

### Audience 2 (Prospective Undergrad Families) Proof

**Holistic Learning.** True learning means more than what you know. Iowa State places as much emphasis on building relationships and community as it does on gaining new knowledge and skills. Our students graduate “Loyal and True” to each other, to the integrity of their work, and to the world at large.

### Additional Audiences

**Home to human breakthroughs.**







# Telling Our Story

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

IN THIS SECTION

**Narrative**

**Storytelling Tips**

**Our Voice**

**Quick Style Guide**

**Writing for the Web**



TELLING OUR STORY

# Narrative

Now that we know who we are, what we promise, and how we prove it to the people who use our website, let's set our compass to how that story should *feel* as we tell it.

## Heart

This one word encapsulates what Iowa State is and how Iowa State works.

“Heart” evokes drive, innovation, and tenacity. It emphasizes inclusivity, community, and caring. It echoes Iowa State’s “heartland” location and central value to our state, country, and world.

When deciding how to show and tell the story of Iowa State, always choose the option that resonates most with the concept of “heart.”



# Narrative

## Implementation

### Do:

- ✓ **Conceptualize “heart” as the jumping-off point** for frequent explanations of why Iowa State favors a certain approach:

*e.g., consider “because our world...” as a messaging construction.*

- ✓ **Substitute “human” as a stand-in for “heart” in overt messaging**, especially when discussing Iowa State’s approach to STEM education and innovation.

- ✓ **Consider “heart” as a proof point in crafting a friendly, clear user experience** – we care for those who use our website by using plain language to make navigation easier.

- ✓ **Make use of existing messaging that resonates with the “heart” narrative:**

*e.g., “Loyal Sons, Forever True.”*

- ✓ **Choose depictions of Iowa State that emphasize the following aspects of “heart”:**

*Human activity and connections*

*Deeper meanings of beauty and truth wherever possible*

*Focus on the task at hand*

*Dispersion and intake of vital information*



# Narrative

## Implementation

### Don't:

- ✘ **Overtly use the word “heart” as a tagline or headline, especially when devoid of other context:**

*e.g., “The University with Heart,” etc.*

- ✘ **Use “family” to promote the close-knit nature of the Iowa State community, as this could be seen as exclusionary.** Note that students, faculty, and staff can freely use this word when attributed, just not the Iowa State voice.

- ✘ **Choose flowery, effusive, or overly poetic language as a means to convey the “heart” narrative** – think of “heart” as a powerfully efficient muscle that delivers oxygen to every extremity.

- ✘ **Employ “heart” as an expression of proximity that could be misinterpreted as an implication of inappropriate physical contact:**

*e.g., “faculty works closely with students...”*

- ✘ **Oversimplify the use of “heart”:**

*Heart puns and wordplay*

*Hand hearts*

*Use of heart symbols and icons in maps, etc.*

*Overuse of heart emojis*

# Storytelling Tips

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How you say it is as important as what you say. Before you begin writing in the Iowa State voice, ask yourself, “What writing style best proves our story?” The following tips will help you stay on track:

## Speak plainly, don’t use jargon

Academic and technical writing tends to rely on jargon and acronyms in order to establish credibility. Since the Iowa State “heart” narrative focuses on support for the development of students, we establish credibility on our website by communicating clearly in plain, understandable language.

## Vary sentence and paragraph length

When writing long-form content, run-on sentences are hard to avoid. Make sure to split up statements that convey two ideas. Variation in sentence length increases readability. Feel free to split out key statements into single-line paragraphs for ease of scannability.

## Use reasonable conjunctions

When they’re useful for saving time, conjunctions convey a sense of care and familiarity to the reader. When overdone or too folksy, there’ll be confusion.

## Name usefully

Prize visibility and clarity over accuracy in naming conventions, and explain any necessary nuances with helpful explanatory copy. (See more info on this subject in the [“SEO Best Practices”](#) section of this guide).

## Communicate *why*

Iowa State is a unique place with a uniquely Iowan approach to education. There’s a reason why we do everything we do, and it always ties back to our core values. Our ability to highlight this, often and thoughtfully, is what makes the “heart” narrative resonate.

## Smile with your writing

Avoid negatives while speaking matter-of-factly. When absolutely necessary, use “avoid” or “without” instead of “unless” or “don’t.”



# Our Voice

**Plain**, but not simple.

**Positive**, but not effusive.

**Practical**, but not blunt.

**Familiar**, but not folksy.

**Humble**, but not modest.

## Quick Style Guide

### Oxford (serial) comma?

Yes, always.

### Ampersands?

No, never.

### Punctuation in headlines?

Only when a question mark is needed.

### Dash usage?

En-dash separated by spaces ( – ),  
not a full em-dash (—).

HTML: `&ndash;`

### Exclamation points?

Only for social media or athletics.

# Writing for the Web

## General Best Practices

- Devote 50% of your creative energy to your headlines (they may be the first and only things people read anyway). Put 25% of your energy into the first sentence of each paragraph and photo captions. The remaining 25% is for everything else.
- Use clear, descriptive page titles. (See more specific guidance on titles in “[SEO Best Practices](#)” section)
- Use as few words as possible to get the point across.
- Avoid large blocks of text, and break content into smaller paragraphs. Communicating readability is as important as writing readable copy.
- Use sub-headlines throughout the text to make it easier for readers to skim.
- Use bulleted or numbered lists rather than in-sentence lists wherever feasible.
- Use photos, charts, and videos to communicate as well as offer your readers a visual breather.
- Use descriptive hyperlink anchor text (“Learn more about our [application process](#)” instead of “Visit our application process page at [iastate.edu/admission-and-aid/apply](https://iastate.edu/admission-and-aid/apply)”)
  - TIP: to improve the user experience for screen readers, arrange hyperlink anchor text to appear at the end of sentences and paragraphs so that the link destination information does not interrupt the flow of the sentence or thought.
- Avoid “click here” as a call to action for hyperlinks. Simply make the word, phrase, or sentence that refers to the content being linked the actual link.
- Proofread! Then reread your work out loud before you post to the web. It will help you catch mistakes you didn’t notice the first time.
- Think like a journalist. Include the most important information at the beginning, then layer on additional details throughout the piece. It allows the reader to get what they need immediately. And it makes it easier for you to cut text if necessary.
- Use “us” or “we” only when it includes anyone who might read whatever you’re writing. Otherwise, avoid first person plural.
- When appropriate, write in the second person. It makes it easier to connect with the reader. When using second person, always clarify who “you” means (e.g., “If you’re applying as a transfer student...”).
- Always spell out the full title first before introducing any acronym, and in any case where acronym use is unavoidable, always show the acronym in parenthesis after the first full-title usage.



# Writing for the Web

## SEO Best Practices

As a guiding principle of SEO, always consider your reader and their expectations for the content you're publishing.

**URLs** (under 90 characters if possible): use succinct and descriptive titles for subdirectories and pages.

**Title Tags** (always 60 characters or less):

- Lead with the most search-relevant information as a prefix, e.g., “Dean of Students” rather than “Office of the Dean of Students.”
- Use a hyphen “-” rather than a pipe “|” as the main separator of Title Tag sections.
- Include a branded suffix that confirms that this is the official Iowa State website for all pages.

**Metadata Descriptions** (always 155 characters or less):

- If no Metadata Description is provided for a page, Google will automatically display a chunk of on-page content. It's better to provide one.

- Use relevant keywords in Metadata Description text. Search terms used to find the page will be highlighted in bold on the search engine results page.
- Include active call-to-action verbs in the Metadata Description copy.

**H1 Headlines** (always 60 characters or less):

- Only use one H1 Headline per page.
- In the H1 Header text, accurately summarize all information users can expect to find on the remainder of the page.
- Start H1s with the most likely search term used to find the information on the page.

### Metadata

Familiarize yourself with the current conventions of metadata. Basic best practices are outlined here, but specifics will change over time as search engine algorithms evolve. For updated guidance, visit the [Moz SEO Learning Center](#).

**H2 Headlines** (always 70 characters or less):

- While there is no limit to the number of H2 headers on a page, use them only to summarize information in a distinct subsection of page content, e.g., “Internship Opportunities” as a subsection of the “Career Services” page.

**Alt Image Tags** (always add Alt Image Tag text for every image):

- Summarize the visual information depicted in the image in plain language. Avoid “photo of...” but include other key context such as “infographic” or “bar graph.”
- Consider including keywords that could lead searchers to find the image in an image search.

# Writing for the Web

## SEO Best Practices

As a guiding principle of SEO, always consider your reader and their expectations for the content you're publishing.

### Test search volume and difficulty of ranking when composing headlines and page titles.

- This can be done quickly using a free tool such as the [Keyword Surfer Chrome Extension](#).
- Choose more popular phrasings where feasible.
- Begin headlines and page titles with the most relevant keywords, e.g., “Dean of Students” rather than “Office of the Dean of Students.”

**Avoid overt keyword stuffing and unnecessary repetition in on-page copy**, but include applicable descriptive modifiers such as “online master’s program” at least once.

**Consider using “long-tail” keyword inquiries with multiple words in plain English** (e.g., “How do I get an official transcript from Iowa State?”) as section headings.

### Evaluate keyword performance on a regular basis to inform editorial strategy.

- To find keyword performance data by page, use [Google Search Console](#).
- Monitor top performing non-branded keywords and focus on related content during editorial planning.
- Pay special attention to “striking distance” keywords that currently rank pages near an elevated tier of visibility on search engine results pages, such as:
  - **Keyword inquiries that rank an Iowa State page in position 2.**

### Keywords

Search engines have developed a very sophisticated understanding of language and user intent, but keywords are still important.

- **Keyword inquiries that rank an Iowa State page in position 4-6.**
- **Keyword inquiries that rank an Iowa State page in position 11-13.**
- Review search engine page results for these “striking distance” keywords to see what information or content is present on competitor pages but missing from the Iowa State page.
- Plan to edit on-page content to optimize for “striking distance” keywords, add information or content, and monitor results.





# Showing Our Story

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IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

IN THIS SECTION

**Typography**

**Type Hierarchy**

**Colors**

**Photography**

SHOWING OUR STORY

# Typography

## Merriweather

*Italic* Regular **Bold**

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvxyz  
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ  
1234567890!@#\$%^&\*()\_+=?

SYSTEM FONT ALTERNATIVE

### Georgia

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvxyz  
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

## Arial

*Italic* Regular **Bold**

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvxyz  
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ  
1234567890!@#\$%^&\*()\_+=?

SYSTEM FONT ALTERNATIVE

### Helvetica Neue

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvxyz  
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ



SHOWING OUR STORY

# Type Hierarchy

**Merrweather Regular**  
70pts / 93pts leading

# Heading 1

**Merrweather Bold**  
30pts / 42pts leading

## Heading 2

**Arial Bold**  
21pts / 35pts leading

### Heading 3

**Merrweather Bold**  
53pts / 66pts leading

**1 in 4**

**Arial Bold**  
16pts / 26pts leading

**Out of State or  
International Students**

**Arial Bold**  
18pt

#### Heading 4

**Arial Bold**  
16pt

#### Heading 5

**Arial Regular**  
16pt

Body copy lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua.

**Merrweather Bold**  
40pts / 58pts leading

**“ Quote lorem  
ipsum dolor sit.**

**Arial Bold**  
16pts / 26pts leading

**Eliza Smith, senior in physics**

**”**

SHOWING OUR STORY

# Type Hierarchy Examples

H2: Merriweather Bold  
30pts / 42pts leading

Statistic: Merriweather Bold  
53pts / 66pts leading

Body Bold: Arial Bold  
16pts / 26pts leading

Pull Quote:  
Merriweather Bold  
40pts / 58pts leading

This screenshot shows a webpage section for 'Learning Communities'. It features a large H2 heading, a statistic box with '90%' and a photo of a student, a body text block with a pull quote, and a button. Arrows from the left point to these elements, corresponding to the type hierarchy labels.

H5: Arial Bold  
16pts

H1: Merriweather Regular  
70pts

Body: Arial Regular  
16pts

H4/CTA: Arial Bold  
18pts

This screenshot shows the top portion of the Iowa State University website. It includes the university name, navigation links, a breadcrumb trail, a main heading, a large photo of students, and a section for 'Athletics and Recreation' with a photo and a button. Arrows from the left point to these elements, corresponding to the type hierarchy labels.



SHOWING OUR STORY

# Web Color Palette

Iowa State University's web color palette reflects the clarity and depth of our values, and is deeply rooted in the university's land-grant mission. Consistent and appropriate use of these colors will create a strong visual presence for the university.

## Primary Color Palette

<b>CARDINAL</b> PANTONE: 186 C CMYK: 2 100 85 6 HEX: #C8102E RGB: 200 16 46	<b>BURGUNDY</b> PANTONE: 1815 C CMYK: 31 92 80 37 HEX #7C2529 RGB: 124 37 41	<b>DARK GRAY</b> PANTONE: 2336 C CMYK: 66 59 57 39 HEX: #4A4A4A RGB: 74 74 74
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## Secondary Color Palette

<b>LIGHT GRAY</b> HEX: #F5F5F5 RGB: 245 245 245	<b>GOLD</b> PANTONE: 142 C CMYK: 0 24 78 0 HEX: #F1BE48 RGB: 241 190 72
---	---

## Tertiary Color Palette

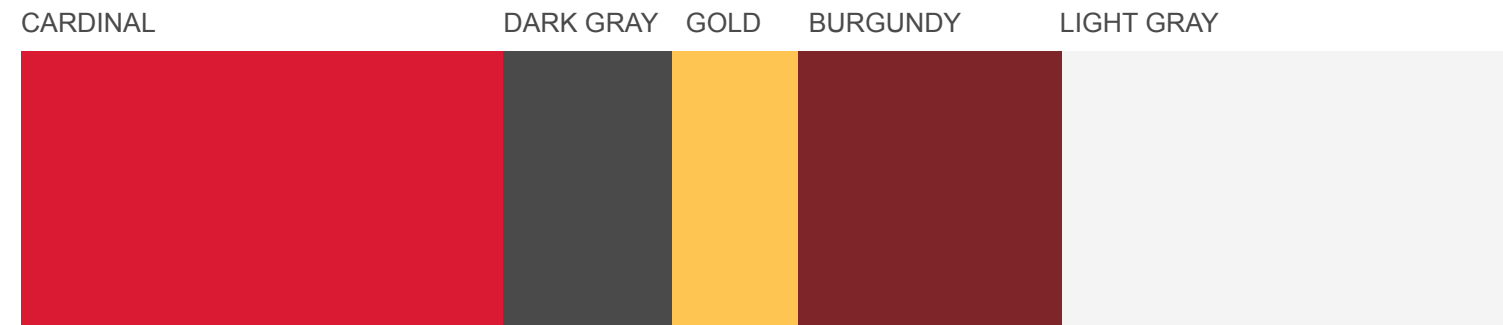
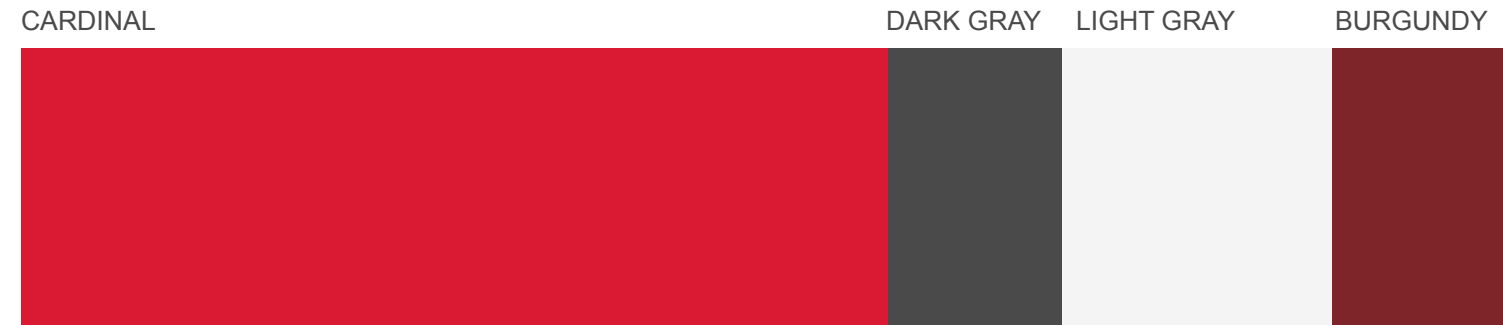
<b>MEDIUM GRAY</b> HEX: #EBEBEB RGB: 235, 235, 235	<b>MIDNIGHT</b> PANTONE: 548 C CMYK: 100 21 28 76 HEX: #003D4C RGB: 0 61 76
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SHOWING OUR STORY

# Recommended Pairings

In order to make web content as inclusive as possible, it is important to adhere to the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\)](#). The chart to the right shows color combinations that are considered accessible for web use.

To confirm accessibility of color combinations, use the [WebAIM Contrast Checker tool](#).



Accessible text and background color combinations include:





SHOWING OUR STORY

# Photography: Tone and Intention

Photography is a powerful and emotionally engaging storytelling tool. Photos should extend the Iowa State voice and visually express our personality. Photos should be warm, authentic, bright, and energetic to emphasize humanity, inclusivity, community, and caring. When choosing web photography, select from three categories – micro-lens, macro-lens, and architectural – whichever best serves the messaging context.

General guidance on photography that will help us maintain our identity:

- Compositions that allow audiences to self-insert into the scene depicted
- Participatory, experiencing first-hand
- Action-oriented
- Dynamic
- Not staged





SHOWING OUR STORY

# Micro-Lens Photography

Photos in this category emphasize the “heart” narrative by depicting micro views of campus and campus life.

Photo content should:

- **Always** feature people with an emphasis on inclusivity
- **Often** showcase interactions between people or feature one person focused on a task
- **Sometimes** have subjects look directly at camera when smiling in a natural manner
- **Never** exclusively feature backs facing the camera





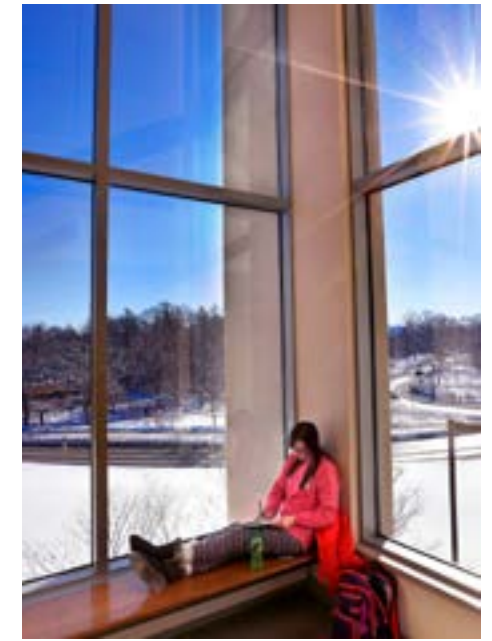
SHOWING OUR STORY

# Macro-Lens Photography

Photos in this category emphasize the “heart” narrative by depicting groups of people engaging in activities within the broader frame of a physical space.

Photo content should:

- **Always** feature both people and their environment
- **Often** use artful framing to suggest movement and flow
- **Sometimes** focus more on an activity than the faces of the people doing it
- **Never** frame an activity as happening behind a barrier of some kind





SHOWING OUR STORY

# Architectural Photography

Photos in this category emphasize the “heart” narrative by depicting images of the campus and artwork in a way that allows audiences to see themselves in the context of Iowa State.

Photo content should:

- **Always** emphasize the human perspective of compositions, either by depicting people or shooting at eye level
- **Often** include both natural and architectural elements
- **Sometimes** use drone, rooftop, or other scaled perspectives, but only when the composition also includes people
- **Never** use photography methods and equipment to intentionally distort images



SHOWING OUR STORY

# Photography Recommendations

## Photo choice helps define your site

Users will notice images usually before they read anything on the site. Choosing the right photography can be difficult, even when you have a great library of images to choose from.

## Tips for Choosing and Using Photos

### Quality is key

A blurry image just doesn't look professional. Follow image recommendations for size and aspect ratio in this style guide and in the website CMS – and reach out if you need help.

### Choose relevant images

Images are usually the first thing users notice. Does it make sense with the text around it? How do featured images look in a search result? Do you need a caption to help explain it?

### Use stock wisely

Users can spot “stocky” images from a mile away. If you need to use stock, take extra care to choose unique subjects and settings.

### Check usage rights

Make sure you have the right permissions to use an image – don't just download from a Google image search or off someone's site.

### Optimize photo colors

You don't need to be a designer to tweak an image that's a little washed out or has some weird colors. Use a free tool like [Pixlr](#) to make minor adjustments.

### Avoid image collages

Combining multiple images into a grid can look really busy, especially if that image is shown small. Stick to using one image.

### Empty space ≠ filler image

Images should always be supporting your content, and not used for decoration. If you want to fill space with an image, describe it with a meaningful caption or blurb around it.





# Web Theme Guidelines

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

IN THIS SECTION

**Information Architecture**

**Digital Accessibility**

**Image Terminology**

**Principles of Digital Accessibility**

**Image Optimization**

**Image Specifications**

**Elements**

**Element Heading Styles**



# Information Architecture

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## Organizing and Labeling Content

How pages are organized and labeled on a website – referred to as the information architecture – is critical for a site’s success. When done well, visitors won’t even notice. But when done poorly, a site becomes confusing, frustrating, or difficult to use.

The labels we choose in an information architecture allow visitors to find information and complete tasks. These labels reinforce where visitors came from and where they can go to learn more. These labels communicate the personality of an organization and how it is seen to the world. While a page titled “Academic Programs,” “Majors and Minors,” or “Things to Study” could have the same content, each label communicates something different.

# Before You Start

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## Consider your users and their goals

When planning a new site, the first step is to understand the needs and challenges of your target audience. This can be accomplished many ways, including interviews, focus groups, and surveys. If this upfront research isn't possible, at the minimum, use your team's experience and expertise to make an informed guess as to the primary reasons why one might come to your website. This exercise will help to inform many of future decisions including:

- What content needs to be accessed the easiest?
- What words resonate most?
- What is the audience(s)' understanding of your organization and the services you provide?

## Audit existing content

In order to best design the navigation for your site, you need to have a complete understanding of existing content. While more time-consuming, clicking all links on site and creating a complete list by hand is the most accurate. If this is not feasible, it may be possible to get a list of all pages on your existing site from SiteImprove (inquire about Iowa State's enterprise license through the digital accessibility office).

Compiling a list of existing content will give you a sense of how many pages need to be organized and where in the site you have the most content. This exercise will also show pages that can be retired or consolidated.

## Plan for new content and organizational priorities

In some cases, simply reorganizing and relabeling content that already exists is not enough. Recent organizational priorities and initiatives may not be represented on the site. The site may need additional pages to address the goals of our target audiences. A site's structure will evolve over time, but a site redesign is the best opportunity to accommodate any dramatic changes to content.



# Organizing Content

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## Organize content by topic

Organize your content by topic as much as possible. The other natural way to organize content is by audience, but this often goes against how users will think and browse your site. It is more likely a visitor will arrive thinking “How do I pay my tuition bill?” than “I am a current student.” In this case, “Costs and Billing” is a better label than “Info for Current Students.”

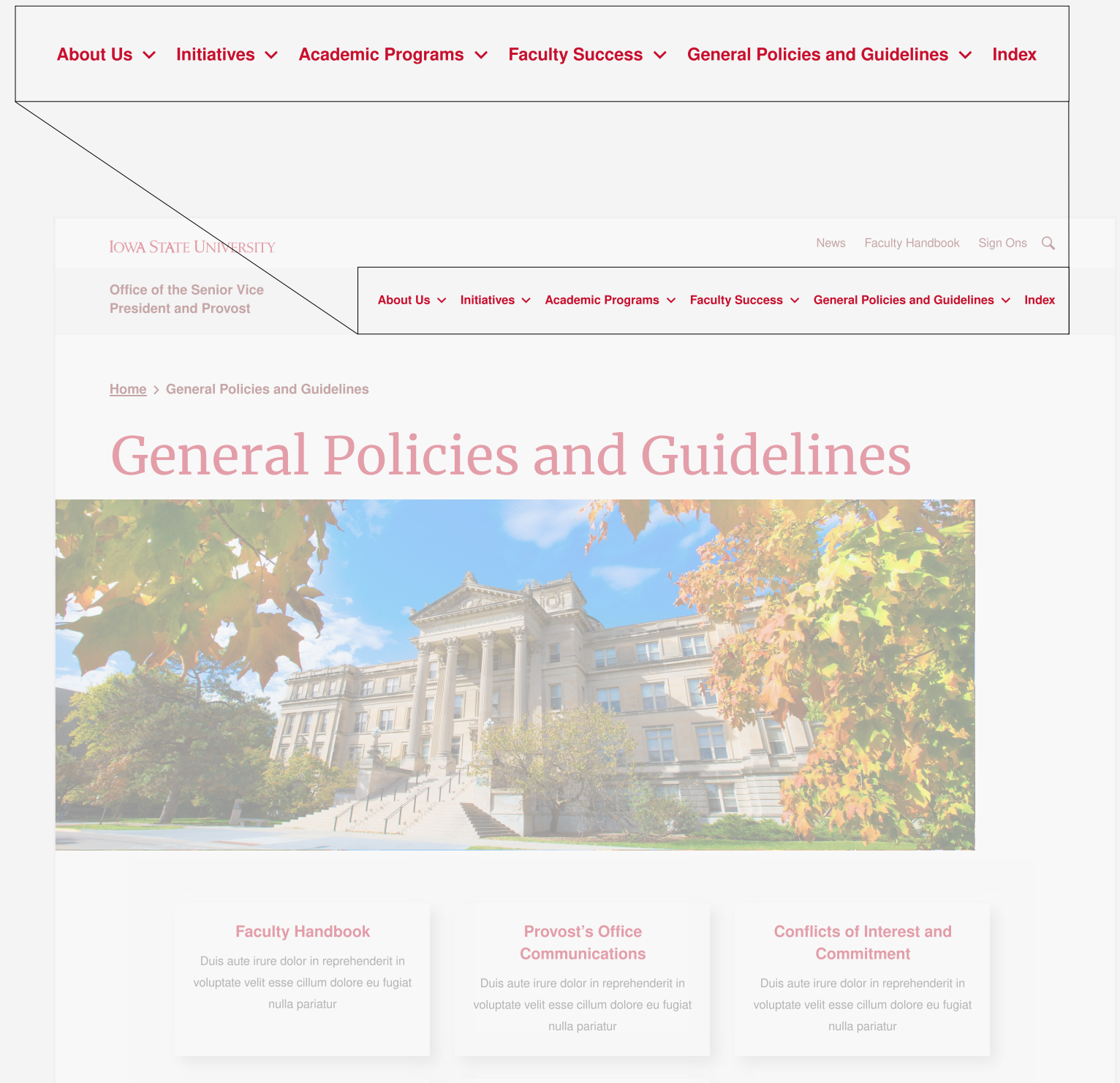
## Create distinct categories

Users will have difficulties finding the content they need if there is significant overlap between categories. If, for instance, a website has both an “Academics” and “Undergraduate Students” section, a prospective student looking to learn what they can study would be unsure which would have that information. It is not enough to simply include the same links in each section. This actually may make things worse, as it would not be clear to visitors how those links are different.

# Organizing Content

## Use between three to seven categories for the main navigation

The main navigation contains links in the website's header that are **most important to your target audiences**. As a general rule, try to use between three and seven categories. This is so that the navigation does not get overwhelming. Not only will the main navigation be less visually appealing, but too many links may inhibit users from finding what they need. This guideline is simply a ballpark – fewer than seven categories still may not fit if the labels used are too lengthy.



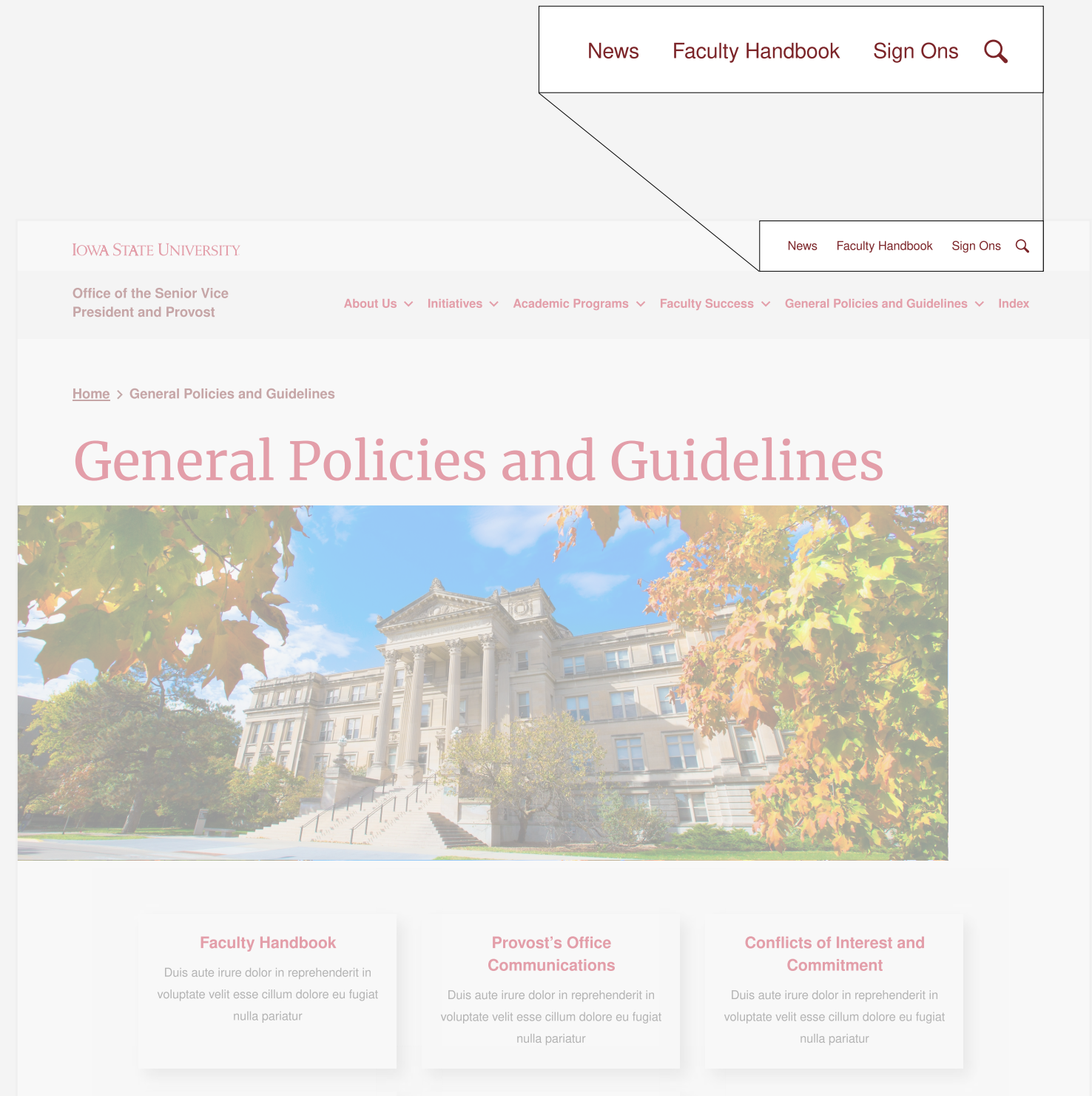
# Organizing Content

## Use calls to action or lower priority items for the utility navigation

The utility navigation contains the links in the website’s header that are important to the target audience, but less important than those in the main navigation. Alternatively, the links that you choose for the utility navigation might have a different feeling or purpose than the main navigation. Utility navigation links are not always necessary – do not include these links if you are finding it difficult to find appropriate content.

Use the utility navigation for **only one** of the following these scenarios:

- **Calls to action.** This is the best use of the utility navigation. Examples include contact, visit, apply, donate, and request information.
- **Lower priority links.** Use for pages you’d like to link to but want to be understated compared to the main navigation. Examples include news, events, and directory.
- **Audience links.** While audience links aren’t recommended for the main navigation, use the utility navigation to provide quick access to pages for secondary or tertiary audiences. Examples include Parents, Faculty and Staff, and Alumni.





# Labeling Content

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## Speak your target audience’s language

A website’s navigation should be free from jargon and insider terminology. **Avoid the common pitfall of grouping content according to organizational structure or content ownership.** This is known as the “curse of knowledge,” or the assumption that those you are communicating with have the same understanding and background as you do.

The labels chosen for links and page titles should be self-explanatory to those with little familiarity with your organization. This does not mean your audience is uninformed or unfamiliar with the subject matter. The term “graduate medical education” is understood by those graduating medical school, but a lay audience may only know this as a “medical residency.” Use terminology appropriate for those browsing the site.

## Avoid insider terminology or branded terms

In the cases where a page is about a topic with a branded name, avoid using the branded name as the page title. Instead, use on-page copy to introduce the proper names of programs, initiatives, and other content that is Iowa State specific. Users are much more likely to click on a link when they know what they will find.

For instance, a university may have a freshman rotational experiential learning program called the “Discovery Program.” Without previously knowing what the Discovery Program is, users would be less inclined to visit this page. Either use plain language to describe the page (“Freshman Rotational Program”) or use additional clarifying words in addition to the branded term (“Discovery Rotational Program”).

As a reminder, “insider terminology” includes acronyms that have not been properly introduced with a full title usage.

# Labeling Content

## Use consistent labeling

Consistent, parallel language is an effective tool in ensuring users can find information on your site. Proper labeling is akin to good writing – a clear format and cadence encourages comprehension and understanding.

For example, instead of an Academics section with mixed terminology, such as:

*“Majors and Minors,” “Graduate Degrees,” and “Ph.D. Programs”*

Use a consistent terminology set, such as:

*“Bachelor’s Degrees,” “Master’s Degrees” and “Doctoral Degrees” or*

*“Undergraduate Programs” and “Graduate Programs.”*

Repeating verb conjugation and syntax is also helpful.

For example, rather than a utility navigation with:

*“Apply,” “Contact Us,” and “Giving,”*

Use:

*“Apply,” “Contact,” and “Donate.”*

## Other Best Practices

- Avoid including the same idea or topic on more than one page.
- Avoid creating very short evergreen child pages of less than 500 words (including all on page menu, link, and footer copy). Where possible, consolidate shorter child page content onto the directory page using a visually distinct module. Create child pages only when the length of a directory or landing page becomes overwhelming.
- Use the header navigation and on-page sub navigation to link only to pages on your website.
- If an external link to a different website or a cross-link to another Iowa State subdomain (differentsite.iastate.edu) is necessary, include it in body text with a brief explanation to prepare the user, and set the link to open in a new browser tab.
- Do not use the header or on-page sub navigation to link to files, including PDFs, Word documents, Excel spreadsheets. Instead link to these in the body of the page.



# Organization and Labeling Checklist

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- ✓ **Does the menu account for all existing content?**  
If not, what must be added or relabeled so that all pages can be found?
- ✓ **Does your menu account for known future content?**  
If not, what must be added or relabeled so that all pages can be found?
- ✓ **Can all content be found in only one section?**  
If not, how might the pages be relabeled or regrouped so that each section is distinct?
- ✓ **Does the main navigation have between three and seven links?**  
If not, can any sections be combined?
- ✓ **Does the main navigation have the content most important to your target audiences?**  
If not, which sections are less important than the others and can be omitted?
- ✓ **Does the utility navigation have only call-to-action links?**  
If not, are the links lower priority than those in the main navigation?
- ✓ **Do all links and page titles use words that the target audience understands?**  
If not, how can they be rephrased?
- ✓ **Are all links and page titles free from jargon and branded terms?**  
If not, how can they be rephrased?
- ✓ **Is content grouped in a way that someone doesn't have to be familiar with your organization?**  
If not, how might the pages be relabeled and regrouped so this isn't the case?
- ✓ **Are all labels consistent and follow the same format?**  
If not, how can they be reworded so that they follow a similar structure?
- ✓ **Can all content and ideas be found on only a single page?**  
If not, what can be combined or reorganized?
- ✓ **Are all pages of an appropriate length?**  
If not, what can be consolidated with its parent page? What can be moved to a child page?
- ✓ **Do all menus only include links to pages on your site?**  
If not, how can you link to external websites or files within the body of the page?

# Digital Accessibility

The Iowa State website needs to prioritize accessibility from the start. Content creators have a responsibility to ensure everyone is able to easily navigate and access information. Remember, accessibility builds a better experience for everyone.

## What is Accessibility?

Accessibility is intentionally designing an experience to work for a wide range of people, whatever their hardware, software, language, location, or ability might be. Digital accessibility specifically is enabling as many people as possible, including folks with disabilities, to have barrier-free access to digital products.

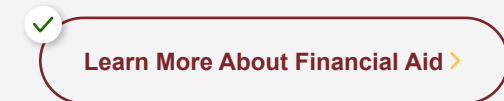
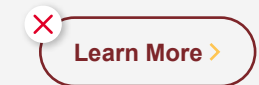
## Questions?

For more information on digital web accessibility, contact the Digital Accessibility Team at [digitalaccess@iastate.edu](mailto:digitalaccess@iastate.edu).

## Tips for Creating Accessible Content

### Use descriptive link text

Let users know what they're selecting and where they're navigating to when accessing links. Avoid phrases such as "learn more" or "click here." This applies to all links, including links within your text and buttons.



### Keep the heading structure organized

When page content is organized in a clear visual hierarchy, users can scan a page and get the gist from your headings. A designated heading structure helps to organize your page and establish hierarchy. Not only does it tell a screen reader how a page is laid out, it also keeps your code and page design clean and understandable. See [details on heading structure](#) from WebAIM.



Headings include a page title, and different levels of H1, H2, H3 and so on.

### Provide meaningful alternative text with images

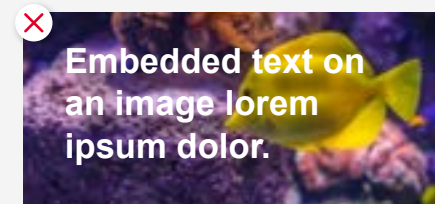
If users can't always see your images or they choose not to display them, alternative text provides them with the context they need. Alternative text best practices depend on page content and image function. For images that do not provide important contextual information, no alternative text is needed. Mark these as decorative. Read the [comprehensive guide to using alternative text](#) on WebAIM to learn more.



A textual preview of the alternative text appears when images don't load visually.

### Don't use images with embedded text

Avoid using images of text. Images should add to the content but should never be the content.



Embedded image text such as this rasterized heading overlay can't be read by screen readers.



# Principles of Digital Accessibility

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Digital accessibility is a demonstration of the Iowa State website’s “Heart” narrative, and a crucial proof point for the core value of inclusivity.

Before creating content, familiarize yourself with core principles and practices of the digital accessibility as outlined by the [A11Y Project](#).

## Basic principles

1. Use sufficient color contrast (see [page 25](#) of this document)
2. Don’t use color as the only way to convey meaning
3. Use appropriate font sizes (Is the text big enough to be readable with an accessible font?)
4. Focus on readability and comprehensibility (is content written at a 9th grade level?)
5. Include captioning for video content

## Guiding principle

While the discipline of digital accessibility does include specific best practices that require an awareness of technical aspects, the guiding principle behind all of them is to keep content as consistent and simple as possible.

Remember: digitally accessible content is *thoughtful* content.

# Image Terminology

## How It Looks

This matters if important parts of the image are cut off when it's used as a background image.

### Aspect ratio

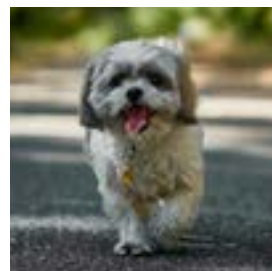
The relationship between the width and height. Elements can require certain aspect ratios for the best fit.

#### Examples



#### 16:9 (Exact Aspect Ratio)

This is a commonly used ratio for horizontal images, especially for large backgrounds.



#### Square (Exact)

Some images need to be exact squares, such as images that become circular.



#### Horizontal (General)

Sometimes just a general width-to-height ratio is enough to choose the right image.

### Focal point

The main point of interest in an image.

#### Examples

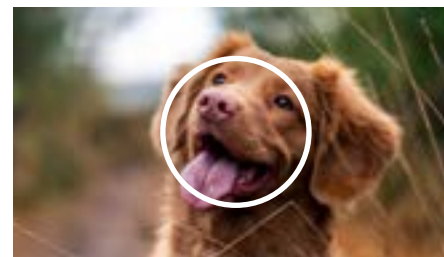
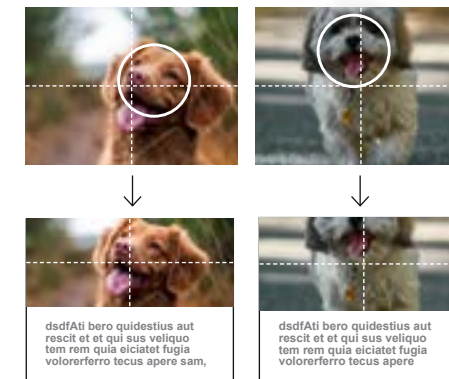


Image with a centered focal point.



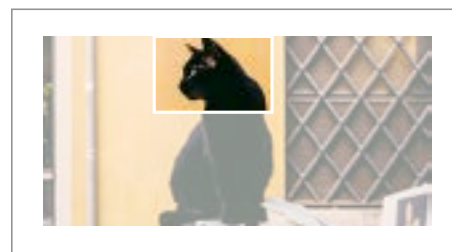
Images placed in an element with a centered focal point.

# Image Sizing

This matters most when images are looking blurry or pixelated and/or the images are loading too slowly.

## Dimensions

An image's *dimensions* describe its width and height in pixels (e.g. 600px × 400px) when viewed at 100%. Proper dimensions can help improve image quality by avoiding stretching or pixelated/blurry images.



Example of a small image used in a large element



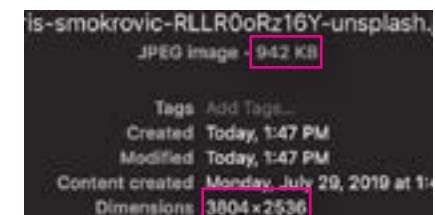
The image is stretched out, and looks blurry.

## File size

The *file size* of an image is the amount of memory it occupies on a server, expressed in bytes (e.g. 300 KB). Large file sizes can slow down web pages, resulting in poor performance. Avoid files over 1 MB. The file size limit on many Iowa State sites is 1.5 MB.



Image info in Finder on a Mac computer.



The file size is **almost 1 MB** – this should be optimized to create a smaller file.



# Image Optimization

It's worth repeating: Images that are too large can slow down sites. While it is important to use high-quality images, they also need to maintain reasonable load speeds. Here are some tips and tools to help optimize images:

## Use JPG vs. PNG

You can adjust the image quality setting within a JPG file using image-editing software such as Photoshop or [Pixlr](#). This is not true for a PNG image file. Unless an image requires the transparent background feature of a PNG image, save and upload your images as a JPG.

## Adjust image dimensions and file size

Pay close attention to the image dimension and file size specifications outlined in the following “Quick Recommendations” pages. Once you are clear on the recommended specs for your image upload, complete the following steps for all JPG images:

1. Resize the image to the recommended dimensions (always crop, never stretch)
2. Resave the image file as a JPG with an “image quality” of 50% using Pixlr or another image-editing software
3. Compress the image file size using the [TinyPNG](#) tool

This will ensure that every image appears in high resolution on retina devices without a burdensome file size.

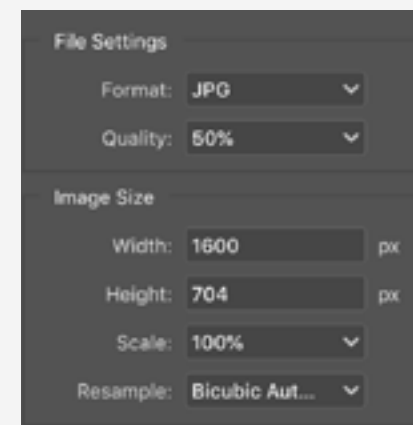
## Tools to help

For compressing image file size:

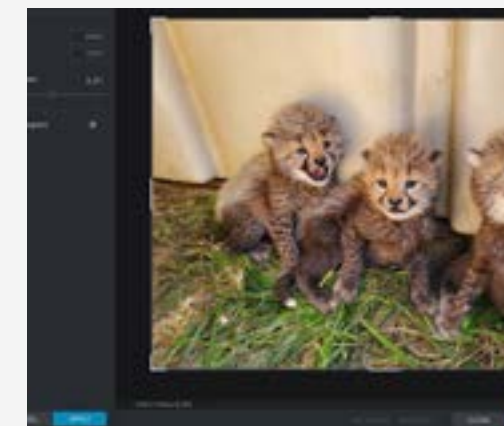
- [TinyPNG](#) (online, free): compresses images

To re-size and adjust quality:

- [Pixlr](#) (online, free)
- Photoshop



Photoshop “Export” options for image size and quality. Note the “50%” quality level.



Pixlr – an online tool to create, re-size and optimize images



TinyPNG – an online tool to compress images

# Image Specifications: Elements

## Important Notes

**These are the recommended image sizes.** The dimensions are intentionally larger than what users see on-screen to account for retina device displays.

**Adjust quality of all images to 50%.**

**Watch the file size.** Avoid files over 1 MB. The file size limit on many websites is **1.5 MB**.

**Preview before publishing.** Some elements have an overlapping inset that may partially cover an image. Adjust by positioning the image’s focal point within the frame.

## Information and updates

[theme.iastate.edu](http://theme.iastate.edu)

Elements	Aspect Ratio	Focal Point	Dimensions (px)	Notes
<b>Blockquote</b>	Square	Centered	515 x 515	Headshot or portrait images only.
<b>Call to Action – Image</b>	Horizontal	Any	2160 x 807	Use “Macro-lens, Micro-lens, or Architectural” photography. Image will stay the same aspect ratio at all screen sizes.
<b>Card Set</b> <b>Card Set – Image with Link</b> <b>Card Set – Modals</b>	Square	Centered	688 x 688	Use “Micro-lens” or “Macro-lens” photography.
<b>Carousel</b>	Horizontal	Center-Top	1200 x 673	Keep important features away from the left, right, and bottom edges of the image.
<b>Feature – External</b>	3:2	Any	608 x 404	Don’t use a busy image. Use “Macro-lens” or “Micro-lens” photography.
<b>Feature – Large</b> <b>Feature – Large with Intro</b>	16:9	Center-Right	1713 x 963	Image will stay the same aspect ratio at all screen sizes.
<b>Feature Set</b>	Horizontal	Any	1076 x 620	Use “Macro-lens” or “Micro-lens” photography. Image will stay the same aspect ratio at all screen sizes.
<b>Feature – Small</b>	3:2	Any	1244 x 830	

WEB THEME GUIDELINES

# Image Specifications: Elements

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Elements	Aspect Ratio	Focal Point	Dimensions (px)	Notes
<b>Image – Full Width</b>	Horizontal	Any	2160 x 807	
<b>Image Grid with Text</b>	3:2	Any	1254 x 836	All images in the grid use the same aspect ratio. Top image appears larger on desktop and become equal in size on mobile.
<b>Inline Images – L and R Aligned</b>	Any Ratio	Any	648 wide max	This is an element in the Body Content block and in text editor fields. Any ratio image can be uploaded but needs to be at least 648px wide. The CMS will automatically display the image at 648px wide even if uploaded at a smaller size.
<b>Inline Images – Center Aligned</b>	Any Ratio	Any	1472 wide max	This is an element in the Body Content block and in text editor fields. Any ratio image can be uploaded but needs to be at least 1472px wide. The CMS will automatically display the image at 1472px wide even if uploaded at a smaller size.
<b>Multicolumn Content – Alt</b>	Any Ratio	Any	688 wide max	Any ratio image can be uploaded but needs to be at least 688px wide.
<b>Page Hero – Default</b> <b>Page Hero – Alt Nav</b>	Horizontal	Centered	1412 x 528	Use impactful “Macro-lens” or “Micro-lens” photography. Image will stay the same aspect ratio at all screen sizes.
<b>Video</b>	16:9	Any	1472 x 844 (optional)	Optional custom thumbnail image. If a custom image is not uploaded, a default thumbnail image from YouTube or Vimeo will be used.



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**Preview before publishing.** Some elements have an overlapping inset that may partially cover an image. Adjust by positioning the image’s focal point within the frame.

**Information and updates**  
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Elements	Aspect Ratio	Focal Point	Dimensions (px)	Notes
<b>People</b>				
<b>People Cards</b> <b>People List</b> <b>People Detail</b>	Square	Centered	688 x 688	Same size is used for all people elements.
<b>Events</b>				
<b>Events Cards</b> <b>Events List with Feature</b>	Square	Centered	688 x 688	Use “Micro-lens” or “Macro-lens” photography.
<b>Events Hero with Details</b>	Horizontal	Centered	1277 x 719	Use impactful “Macro-lens” or “Micro-lens” photography.
<b>News</b>				
<b>News Article Hero with Details</b>	Horizontal	Centered	1277 x 719	Use impactful “Macro-lens” or “Micro-lens” photography.
<b>News Cards</b>	Square	Centered	688 x 688	Use “Micro-lens” or “Macro-lens” photography.
<b>News Featured</b>	Horizontal	Any	1244 x 830	Same size for large and small features.
<b>News List</b>	3:2	Any	608 x 404	Use “Micro-lens” or “Macro-lens” photography.

WEB THEME GUIDELINES

# Image Specifications: Elements

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## Information and updates

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Elements	Aspect Ratio	Focal Point	Dimensions (px)	Notes
Homepage				
Homepage Hero – Atmospheric Image	Horizontal	Centered	2002 x 943	Image scales down proportionally for mobile.
Homepage Hero – Background Image	Horizontal	Centered	2002 x 1065	Image automatically scales down for mobile and will become a 375 x 480 ratio crop at its smallest size. The same image is used for both, so the main focal point must be in the center.
Homepage Hero – Background Video	Horizontal	Centered	2002 x 1065 (optional)	Optional custom thumbnail image size. If a custom image is not used, a default thumbnail from YouTube or Vimeo will be used. Video automatically crops to 375 x 480 ratio on mobile.
Homepage Hero – Supporting Image	Square	Centered	800 x 800	Image scales down proportionally for mobile.
Homepage Social – Follow	Square	Any	600 x 600	Use images from your Instagram account.

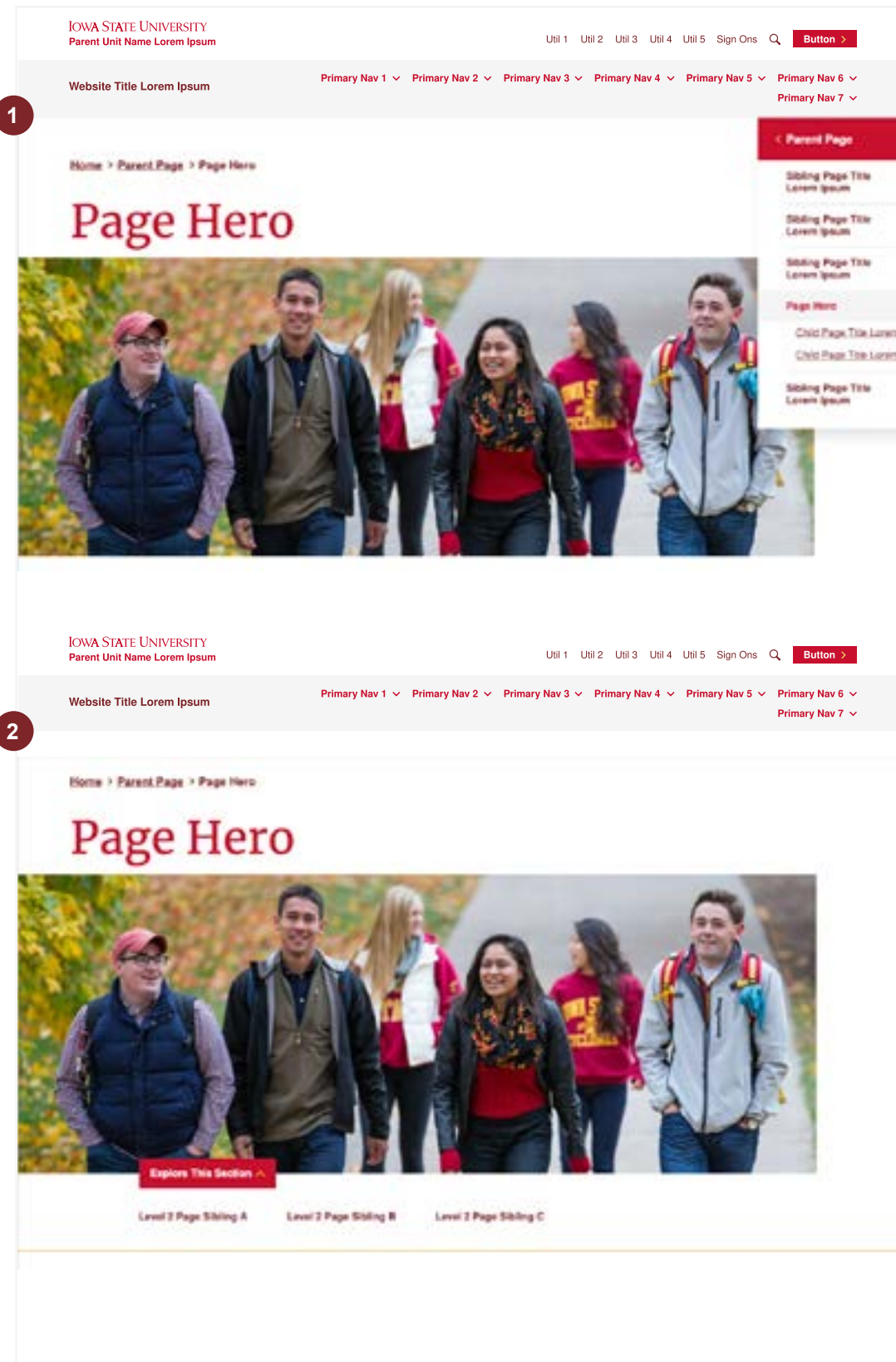
## WEB THEME GUIDELINES

# Elements

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The site CMS determines where you'll find the elements – for example, as individual blocks, as toggle choices within other blocks, or in the site's settings.

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### 1 Page Hero – Default

Contains the H1 site header and breadcrumbs. Optional elements include the side navigation and hero image.

- **Do** use on all pages except the homepage.
- **Do** use an image that has a clear focal point.
- **Don't** use an overly busy or an extremely zoomed out image.
- **Don't** use side navigation for stand-alone pages.

### 2 Page Hero – Alt Nav

Similar to Page Hero – Default, but features a horizontal subnavigation element in place of side navigation. When activated, the Explore this Section button functions as a toggle to show/hide the horizontal subnavigation links.

- **Only use** for level one landing pages that have child pages.
- **Don't** use for level two/child pages and lower.



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### 3 Body Content

Contains header styles (H2–H5), body copy, bullet styles (standard and numbered), and inline images.

- **Do** use headers in proper order based on hierarchy (H2, H3, H4, etc.), and bullets to help support points within a block of copy.
- **Don't** use headers in an improper order (ex: H4 directly under an H2), or overuse bullets.

### 4 Button Set

Buttons draw the user's attention to the most important trigger actions and links. Use sparingly.

- **Less is more.** One button is best, two is OK, three is the max.
- **Limit button label text** to no more than three words. If a button has long text, try pairing the button with a heading to break it up.
- **Use descriptive text that tells users what to expect.** Avoid generic link text such as "More," "Click Here," or "Submit."
- **Don't** overuse buttons. Prioritize the actions you want your users to take when choosing Button vs. Link sets. Avoid sprinkling too many buttons throughout a page.

### 5 Link Set

Link Sets draw the user's attention to trigger actions and links with less emphasis than Button Set actions.

- **Use** the appropriate link style, especially for links that lead to external sites.
- **Use similar guidance** provided for Button Set.

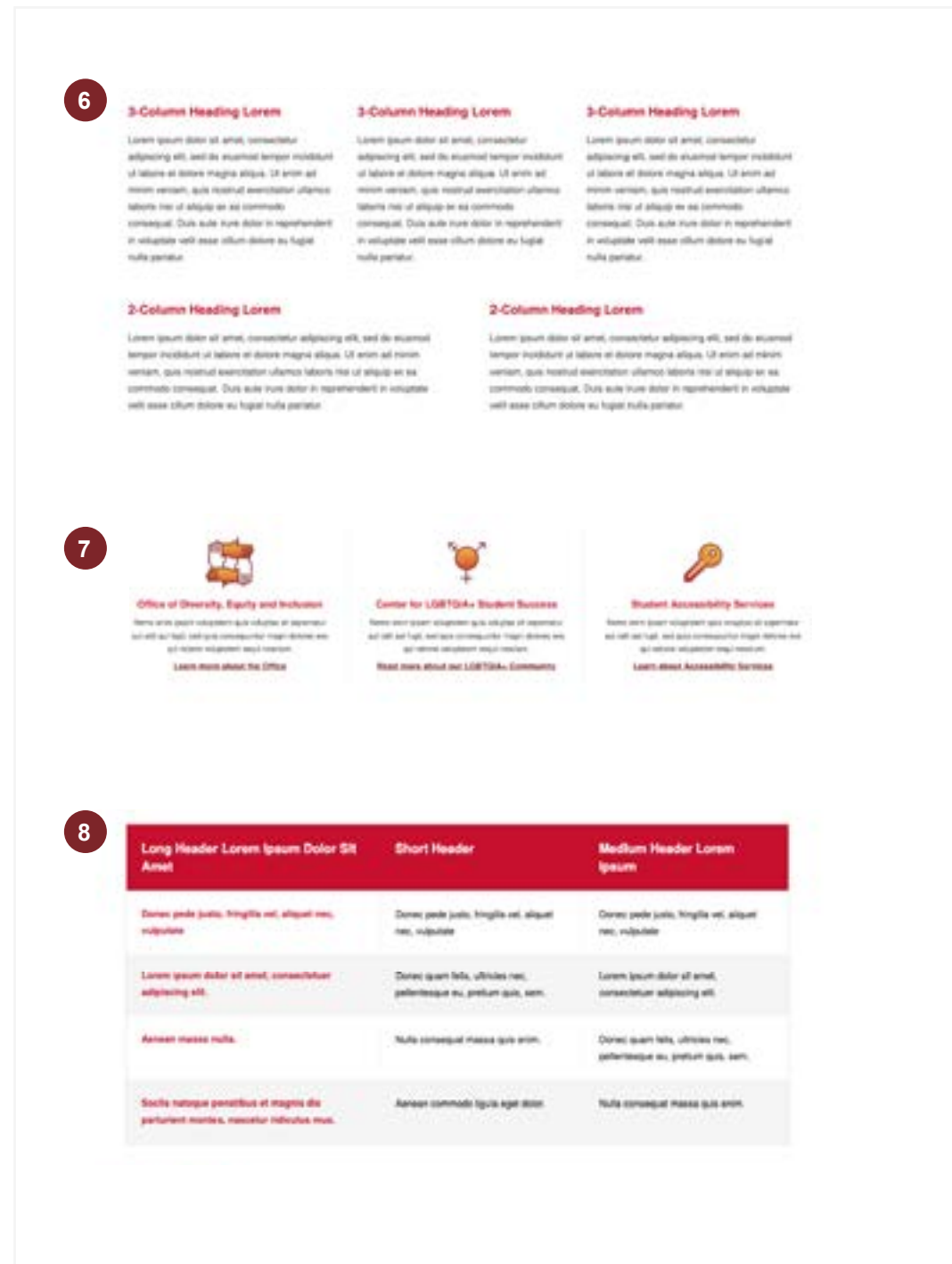
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### 6 Multicolumn Content

Allows for an optional title, optional description, optional image, and optional tertiary link. This content can appear in a 2- or 3-column layout.

- **Do** use columns to organize content for quicker scanning.
- **Don't** overuse columns or risk the page layout becoming too repetitive.

### 7 Multicolumn Content – Alt

Content is centered. Allows for an optional title, optional description, optional image, and optional tertiary link. This content can appear in a 2- or 3-column layout. Columns have faint vertical line rules between them.

- **Always** use a similar aspect ratio for images when they are placed within the same row.
- **Don't** use for long, text-heavy content.
- **Use similar guidance** provided for Multicolumn Content.

### 8 Table

- **Headings are required.** Keep these as short as possible. With more columns, these headers get difficult to read on smaller devices.
- **Consider** breaking data into multiple tables rather than segmenting across many columns.
- **Avoid** using a table with too many rows.
- **Doesn't** allow links. If needed, apply the theme style to your CMS default table block or to tables created in text editor fields (ex: Body Content block).

## WEB THEME GUIDELINES

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**Information and updates**  
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**9** **Inline Images – Left/Right Aligned**

Allows for left- and right-aligned images with an optional caption.

- **Do** use to support talking points in a large block of copy.
- **Do** use a similar aspect ratio for these images when they are placed within the same Body Content block, text editor field, or in close proximity to each other.
- **Don't** use for short paragraphs.
- This is an element in the Body Content block and in text editor fields.

**10** **Inline Images – Center Aligned**

Allows for an optional caption.

- **Do** use to support talking points in a large block of copy or when a larger image makes sense.
- **Do** use a similar aspect ratio for these images when they are placed within the same Body Content block, text editor field, or in close proximity to each other.
- **Don't** overuse and stack too many on a page.
- This is an element in the Body Content block and in text editor fields.

**11** **Image – Full Width**

Allows for an optional caption.

- **Do** use to break up the flow of a page or provide a visual rest.
- **Don't** overuse and stack too many on a page.





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### Information and updates

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## 12 Accordion

Accordions organize and simplify a large amount of related content. When selected, the content is viewed without having to navigate away from the page.

- **Do** use at least two sections for each accordion.
- **Do** choose headings that are related to a similar topic.
- **Only text** is recommended within an accordion.
- **Keep content length reasonable.** Users may skip over info if it is buried in overly long text.
- **Do** be aware that search engines can lead users to the page, but not specific locations within accordion sections.
- **Don't** use long headings. Instead, try to move text down into the body.

## 13 Statistic

Contains an optional H2 title, multiple large statistics (including non-numerical characters), and supporting copy for each statistic. The red statistic block can be left- or right-aligned alongside an optional body copy section, or span full width without a body copy section. It is highly recommended to always pair a statistic with text.

- **Do** use clear and brief copy to provide additional content to the number.
- **Don't** overuse supporting copy. Save this for the body copy surrounding the statistic.

## WEB THEME GUIDELINES

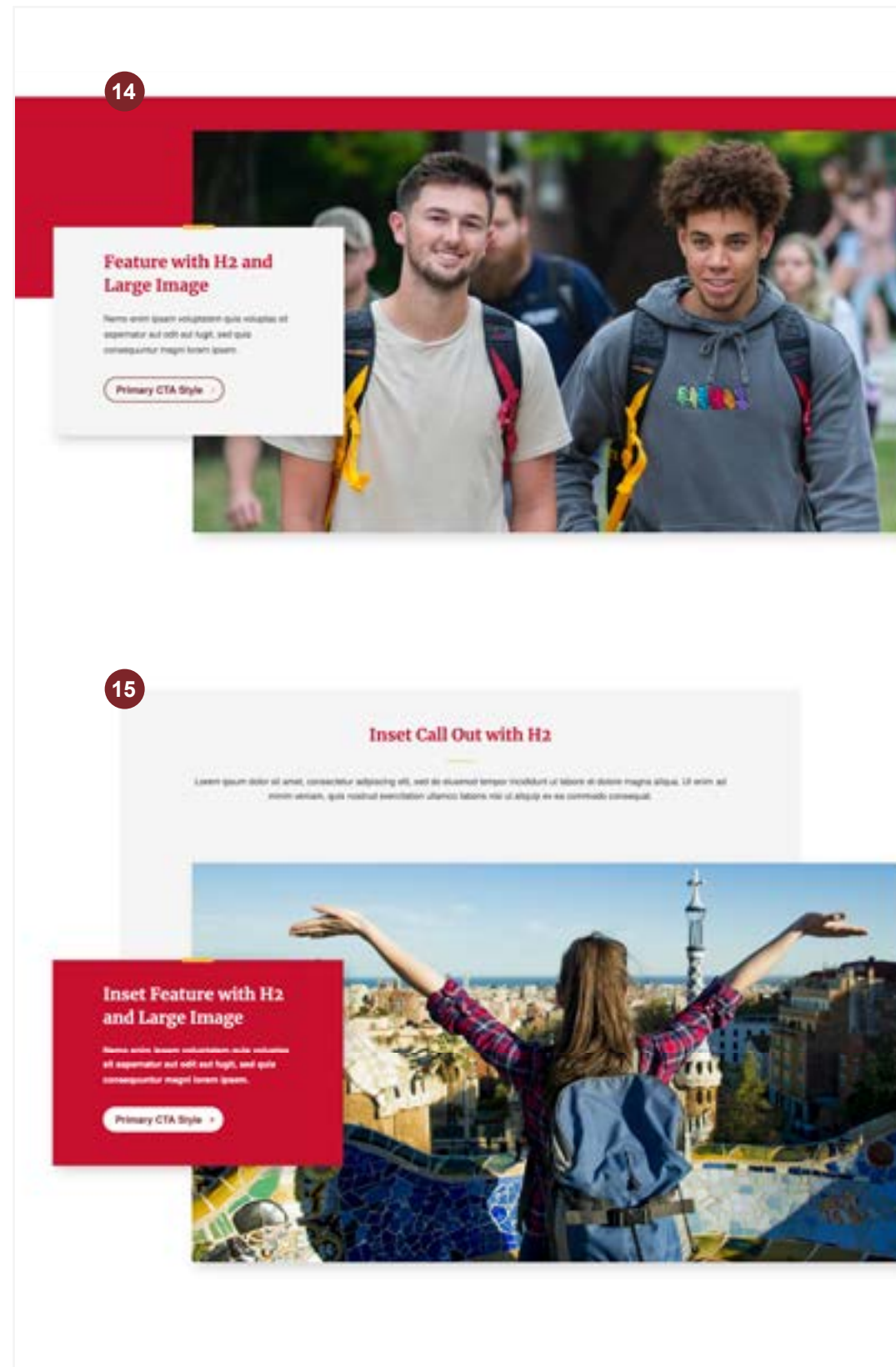
# Elements

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### Information and updates

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### 14 Feature – Large

Contains a large image, H2, supporting copy, and a button.

- **Use** to break up a page flow, create visual rest, and call out an important feature where the content clearly supports the same on-page narrative.
- **Use** when you want a large image and no introductory copy.
- **Keep** in mind that the text block will cover a portion of the image (left-center).
- **Keep** supporting copy brief.
- **Use** only one button.
- **Don't** use back-to-back on a page, and try not to use more than once on a page.

### 15 Feature – Large with Intro

Contains a large image, intro copy, H2, supporting copy, and a button.

- **Use** to break up a page flow, create visual rest, and call out an important feature in instances where the featured content introduces a new on-page narrative from the prior module or page section.
- **Use** this feature when you want to use a large image and introductory copy.
- **Keep** in mind that the text block will cover a portion of the image (left-center).
- **Keep** supporting copy brief.
- **Use** only one button.
- **Don't** use back-to-back on a page, and try not to use more than once on a page.

## WEB THEME GUIDELINES

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**16 Feature – Small**

Heading 2 - This is a title of major section of a page

Primary CTA Style

**17 Optional Subheading External News/Story Feature**

Headline Nemo enim inure dolor in reprehenderit in voluptate velit esse cillum dolore.

External Link Style

**18 Feature Title Lorem Ipsum Dolor**

Link Lorem Ipsum Dolor

**Feature Title Lorem Ipsum Dolor**

Link Lorem Ipsum Dolor

- 16 Feature – Small**
  - Contains an image, H2, body copy, and call-to-action button. Used to feature a piece of content with an accompanying large image and button.
  - Do** use before or after a series of smaller features (listed below) or to create variety in a page layout.
  - Don't** overuse so they retain their special feel.
- 17 Feature – External**
  - Contains a small image, title, body copy, and external link. The H3 subhead is optional, but should be used for maximum accessibility.
  - Use** this element to link to news, features, stories, and other content on external sites.
- 18 Feature Set**
  - Used to highlight a series or multiple features. Contains an optional smaller image, H3, body copy, and link styles instead of a button.
  - Use** in a single instance if not showing an image, not back-to-back.
  - Use** consecutively if showing an image, one to three in a row, two is ideal.
  - Do** choose the appropriate link style for each feature.
  - Don't** use more than three in a row.



## WEB THEME GUIDELINES

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### 19 Image Grid with H2 Title and CTA

Image caption here (short) Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis aute irure dolor in reprehenderit in voluptate velit esse cillum dolore eu fugiat nulla pariatur. Excepteur sint occaecat cupidatat non proident, sunt in culpa qui officia deserunt mollit anim id est laborum.

Primary CTA Style



### 20 Video



### 21 Carousel



Image caption here (short) Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat.

#### Image Slide Short Descriptive Title Lorem

Image caption here (short) Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat.

### 19 Image Grid with Text

Use when you need a large feature with H2, button, and multiple photos.

- **Do** use sparingly.
- **Don't** use this block too many times on a single page to retain its uniqueness.

### 20 Video

A video embed with a custom play button and optional caption.

- **Do** upload a thumbnail if the platform doesn't generate one or if you prefer a different image to display.
- **Don't** embed text or add a play button layer on the image.

### 21 Carousel

Showcases a gallery of multiple images within one area of the page. Each image includes an optional title, body copy, and image caption.

- **Do** use at least three images. Choose a different block for two or fewer, such as the Multicolumn Content or Image - Full Width blocks.
- **Don't** use an image that has important features toward the edges or covered by elements over the image. For example, if you are featuring a person, make sure the face is towards the top third and easily visible.

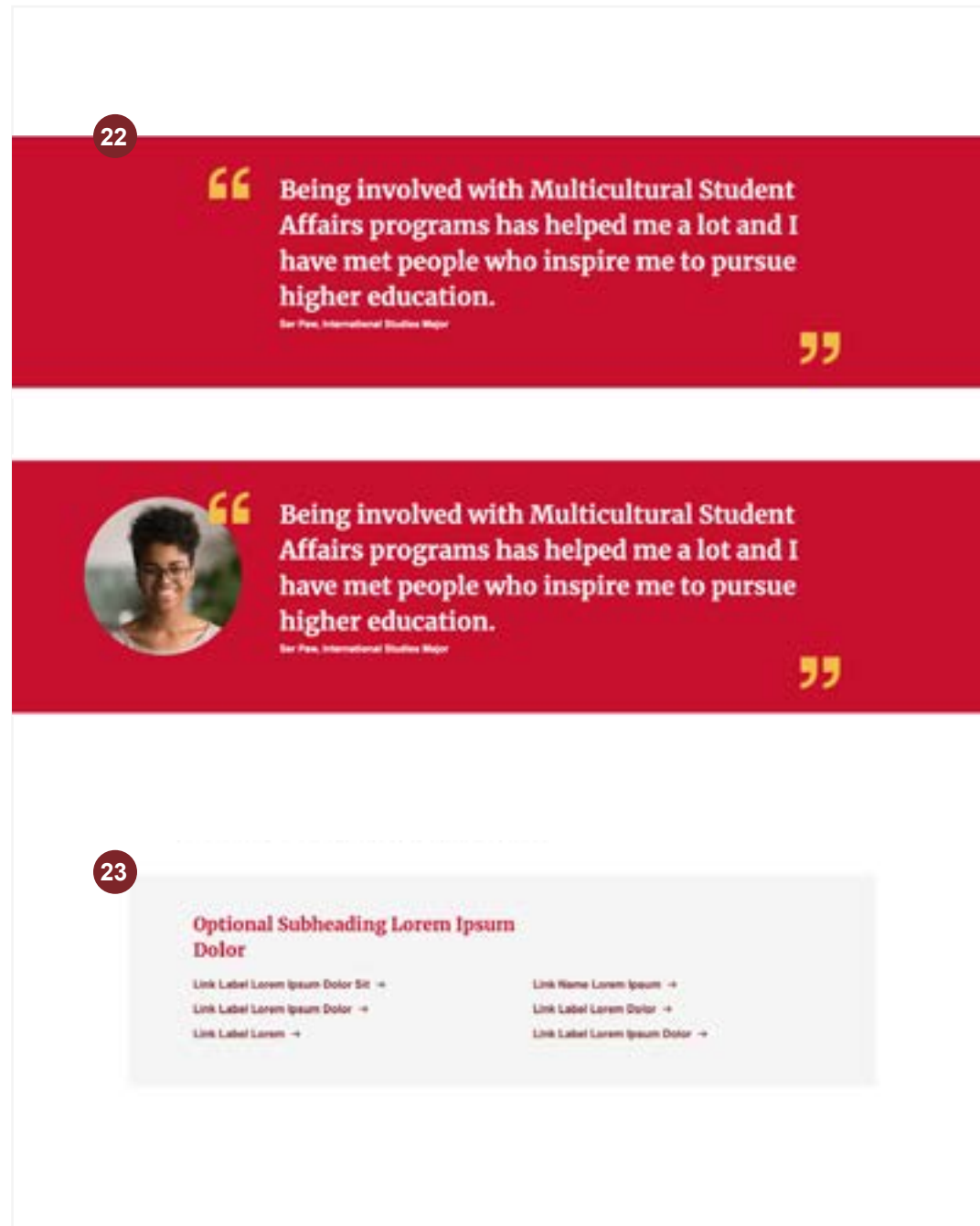
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## 22 Blockquote

A specially styled visual section of text that supports content on the page. Allows an optional image and optional fields for name/author and title/role.

- **Do** include midway through a long article to add visual interest and help break long copy into smaller sections.
- **Do** use a short quote to minimize scrolling and what might be an overwhelming amount of text.
- **Don't** place a blockquote as the last element on page, which would stack a red block on top of the footer's red block.
- **Don't** include quotation marks within the text, they are part of the design.

## 23 Link Block

Used to feature a number of related links, including external links. Contains an optional H2 and multiple link styles.

- **Do** use this at the end of pages to feature related content. Ideally, include three and nine links.
- **Do** select the appropriate link style, especially for links to external sites.
- If more than nine links are needed, use more than one Link Block and group them using headings. The Multicolumn Content blocks are good alternatives to showcase multiple text links.



## WEB THEME GUIDELINES

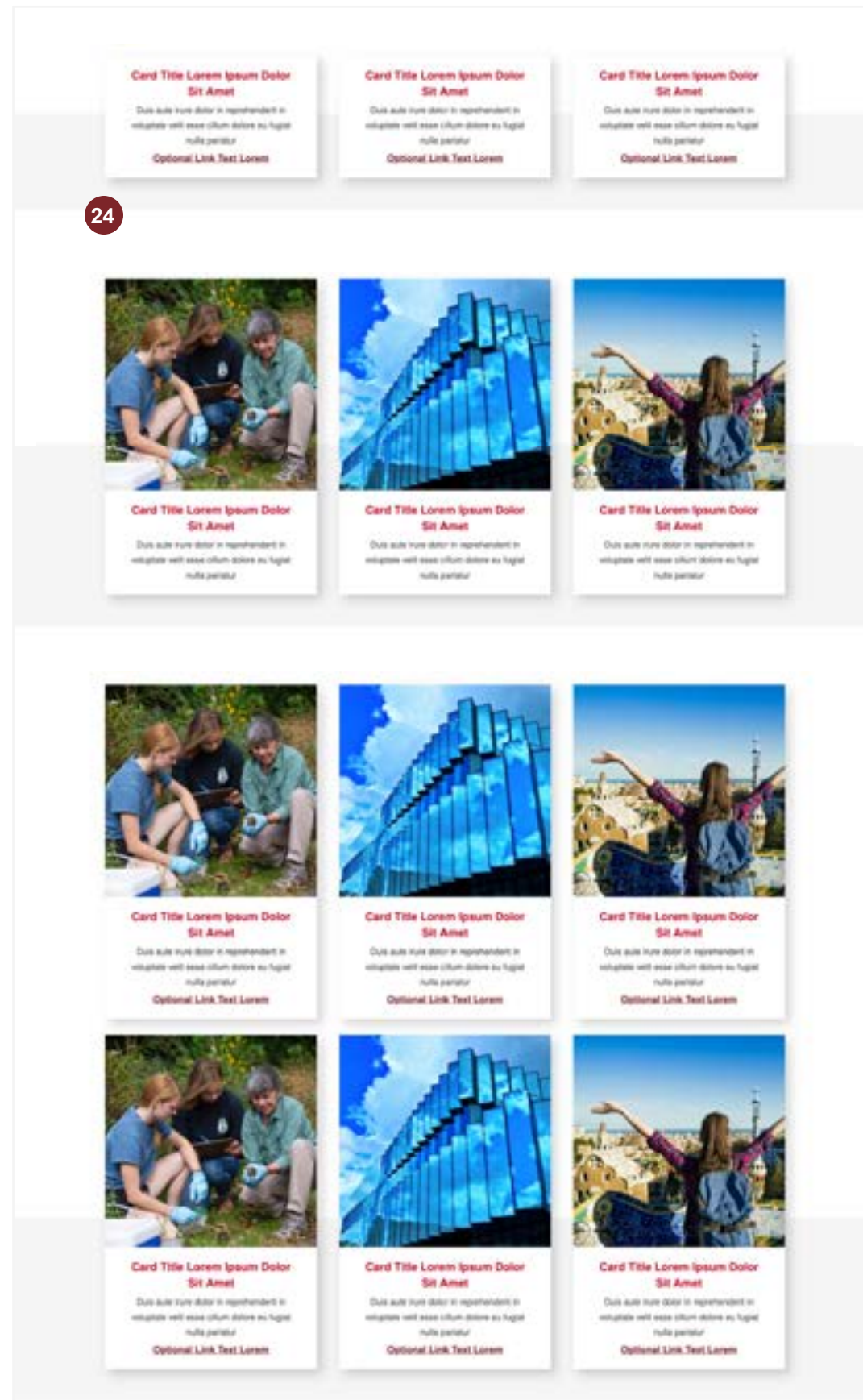
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### 24 Card Set

Cards briefly describe and link to a piece of content. Supporting copy, image, and link text are optional.

- **Do** use three to six cards at a time.
- **Don't** add links to content in the text editor. Use the URL and link text fields (one link per card).
- **Limit** headings to 40 characters max.
- **Limit** text to 230 characters max.
- **Don't** use fewer than two or more than six cards at a time.

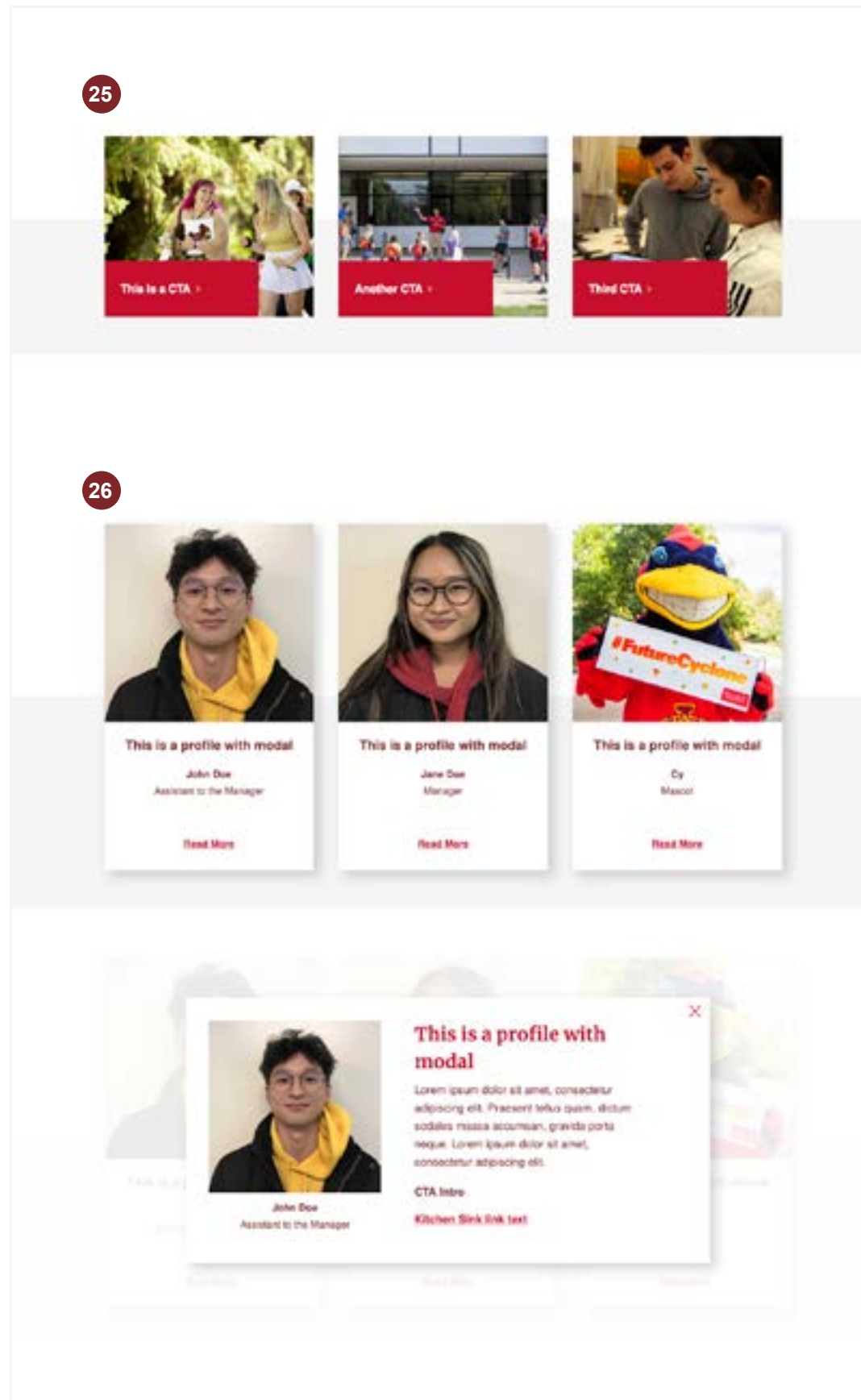


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## 25 Card Set – Image with Link

Used when only an image and very short call to action titles are needed.

- **Do** use three cards at a time.
- **Do** use short titles (22 characters max).
- **Don't** use fewer than two or more than three cards at a time.
- **Don't** use this card set more than once on a single page.

## 26 Card Set – Modals

A versatile card that can highlight a person, tease a longer story, summarize a program, and more. The initial card display includes an image, three differently styled text fields, and link text to launch the pop-out modal. Clicking the card opens a modal with supporting text, optional call to action intro text, and an optional link.

Image and link fields are optional but highly recommended.

- **Do** use an image and supporting text, or use a regular Card Set instead.
- **Limit** supporting text to 230 characters max to ensure text can be displayed without scrolling.
- **Do** use three cards at a time.
- **Don't** use fewer than two or more than three cards at a time.

## WEB THEME GUIDELINES

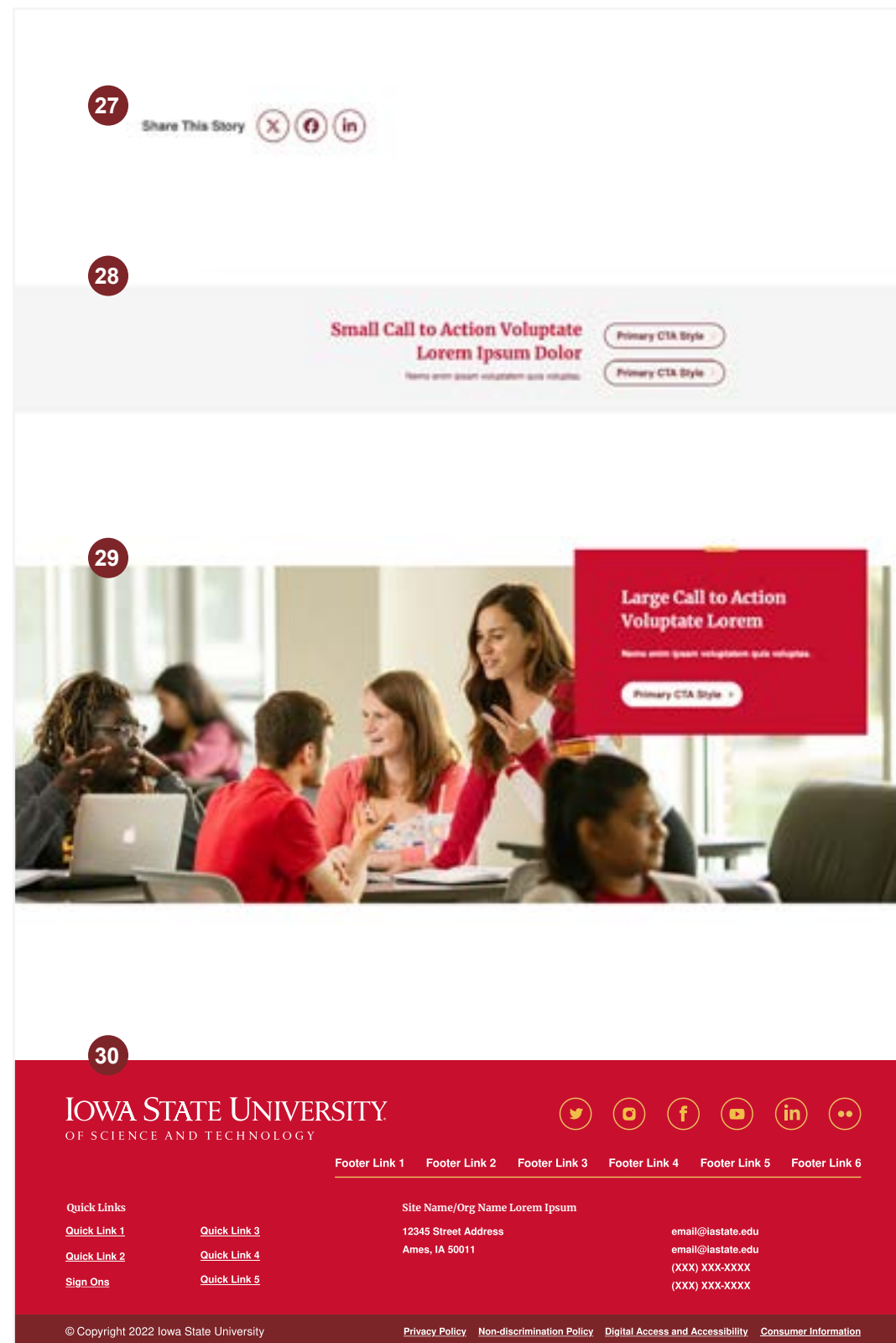
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### 27 Social – Share This

Contains links that encourage users to share a page on social media channels. Depending on CMS, it may be an independent block or an optional element. Refer to the fractal or theme site for information.

- **Use** on news and events pages.
- **Use** only once per page.

### 28 Call to Action – Text

Contains an H2, optional supporting copy, and button. Be concise.

- **Do** use at the end of a page.
- **Use** sparingly, at most one per page.
- **Use** with one or two buttons, at most three.
- **Don't** use right after the Page Hero image.

### 29 Call to Action – Image

Use when an image and only one button is needed.

- **Use similar guidance** provided for Call to Action – Text.

### 30 Site Footer

- **Use** primary footer links to direct users to take immediate action (e.g., Request Info, Apply, Visit, Give, Contact). Limit to six links.
- **Use** Quick Links to direct users to additional pages with less emphasis, and that do not appear in the header. Limit to nine links.
- Footer elements usually are set up in the CMS site settings.

# Elements: People

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## 31 People Cards

Used to display multiple people on a directory page. Includes name, optional image, title, contact information, and optional link to bio page.

- **Use** when organizing people by teams on a page.
- **Use** a similar image as on the bio page.
- **Don't** combine with People List or People Table.

## 32 People Filter/Search

Used to search and filter a directory display. Allows for a combined search using a text field and several optional category filters.

## 33 People List

- **Use** in a similar manner as above but when fewer people need to be highlighted on a page.
- **Don't** combine with People Cards or People Table.

## 34 People Detail

This element is used at the top of individual bio pages. Includes a name, optional image, titles/units/roles, web and social media links, and contact information.

## 35 People Table

Displays a directory of people in a sortable table. Includes first name, last name, title/unit/role, email, and phone number.

- **Use** to showcase multiple people in an easily scannable format.



# Elements: Events

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### Event Title Lorem Ipsum Dolor Sit



36

- 🕒 Wednesday, 04 Jan 2023 from 1:00 pm to 2:00 pm
- 📍 Location sint occaecat cupidatat
- 💰 Free
- 🏷️ Text Label Lorem: Lorem ipsum dolor sit
- 🌐 Website: [loremipsum.com/calendar/this-event](https://loremipsum.com/calendar/this-event) →
- ✉️ [person@contactforthisevent.org](mailto:person@contactforthisevent.org) →
- 📞 (xxx) xxx-xxxx

### Featured Events

37

<p>Card Title Lorem Ipsum Dolor Sit Amet</p> <p>Wednesday, Jan 04 2023 from 1:00 pm to 2:00 pm</p> <p>Curdak, SD</p>	<p>Card Title Lorem Ipsum Dolor Sit Amet</p> <p>Friday, 06 Feb 2023 from 1:00 pm to 2:00 pm</p> <p>Wabert, ND</p>	<p>Card Title Lorem Ipsum Dolor Sit Amet</p> <p>Friday, 13 Feb 2023 from 1:00 pm to 2:00 pm</p> <p>Labori, MD</p>
--	---	---

### 36 Events Hero with Details

Used at the top of event pages. It contains an H1 title, optional hero image, and highlights key details with links and icons for date, location, cost, email, and phone number.

- **Use** at the top of an events page.
- **Use** custom text labels for websites or for event details without an icon.
- **Use** consistent language for text labels.

### 37 Events Cards

- **Use** to highlight events with more visual presence on a page. Includes image, title, and location for each event. Centered H2 section title is optional.
- **Use** similar to Card Set.

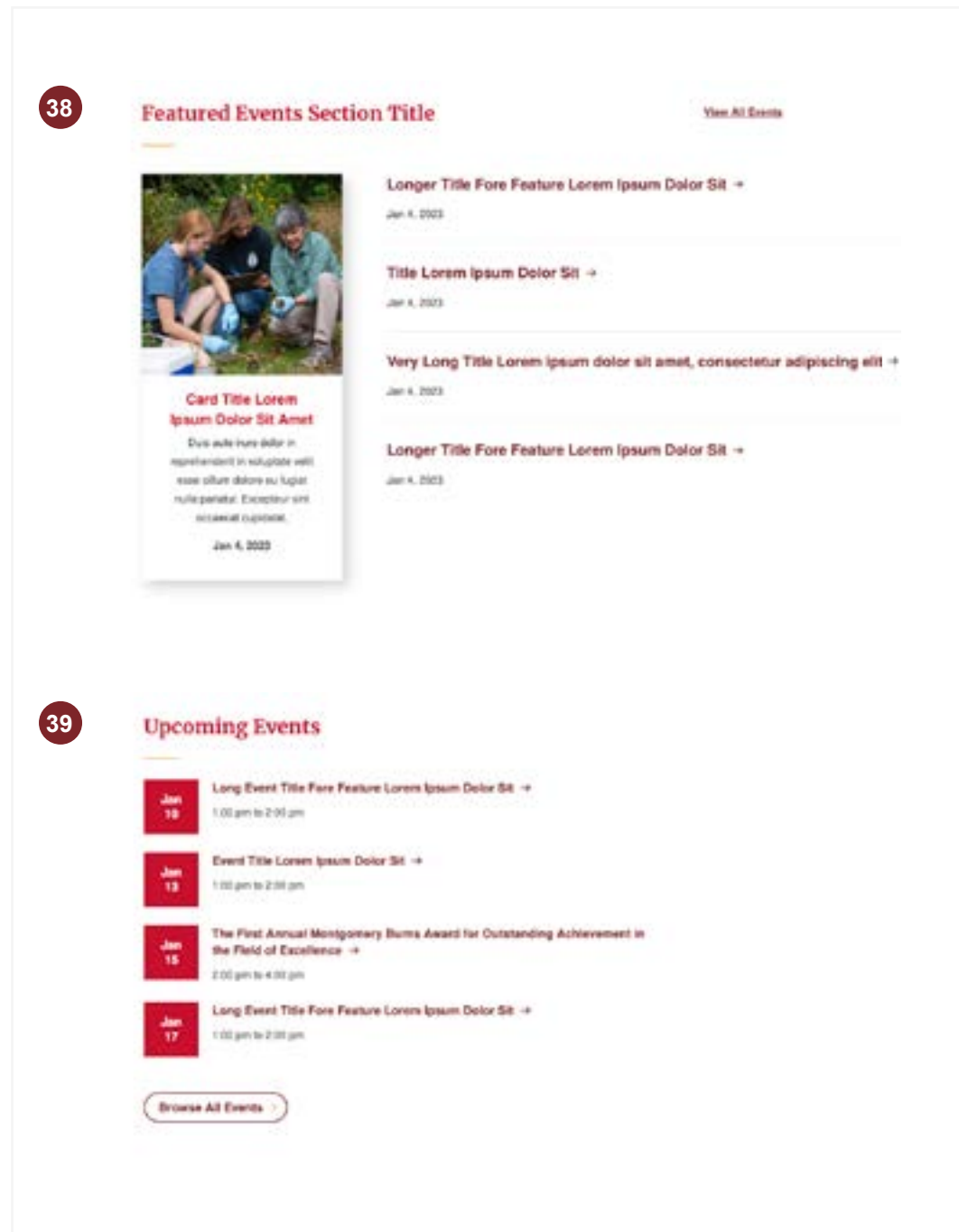
# Elements: Events

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### 38 Events List with Feature

Used to manually curate up to five featured events. Includes an optional H2 section title. Events have H3 titles that are styled as H4. Only the main featured event includes an image and short blurb with title and date. The list of other events displays title and date.

- **Use** when you want only selected events to display.

### 39 Events List

Used to feature up to four events. Each event includes a date, title, and time. A button link to all events appears below the list. Includes an optional H2 section title. Events have H3 titles that are styled as H4.

- **Use** to highlight upcoming events at a glance.
- **Don't** use if event images need to be included.

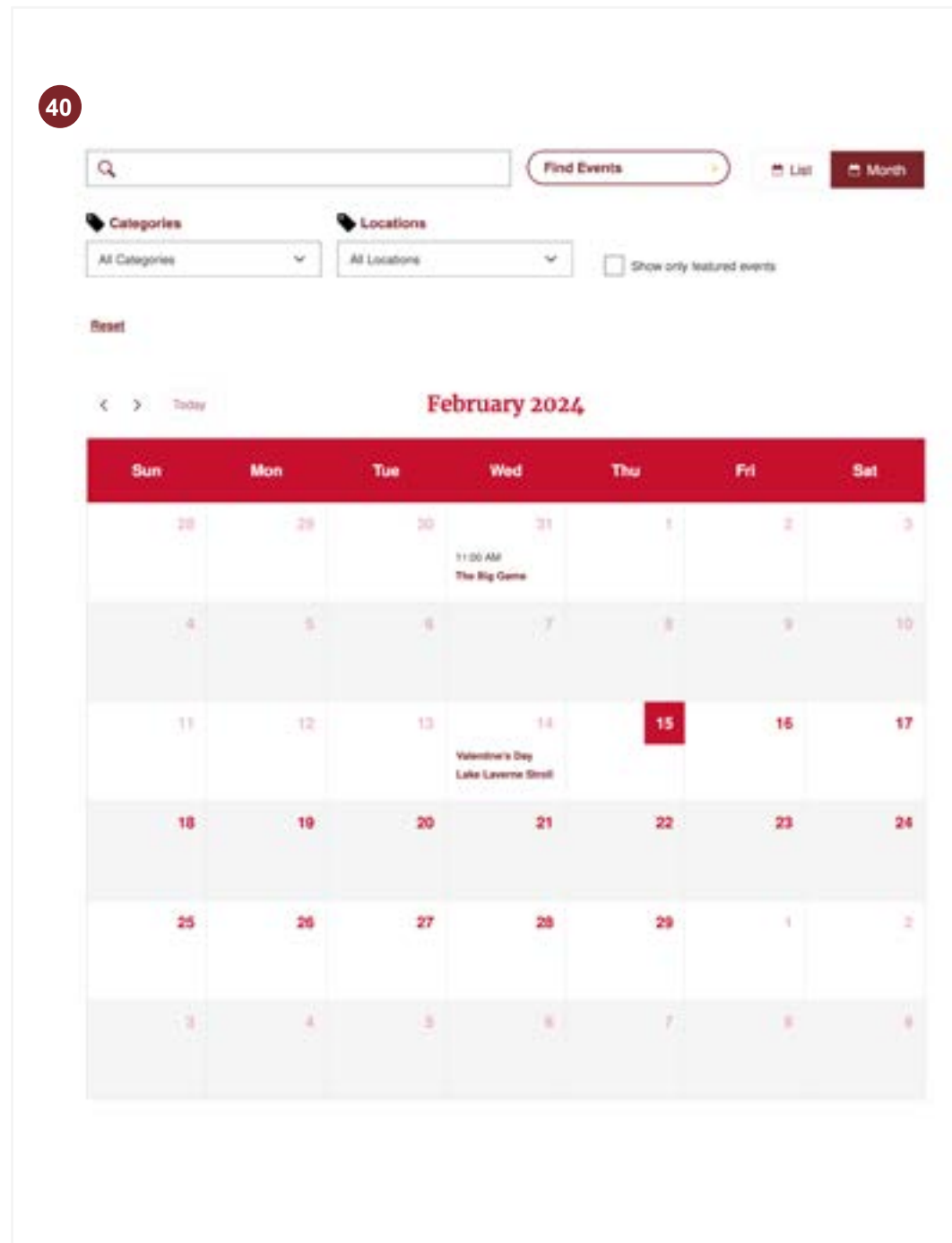
# Elements: Events

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## 40 Events Calendar

Used to display upcoming events in list and monthly calendar formats. Includes the ability to search words and sort events by categories and locations.

- **Use** on event/calendar pages.



WEB THEME GUIDELINES

# Elements: News

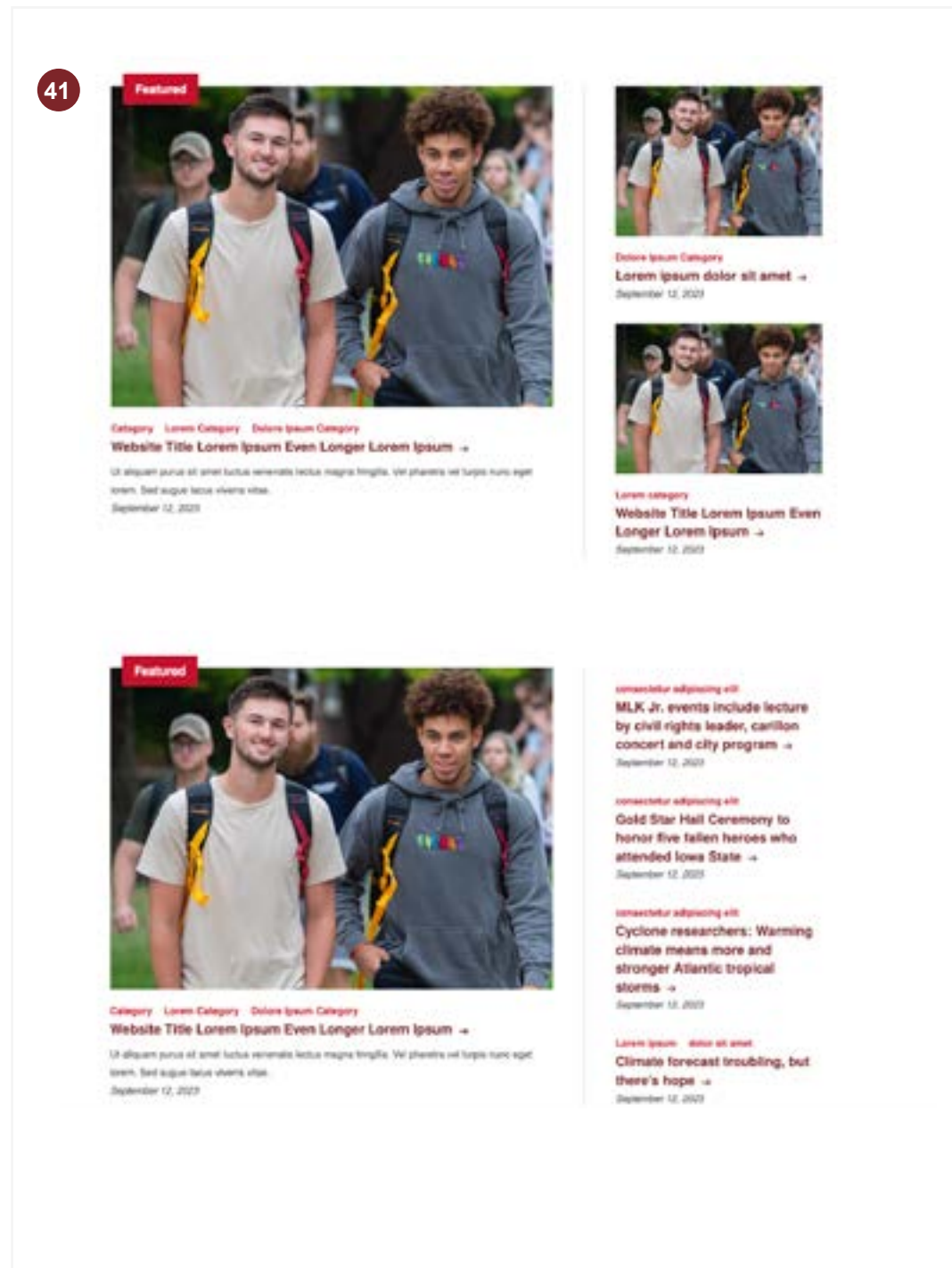
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The screenshot displays a news grid with four items. The top-left item is a large featured story with a 'Featured' tag, a large image of two students, and a title 'Website Title Lorem Ipsum Even Longer Lorem Ipsum'. Below it is a smaller article with a 'Featured' tag, a smaller image of the same students, and a title 'MLK Jr. events include lecture by civil rights leader, carillon concert and city program'. The top-right item is a smaller article with a title 'MLK Jr. events include lecture by civil rights leader, carillon concert and city program'. The bottom-right item is a smaller article with a title 'Cyclone researchers: Warming climate means more and stronger Atlantic tropical storms'. Each item includes a date of 'September 12, 2023' and a 'Read more' link.

## 41 News Featured

Used to manually curate up to five featured stories, including one main feature with a large image and blurb.

Additional features can be listed with or without photos. All features include title, date, and optional categories.

## WEB THEME GUIDELINES

# Elements: News

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## Under Pressure

How ISU researchers solved one of the 20th century's biggest scientific mysteries and helped end WWII.

Author: Frimansa Lehtinen | Image: Frimansa Lehtinen

42



43

### In the News

The Orion

News Title →

News site story excerpt

Author

News Story with External Link ↗

News site story excerpt

44



Category: Lorem Category | Dolore Ipsum Category  
Website Title Lorem Ipsum Even Longer Lorem Ipsum →  
September 12, 2023



Category  
Interdum varius nisi →  
September 18, 2023

### 42 News Article Hero with Details

Used at the top of article pages. Contains an H1 story and page title. Subhead, attribution, and hero image are optional.

### 43 News Items

Contains article title, short blurb, and link. H2 section title and multiple tags are optional.

- **Use** short descriptions (100 characters max).
- **Use** to highlight up to two news stories.
- **Use** with an H2 (strongly recommended).
- **No images** are displayed.

### 44 News List

Used to display a news feed of the most recent stories. Includes story title, link, and date. Image and multiple tags are optional.

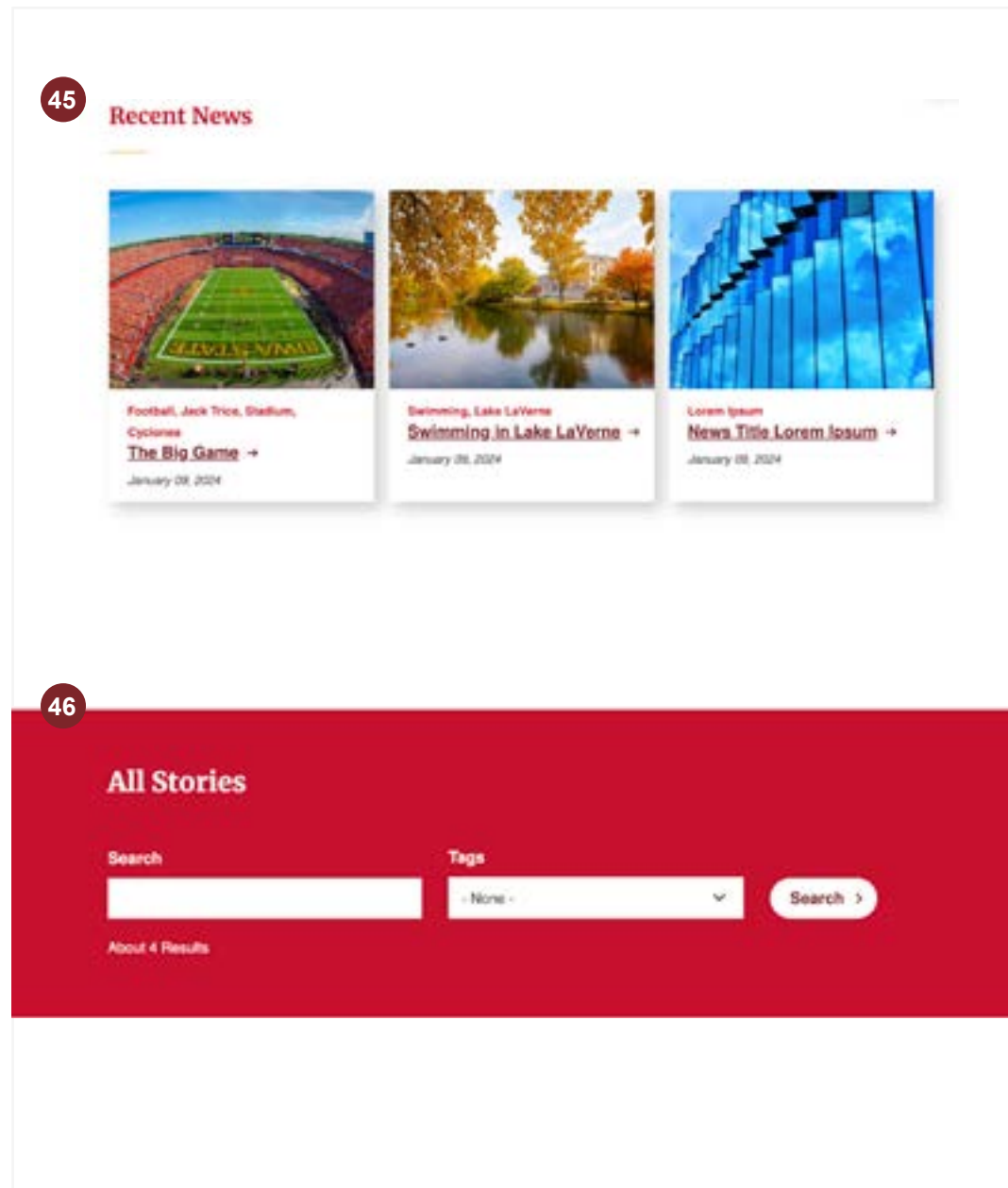
# Elements: News

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### 45 News Cards

- **Use** when you need to highlight stories with more visual presence on a page. Includes an image, article title, and date for each story. H2 section title and multiple categories are optional.
- **Use** similar to Card Set.

### 46 News Filter/Search

Used to search stories by text, with optional combined search using categories/tags.

- H2 section title is optional.



## WEB THEME GUIDELINES

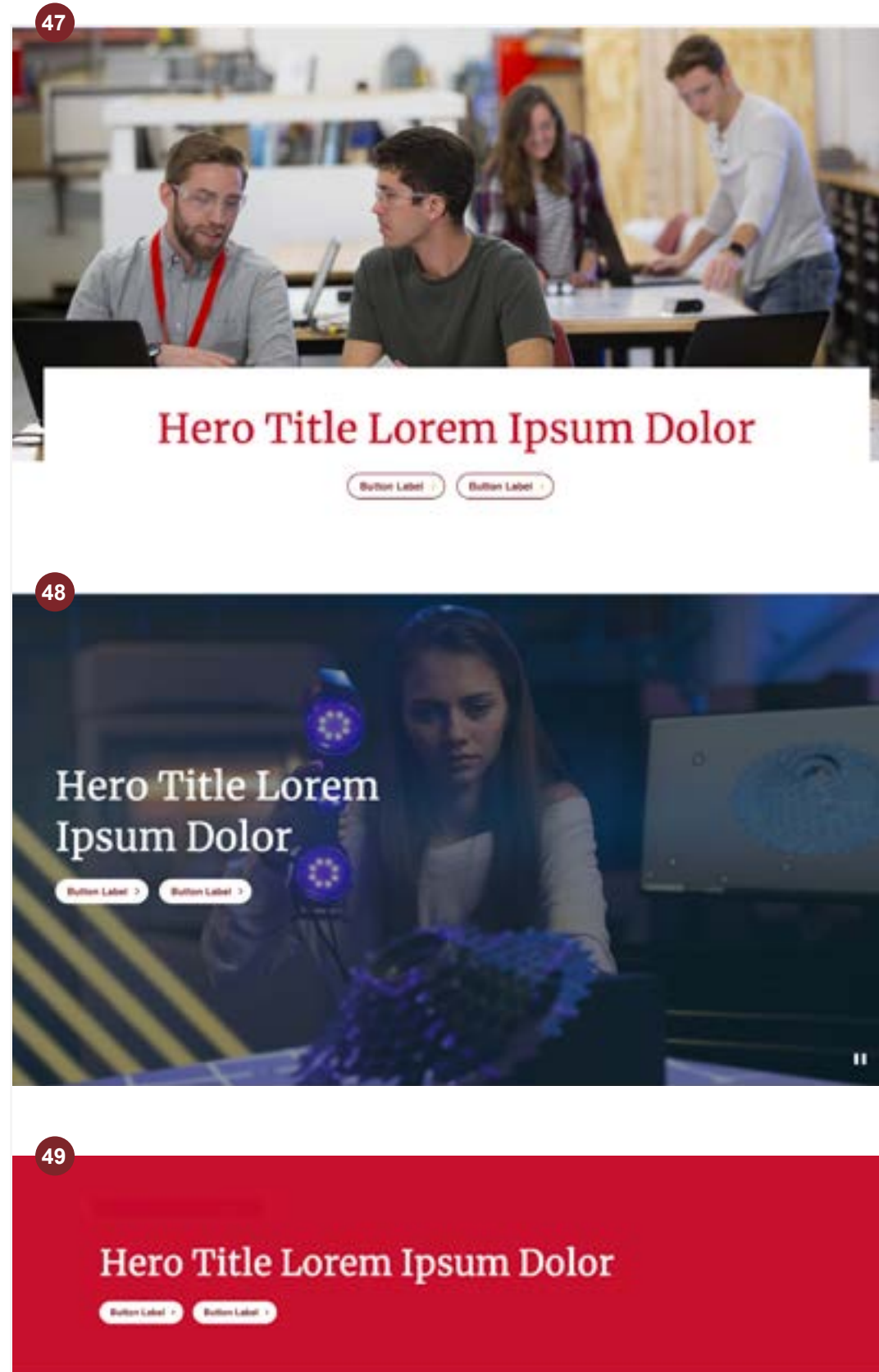
# Elements: Homepage

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### 47 Homepage Hero – Atmospheric Image

Contains an H1, image, and optional button.

- **Use** on Homepage when the hero image isn't the focal point of the top of the page.
- **Use** with “Architectural” photography.
- **Use** no more than two buttons.
- **Don't** use on basic pages.

### 48 Homepage Hero – Background Video

Contains an H1, background video, and optional button.

- **Use** on Homepage when a more immersive experience is needed as a focal point.
- **Use** short video clips (15 seconds max).
- **Use** video links from YouTube, Vimeo, or self-hosted video.
- **Use** no more than two buttons.
- **Don't** use on basic pages.

### 49 Homepage Hero – No Image

Contains an H1 and optional button.

- **Use** on Homepages when an image isn't the focal point at the top of the page.
- **Use** no more than two buttons.
- **Don't** use on basic pages.

## WEB THEME GUIDELINES

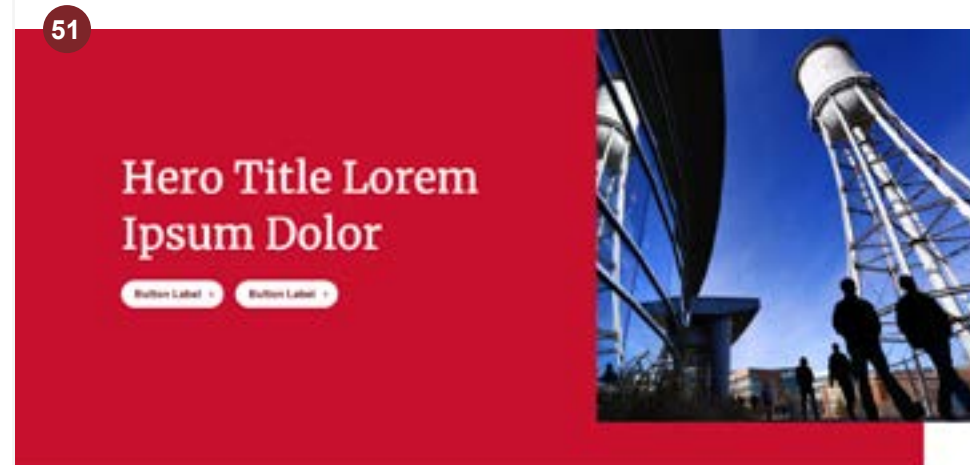
# Elements: Homepage

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### 50 Homepage Hero – Background Image

Contains an H1, image, and optional button.

- **Use** on Homepages when a large image is needed as a key focal point.
- **Use** with “Macro-lens” or “Micro-lens” photography.
- **Use** no more than two buttons.
- **Don't** use on basic pages.

### 51 Homepage Hero – Supporting Image

Contains an H1, image, and optional button.

- **Use** on Homepages when a smaller image is needed as a focal point.
- **Use** no more than two buttons.
- **Don't** use on basic pages.

### 52 Homepage Social – Follow

Manually curated with images from the Instagram account associated with the website. Social icons should link to other associated social media channels.

- **Do** use Instagram images that are impactful and engaging.
- **Do** use the default gray version.
- **Don't** place the red version at the bottom of a page, which would stack a red block on top of the footer's red block.
- **Don't** use overly busy photos or images with embedded text.
- **Don't** use on basic pages.

# Element Heading Styles: Quick Reference

## H1 Headings

Body Content  
Events Hero with Details  
Homepage Hero – Atmospheric Image  
Homepage Hero – Background Video  
Homepage Hero – Background Image  
Homepage Hero – No Image  
Homepage Hero – Supporting Image  
News Article Hero with Details  
Page Hero – Alt Nav  
Page Hero – Default

## H2 Headings

Accordion\*  
Blockquote  
Body Content  
Call to Action – Image  
Call to Action – Text  
Card Set\*  
Card Set – Modals\*  
Events Calendar  
Events Cards\*  
Events List  
Events List with Feature  
Feature – Large  
Feature – Large with Intro

Feature – Small  
Homepage Social – Follow  
Image Grid with Text  
Link Block  
News Cards\*  
News Featured\*  
News List\*  
News Filter/Search  
News Items  
People List  
Statistic

## H3 Headings

Body Content  
Carousel  
Events List\*\*  
Events List with Feature\*\*  
Feature – External\*\*  
Featured Set  
Multicolumn Content  
Multicolumn Content – Alt  
Statistic

## Captions/Links/Other

Breadcrumbs  
Button Set  
Card Set – Image with Link  
Carousel  
Form  
Link Set  
People Cards  
People Filter/Search  
People Table\*  
Social – Share This  
Side navigation  
Table\*  
Video

\* Heading is styled like an H3

\*\* Heading is styled like an H4



# Contact

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Need more information?  
Have a request?

Website direction will be handled by Iowa State University's Strategic Relations and Communications team, with support from the idfive agency.

## Erin Rosacker

Communications Specialist

Strategic Relations and Communications

[edavison@iastate.edu](mailto:edavison@iastate.edu)

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### Additional Resources

- [Iowa State University Brand Marketing](#)
- [Innovate at Iowa State](#)
- [Start Something](#)
- [In the Making \(Admissions\)](#)
- [theme.iastate.edu](https://theme.iastate.edu)