


Media and Communications Studies Articulation Committee  
(MACSAC)

Transfer and Articulation Project  
Final Report  
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*Submitted to*  
*BC Council on Admissions and Transfer*  
*#709 - 555 Seymour Street*  
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## Executive Summary

With Special Projects funding from BCCAT, the Media and Communications Studies Articulation Committee TAP project—hereafter called the MediaBC website--began in earnest in early October 2005 and was demonstrated as a completed and functional design to the MACSAC committee at its annual meeting on May 26, 2006. The consensus at the meeting, and in subsequent email comments from MACSAC members, indicate the widespread approval and acceptance of the website as suitable to supporting MACSAC activities.

Features of MediaBC (<http://www.mediabc.ca>) include a custom designed Content Management System (CMS), allowing users without programming experience to post information to the site; a mix of networking and delivery strategies using up-to-date web technologies; and a unique approach to the notion of discourse community utilizing different levels of access.

We have made every effort to capitalize on—without duplicating--the features of the existing BCCAT website. We wanted, above all, to demonstrate a close relationship between the activities of a typical articulation committee and the services provided by BCCAT, and this is reflected in the site design, structure, and functionality. As noted in our proposal for funding, one of our goals was to model the kind of web-based resource that would provide useful support to the activities and interests of an articulation committee.

Apart from minor refinements, the design and implementation of the site is complete. We will continue to maintain and host the site on our servers at Malaspina University-College until otherwise directed by MACSAC.

## Implementation of Design and Specifications

The Interim Report we submitted to BCCAT in December 2005 describes in detail the process we used in the early stages of project development. This final report describes the subsequent process we followed.

In early January 2006, we began to develop the actual framework of the MediaBC website. As noted in our Interim Report, the template for the site--along with much of the information design--had been completed between October and December 2005, and we had a target audience firmly in mind.

A key feature of the website design was our desire to bring a number of communities of interest together: faculty instructing in Media and Communications Studies programs; faculty and administrators involved in the articulation and transfer of Media and Communications courses; and anyone interested in knowing more about the discipline—faculty, students, general public—and the kinds of resources falling under its purview.

The dynamic features of the site were developed to allow it to grow without the intermediary of HTML or programming specialists to add content. In this way, participants could focus on articulating courses and adding media resources without needing to know these specialized skills. A great deal of our effort was thus dedicated to constructing a robust Content Management System (CMS).

In three of the four content areas - MACSAC, Articulation, and Media Resources - a dynamic template system was developed. It allows users to log in and post new items or comments to existing items. (*Why Study Media?*, the forth section, does not use this system). Similar in structure to a blog, the site allows a community to grow around a shared collection of resources.

### The Four-Part Structure of MediaBC

The *MACSAC* section is intended for members of the articulation committee (MACSAC). This section contains documents relating to committee business (e.g. mandate information, principles of the committee). It is designed to update information continually; as new working groups are formed or changed, this section can reflect those changes. The kinds of information recorded include: a list of members, relevant (e.g. institutional) websites, contact information, and meeting agendas and minutes.

The *Articulation* section contains information and course posting tools to assist faculty throughout BC with the process of articulating Media and Communications Studies courses. In the *Articulation Consultation* section, we will provide a facility for faculty to post course and program information, and engage in relevant dialogue. This information includes instructor requirements, course outlines, learning outcomes, and textbook lists, and allows faculty to compare courses and seek clarification.

The *Media Resources* section informs faculty, students and other interested parties about media resources and research. In this area, individuals can post reviews, contribute articles, and annotate links. Other individuals can then continue the dialogue with responses. Students will naturally be able to access this information for assistance with their studies in this field.

The final section--*Why Study Media?*--provides current and potential Media and Communications Studies students with information relating to this field as an area of study and employment. It explains to potential students how this field is defined and how they might become involved. Further, it provides students with substantial information on careers in this field, information on the major employers in the region, and actual job postings (pulled from a third-party site such as Monster.ca). This section will also include information on what media and communications studies programs exist in BC and beyond.

## Access Management

Developed in PHP and using MySQL as a database, the system has four levels of access. The first level is a free community account for individuals interested in the study of media at a general level, and allows posting in the *Media Resources* section. Next in the hierarchy of graduated access comes the Media Faculty account: faculty engaged in the study, research, and teaching of media and communications can post courses in the *Articulation* section and comment on the courses posted by other faculty. The third level of access is for *MACSAC* members. To facilitate communications among members of this group, we have provided the ability to include documents (such as meeting minutes) with postings. Lastly, there is Administrator access for those responsible for site maintenance.

## Content Management

As previously mentioned, we decided it would be beneficial to allow content updates by members without programming experience. Regular pages on the site are thus created and managed through a relatively transparent custom content management system. Members of *MACSAC* and Administrators can log into the CMS to create, edit, and delete pages. This feature incorporates some of the advantages of a wiki, allowing relevant parties to edit pages and provide content.

## Notification Mechanisms

Several mechanisms were developed to help community members keep up-to-date. Besides actively searching the site with the integrated search option, or browsing through our menu system, we determined that people would find it easy to stay up-to-date if additional methods of notification were available.

We have used the left sidebar of the site to host a rotating list of recent posts to the Media Resources and Articulation section, as well as to highlight upcoming events in the media community. This will provide a quick visual reminder to a site visitor.

Furthermore, new courses posted to the list generate an informative email to those with Media Faculty and *MACSAC* accounts. This allows members to see that a new course has been posted, and provide feedback accordingly.

Lastly, the more novel mechanism of RSS feeds (Really Simple Syndication) is provided. Subscribers to the feeds are notified with headlines and brief summaries of courses or media resources, with the option to view more with a single click. Many internet users now have customized home pages with RSS feeds built right in, or else they may have "feed readers" or "live bookmarks" built into their web browser to keep them up-to-date. This networking feature

allows users to be selective about site visits--and thus feel in control of their surfing habits--while providing information to them in a timely way.

## Technical Specifications & Style Guide

Early in January 2006, and after we received feedback from MACSAC users on the initial design and concept, the visual prototype was completed, and a final template produced. As well, all CSS styles (Cascading Style Sheet) to be used throughout the site were determined, and provided a guideline to those developing the site.

As noted in the interim report, we settled on some firm guiding criteria to provide a technical specification for any technologies used to implement our design. We fully adhered to these guidelines:

- The project will be developed and delivered on an Apache system.
- The project will be developed using PHP & MySQL for all dynamic and data requirements.
- The project will use strict XHTML & CSS standards wherever possible and will keep browser-specific code to an absolute minimum.
- The project will meet the accessibility requirements contained within the Government of Canada's Common Look & Feel guidelines. This means that the MediaBC website will meet WC3 Priority 1 and Priority 2 checkpoints.

## Presenting Finished Site to MACSAC

After the site systems had been completed to specification by Michael Nixon, Mike Haugland, and Herman Leung (research assistants in the Centre for Digital Humanities Innovation), project supervisors Marshall Soules and Doug Stetar provided content for the site, including MACSAC archival materials; an introduction to the BCCAT website; sample course outlines; labour analysis; reading lists; media reviews; and other content required to provide substance for the site.

When it was presented by Doug Stetar at the annual MACSAC articulation meeting at UCFV on May 26, 2006, the MediaBC website was more than just a concept, or an empty shell waiting to be filled: it was a fully functioning website—apart from a few technical glitches we have subsequently addressed—with substantial illustrative content. The consensus at the meeting suggested that MACSAC members were pleased with the result. We solicited further comment after the meeting by email, and have received only favorable comments.

While much development of the site will occur through contributions over time, we feel we have satisfied the terms of our contract with BCCAT, and are thus submitting an invoice for the remaining funds awarded in the contract. We will continue to host, maintain and improve the site at Malaspina until otherwise determined by MACSAC. We also welcome any comments and suggestions from BCCAT to help us make this one of the best of BC's articulation committee websites. Finally, we appreciate BCCAT support—both financially and with suggestions—towards the completion of this project.

Respectfully submitted,

*Marshall Soules and Doug Stetar*