Table of Contents

1 Introduction and Overview
   1.1 Methods

2 Initial Consideration of Rhetorical Purposes
   2.1 Exploring the Relationship between LLP & the Linguistics Program
   2.2 Proposed Revisions to Rhetorical Goals
       2.2.1 Internal Page: “What do we do? What have we done?”
       2.2.2 External Page: “The Face of our Outreach”

3 Results Of Content Audit: Existing Design Gaps
   3.1 Overall visual design
   3.2 Inconsistency of Content Type
   3.3 Menus and Navigation
   3.4 Redirection to External Sources

4 Results of Content Audit : Issues with Content and Style
   4.1 Inconsistent Audience and Style
   4.2 Inconsistent Content Length and Type
   4.4 Outdated and Broken Content

5 Recommendations for Design
   5.1 Re-Structure the Site
       5.1.1 Add Resources for Current Students
       5.2.2 Consolidate Satellite Sites
   5.2 Align Visual Design with University Standards
   5.2 Restructure Method(s) of Navigation

6 Recommendations for Content
   6.1 Create a Style Guide
   6.2 Delete Content Not Directly Related to Rhetorical Goal
   6.3 Balance Content Type Ratios
   6.4 Be Consistent in Multilingual Offerings

7 Recommendations for Workflow
1 Introduction and Overview

The North Carolina Language and Life project (LLP) is situated in an ambiguous position within NC State University. It is closely connected with the N.C. State Linguistics program, and the two organizations share very similar goals about research, outreach, and public engagement. The two also share datasets and field sites, and much of the research done by NC State linguistics students is closely tied to the efforts of the LLP. However, the LLP also has a need to separate itself from the image of the university in order to successfully conduct research and interact with the public. Additionally, the primary purpose of the “face” of the LLP is outreach, whereas the Linguistics program is interested in research and in the successful education of its students. In consideration of this need to negotiate and maintain its own unique online presence, we suggest the need for a content audit of the LLP’s virtual presence.

We met with members of management from the LLP on February 25, 2016 to discuss the complicated relationship between the two organizations outlined above. We also reviewed the current state of their online presence. LLP staff identified key issues with the current site, including organization, outdatedness, and vagueness of audience. The following report will address these concerns in greater detail and offer solutions for them.

The staff of the LLP has, in the past, had limited time and resources to dedicate to their website and social media, and as such have created content sporadically and organically for their various outreach sites. This has been a successful method up till now. However, as the project aims to grow its audience both online and offline, the sites have a greater need to be focused, organized, and up-to-date.

The final report reflects the following major issues, which are based on the agreed-upon rhetorical goals, and which appear both in the gap analysis and the following recommendations:

- **Audience Design:** Organization, style, and content curation all lack a strong and unified sense of audience. Recommendations are given based on the clarified academic audience of the site.
- **Ease of Navigation:** The visual design and organization do not currently allow for intuitive exploration of the site. Issues with labeling and organizing content appear in several places. The navigational bar is also underdeveloped, leaving too much of the site available only through hyperlinked text.
- **Internal consistency:** Due to the organic creation process of much of the site, there are major inconsistencies in style, structure, length, and media type between otherwise similar pages within the site. We recommend unifying these elements during redesign and creating a genre guide for future content curation.
- **Outdated Content:** The current workflow of the LLP does not allow for consistent updating practices. As such, outdated content is common on the site. We address this in the workflow
section of the report, where we recommend that a content update manual be created for use in the NC State Linguistics Lab.

In our content audit, we provide the following:
● A summary of the clarified intended rhetorical purposes of the LLP webpages (section 2)
● An audit of current practices of the LLP site, along with notable gaps and/or inconsistencies (sections 3-4)
● A list of suggestions on ways to improve the site in the future (sections 5-6)
● Recommendations for workflow to accommodate these changes (section 7)

We hope to offer achievable recommendations that can make the site a successful rhetorical tool on behalf of the LLP and the linguistics program.

1.1 Methods

With these goals in mind we have conducted a content audit and gap analysis of the current Language and Life Project website. We have gathered data on every available page linked to from the LLP site, regardless of whether all pages were hosted by the LLP. We have taken note of basic quantitative features of each page, including word counts, picture counts, and hyperlink counts. We have also conducted a qualitative assessment of tone and style for each individual page and checked for out of date content.

The resulting data has been presented as evidence within the framework of a gap analysis, which identifies overarching issues of design and content in the site. The gap analysis has a necessarily wide frame of reference, as it aims to address problems of the entire site; more detailed commentary on each page is available upon request.

We have chosen not to do a competitor analysis for this specific site. Our reasoning is that the LLP stands unique among academic linguistic programs. Its complicated relationship to the NC State Linguistics program creates rhetorical goals that are unlike standard outreach organizations and also unlike academic program pages. As such, no site can provide us with a successful model for the construction of the new LLP page. However, as we split into multiple web presences (see section 2 for details), we plan on using several successful public outreach pages as competitors.
2 Initial Consideration of Rhetorical Purposes

2.1 Exploring the Relationship between LLP & the Linguistics Program

Through its existing practices, the goals of the LLP are not made clear in content or structure, and correspondingly, neither is their relationship to the goals of the Linguistics program or its webpage. This is an issue which both creates and maintains the LLP’s ambiguous position. This ambiguity also does not aid the N.C. State Linguistics program, as the LLP’s nuanced place in the University makes it difficult to communicate the valuable work done in collaboration between the two groups. Further consideration of the exact nature of the relationship between the LLP and the N.C. State Linguistics program (and the University as a whole) is necessary, as well as the specific language that would most closely represent this relationship so that all parties involved can stay “on-message” and relieve some of the ambiguity.

2.2 Proposed Revisions to Rhetorical Goals

We have worked alongside LLP staff to pinpoint these rhetorical problems. The decision was made to split the LLP page into two separate websites. For the purposes of this report, we will call them the internal page, which is the subject of this audit, and the external page, which will be created under a new domain in the summer of 2016. Below is a brief summary of the rhetorical goals of each page as discussed by the LLP.

2.2.1 Internal Page: “What do we do? What have we done?”

The internal page will be one of the two sites that the LLP runs. It will eventually be created by editing the existing page (the subject of this audit). This page is to be hosted by the N.C. State Linguistics department, and its visual design will mirror that of the Linguistics page. This site will be geared toward the following audiences:

● Current and prospective students
● Academics
● Faculty/staff

Additionally, we find that to avoid the obscure messaging that is currently present, it is imperative that the LLP identify the distinctions between the primary purposes of their internal and external pages. The purposes we propose for the internal page will be:

● To describe the LLP to those interested in working there
To describe the LLP to those interested in attending the Linguistics program
To demonstrate what a powerful asset the LLP is to the university

In consideration of its intended audiences and range of purpose, language will be geared toward an educated audience who already has some knowledge and interest in linguistics, but who may not be familiar with sociolinguistics or in linguistic gratuity. Here, the research will be described in greater detail and resources will be provided for academics who want to learn more. Outreach will be presented not as a goal, but as evidence that the LLP is a successful organization.

2.2.2 External Page: “The Face of our Outreach”

The external page will either be hosted on a separate external domain or by NC State in such a way that it is a redirection from an external domain. If the internal page is an “archive of our work,” the external page is the “work itself.” This page will be designed to educate and engage the general public about issues of linguistic diversity in America. In this situation, the research we do is a means to an outreach end. The site will be more multi-media friendly and engage audiences across our platforms. Educational content will be geared towards those who have little to no knowledge of linguistics. An extended plan of this webpage will be made available in a future report.
3 Results Of Content Audit: Existing Design Gaps

The following section explores current issues and practices employed by the LLP in regards to the design of their site, which will ultimately become the internal page. Issues of design refer to two separate components. The first is the literal aesthetic layout and visual aspects of the site, including but not limited to logos, page layout, multimedia inclusion, and color schemes. The second, related aspect of design is the rhetorical design scheme of the page. This includes the organization of content into categories and the hierarchal relationship of different content as represented by navigational features.

3.1 Overall visual design

The current design of the internal page is, above all else, text-heavy. Most of its content is in text form. There is an average of 1 picture per page, which is embedded somewhere in a wall of text. Throughout the entire site, there are a total of 30 pictures, which, compared to an average of 300-400 words per page, makes for a decidedly text-dominated experience. Most text is black on a white background, with the exception of blue hyperlinks. Additionally, all text seems to be approx. 11 pt font, making long passages daunting to read and perhaps even inaccessible to some visitors of the site.

Additionally, what the internal page lacks in content variety it makes up in white space, which consumes roughly half of each page. All content on the page is bordered by the “edges” of the visual design, making the page itself a column on the computer screen completely surrounded by white space. This column is bordered on the top by a logo and navigation bar, which remains consistent throughout navigation. The page is bordered on the left-hand side by a second navigation bar leading to other aspects of the NC State linguistics program. Although these are places the user may wish to visit, having two separate navigation bars may be confusing, and also seems to emphasize the “border” of the page, making it very confined to only half the available space.

Lastly, the color scheme, layout, text families, and logo design of the webpage were designed by a previous member of the NC State Linguistics program. While they are consistent and well-chosen design elements, they are unfortunately not in coherence with NC State’s visual design requirements. The college has specific rules pertaining to design elements which allow the university a sense of coherence and also dictate best practices for individual webpages. The home page of NC State branding is also available at the following link: [https://brand.ncsu.edu](https://brand.ncsu.edu)

Lastly, the overall visual design still represents the organization as the NCLLP. This will be a problem in the future as the name changes to “Language and Life project at NC State” in other contexts.
3.2 Inconsistency of Content Type

The type of content available, although mostly textual, does include some multimedia options including video, pictures, sound clips, and games. This is especially true of the Outreach section. However, this content is presented in an inconsistent way. When clicking on hyperlinks, it was unclear what kind of page or content would be on the other side. For example, the Outreach page has links to:

- Text-centric pages
- Interactive games
- External sites to purchase DVDs and T-shirts
- Journal publications
- PDF downloads of curriculum

Each of the pages listed are presented in a single list with no delineation or organization. Consistency is also a noted issue with parts of the site that only feature text. This issue will be discussed in greater length in Section Four.

3.3 Menus and Navigation

The current LLP webpage offers a top navigational bar featuring the following organization. The capital letters denote landing page and the indented names are sub-pages available through a drop-down menu.

NCLLP - ABOUT
ABOUT FIELDWORK
RESEARCH AND FIELD SITES
    Alphabetical List of Field Sites
    Non-Geographical Sites
OUTREACH
DIALECT QUIZ

The home page is also available by clicking on the logo above the navigation bar. The navigation bar is overall a strong idea. However, there are two major gaps in execution to be addressed. First, the secondary options are only visible once the primary page has already been navigated to, which could be a time-consuming navigational problem for first-time users who aren’t familiar with the site. However, the more urgent problem issue is that the links available in the drop-down menu do not allow access to the majority of the content on the site. Pictured below is a breakdown of page navigation on the LLP website:
We can see here that hyper-linked text, which is not marked or highlighted in any other way besides an underline and font color change, is responsible for the vast majority of content on this site. Many of these links are embedded in larger paragraphs of fonts, forcing the user to read through the paragraph before discovering that these pages even exist. In some cases, this hyperlinked text is not a description of the link itself: rather, it would be a hyperlinked deictic reference ("click here"), with the description of the link in a different part of the sentence or paragraph. This is a major concern for the site as a whole, as users who have to hunt for content will likely look for information elsewhere or lose interest if the information is too hard to find.

3.4 Redirection to External Sources

Because of the unclear boundary between the LLP’s past initiatives and the Linguistics Department’s research and outreach, there are several specific projects and topics that are referenced as part of the LLP but that are in fact hosted on the Linguistics Department webpage. Besides being rhetorically confusing, this presents a practical issue of navigation - the user clicks to find that the LLP’s navigation bar has been replaced by an identically designed (but differently populated) Linguistics navigation bar. This could be a frustrating experience and ultimately detriment the LLP website’s ability to retain a reader. The main topics which link out of the LLP and into Linguistics are the Educating the Educated initiative, and general information about dialect diversity on campus. The LLP and Linguistics Program should determine who is responsible for these initiatives, and host the content accordingly.

Additionally, there are several other websites that are referenced from the LLP page and are affiliated with a particular facet or initiative of the project but are hosted by separate sites. These include the “Talking NC” website, which used to serve as an archive and store for LLP media objects (DVDs, CDs, shirts, etc), and a “Howl With an Accent” webpage that was created by a student a few years ago for the Educating the Educated initiative. Both these pages have since been abandoned, and as such, have incomplete or out of date information.
4 Results of Content Audit : Issues with Content and Style

The following section explores current issues and practices employed by the LLP in regards to the content of their site. Issues of content refer to the gaps in existence, taxonomy, curation, and upkeep of the “stuff” populating the pages. Issues of style, on the other hand, more specifically refer to the composition, grammar, and vocabulary of multi-modal content that enables content to appeal to specific audiences.

4.1 Inconsistent Audience and Style

Upon conducting this audit, it quickly became apparent that this site is unsure of its audience. On the one hand, this is a page about an organization directly linked to an academic program; on the other, engagement with the general public is at the core of the organization’s work. What results is a mixture of content that is not as in-depth as an academic audience would like, and too technical (and not design-oriented enough) for general audiences. For example, the “Field Sites” page is very technical and obviously aimed towards those who already have background in linguistics. This exists in the same navigational bar as our flash game “Dialect Quiz,” which is aimed at those who have never heard of linguistics before. Some pages are right in-between: the “About fieldwork” page is a long text entry that not presented in a very visually engaging way, making it uninteresting to casual users, but that is too basic in content to interest academics.

4.2 Inconsistent Content Length and Type

In consideration of the pages dedicated to individual field sites, the type of information included for each site varies. Overall, the pages usually offer a combination of the following: geographic information, historical information, research interests/goals/questions, linguistic features, and a list of papers written using data from the field site. However, which sections are present (and how much detail is provided for a given section) are bound to vary between pages. The following table provides a quantitative breakdown of the word count of the field sites pages:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Subheadings</th>
<th>Word Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abaco</td>
<td>About, Photos, Papers</td>
<td>437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beech Bottom</td>
<td>About, Papers</td>
<td>331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crusoe Island</td>
<td>About, History, Research Questions, Papers</td>
<td>344</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some of the pages for individual field sites will offer information on the history of the area, features studied, current projects, papers written, etc. However, some pages may not include half of that information, and others may list each resource as a heading without incorporating content of any kind into the section. As evidenced by the word count table, this leads to extremely variant content length.
This issue is mirrored in other, longer pages as well – some are extremely text heavy (“About Fieldwork” is 1291 word) while others that feature just as “meaty” of a subject are much shorter (“About NCLLP” is only 349 words). The overall effect of this variance is for that the user feels unsure of how much information to expect for a given place. The importance of different pages may also be improperly reflected by information density and word length. For example, the field site page for Robeson County is over twice as information-rich as the overall “About NCLLP” page (822 words vs 349 words). This difference is an inaccurate representation of the relative rhetorical importance of those two topics.

4.4 Outdated and Broken Content

The content of this site is inconsistently updated. There are some pages (Saban English field site, for example) which have been updated as recently as 2014/2015. However, there are others that appear to have not been touched in many years. The Durham field site, for instance, discusses a “current” project that is actually not currently being worked on. Additionally, the Princeville field site states that the community is currently rebuilding after being devastated by a flood even though that is no longer the case. Additionally, it is likely that there are NCLLP field sites which have not been included on the page due to a lack of consistent updates. The current organization of the page features field sites in two lists: an alphabetical list and a list based on geographic location. While the sentiment behind this is encouraging, the actual result is that it appears that the page has double the content. Since this is not the case, only one of these lists is necessary—if it should stay in a list at all! With the use of maps for the dialect quiz, it may be more worthwhile to display the field sites page in such a manner as well.

Certain pages also contain links to outside content and blogs that are no longer current. We counted 4 such links hidden among the pages of the website. These should be eliminated and/or replaced with existing current content.

There is also one link to a blog that was begun by a third organization, a student group called the “Diversity Ambassadors,” and is no longer updated. There is usable content on this website but the site itself is dead. It should be deleted and the content merged onto the LLP website itself.
5 Recommendations for Design

Given that visual design aids in accessibility of information and reader retention, we will detail recommendations for design in the subsequent section. The major points to be discussed are overall aesthetics, rhetorical structure, and navigational ease.

5.1 Re-Structure the Site

Our primary recommendation is that the site be restructured to better fit the LLP's decided rhetorical goals. The purpose of the website was decided to be evidence of a successful program, with an intended audience of professors, academics, and potential/current students. With this in mind, we believe that re-designing the overall structure is the single most effective thing that the LLP can do to better communicate the “evidence” it has. We propose the following structure, laid out in how it may appear in a future drop-down menu:

ABOUT THE LLP
  *History
  *Mission Statement
  *The Importance of Diversity
  *People

RESEARCH
  What is sociolinguistics?
  Fieldwork FAQ
  Research Sites
  *CV

EDUCATION
  *Talks and Lectures
  *Diversity Ambassadors

OUTREACH
  Media Production
  Online Activism
  Public Outreach

RESOURCES
  *Get involved
  *External resources
  *Resources for Students
  *Resources for Ambassadors
  *Resources for Teachers

STORE
We believe that this new structure serves several purposes that are not addressed in the current version. First, and expanded “ABOUT” section will give the project an opportunity to fully clarify the central question of who we are in the context of the University. Having a mission statement will also serve not only the audience, but the organization itself, as it continues to grow. A brief biography of the LLP staff and research team may also lend some personality to the page, and make us more easily contactable.

Second, landing pages for RESEARCH, EDUCATION and OUTREACH successfully organize the question, “what have we done?,” which is the second rhetorical goal of the internal website. The current “Outreach” section has been greatly expanded in this proposition, with content being organized by context and type to give the user a more intuitive exploratory experience. The RESEARCH section also consolidates related content that was not hierarchically organized on the previous site (“About fieldwork” and “field sites”). Additionally, we propose the creation of a compiled Curriculum Vitae, which is currently not available anywhere. We believe this feature will be of interest to academics exploring our project.

5.1.1 Add Resources for Current Students

One proposed addition to this page will be a “RESOURCES” section, which is designed to be a place to put back-end content that may need to be accessed by students and educators. Examples of this type of content would be curriculum designs, worksheets, reading companions, webinars, schedules/calendars, and the like. This suggestion is modeled off the NC State English Department’s page, which is directed mainly at potential students but has a delineated section titled “Information for Current Students: Policies, Resources, Forms.” We chose subheadings for different involved audiences because they have such disparate needs. Having this feature on the site will make the site useful not just as a recruitment tool and archive, but as a practical central location for members to communicate.

5.2.2 Consolidate Satellite Sites

This redesign is also meant to consolidate the LLP content that is being hosted off-site into a single central location. The dialect diversity information and Educating the Educated information, for example, will be moved to “The Importance of Diversity” and “Diversity Ambassadors,” respectively. Additionally, the outdated external sites TalkingNC.com and howl.wordpress.ncsu.edu, both of which are abandoned, can be mined for content which can be added to the OUTREACH and EDUCATION sections. We suggest that these two sites be deleted once the redesign is complete to avoid confusion.
5.2 Align Visual Design with University Standards

Our suggestion for visual design is simply that the LLP begin to utilize NC State’s official web design resources. We suggest this mostly because it has been mandated by the university. However, there are other advantages as well. The wordpress design that the NC State branding team has created solves many of the aesthetic problems discussed in section 3.1, including problems with white space, text-to-picture ratios, and font size/amount. Instead of describing this potential new design, we recommend you explore the following demo page set up by NC State: https://web.ncsu.edu/ncstate-theme-demo/

We suggest that the aesthetic standards held up by this new web design be adhered to in other content as well. For example, the “Do You Speak NC?” Dialect quiz is currently on a page with a white background with no border or texture. We suggest that we find a way to embed such content in the current site, or else update that content to be more visually appealing.

5.2 Restructure Method(s) of Navigation

In response to what we perceived to be a flaw in navigability, we strongly suggest that the majority of content be available through the drop-down menu provided by NC State’s web template. Information that is not available there should be obviously coded as links and should be standing apart from non-hyperlinked text as much as possible. If this is also not possible, then we recommend that the hyperlink certainly include a concrete description of the link.

Additionally, if linking to an external site (like a review, or our store), hyperlinks should open in new tabs so that users aren’t taken off-site unless they want to be.
6 Recommendations for Content

As a result of our investigation into the existing practices manifesting in the LLP internal page, we also have recommendations regarding content. As mentioned towards the beginning of this content audit, all changes made should keep our overarching recommendation of “consistency” in mind.

6.1 Create a Style Guide

Given the overarching message of improving consistency, we recommend that the LLP create a style guide. The purpose of such a publication would be to aid in the future. Additionally, as a page to be hosted by N.C. State University, the communication of the organization’s content should be consistent with the style of the University. To this end, we advise the LLP to seek out guidelines from the University for additional resources to boost the style guide.

6.2 Delete Content Not Directly Related to Rhetorical Goal

After considering the differentiation of the LLP’s audience and the subsequent separation of content based on those differing audiences, we advise that the LLP remove or reframe all content not directly related to the internal page’s target audience and rhetorical goal.

To the end, we advise that the LLP take a critical eye to the content it includes in comparison to their goals and the expectations of their more academic/professional audience. One such example is to move the Dialect Quiz, which is currently given prominence on the site despite its appeal to more of a public or consumer audience, to either an external site or as part of a list of materials produced for the outreach conducted at the N.C. State Fair. If the LLP decides it would like to keep the Dialect Quiz on the internal page, it must be reframed to fall in line with the LLP’s academic and professional audience. Rather than being a product that relies on its “fun” nature, the reframing should instead focus on the effect such a publication has on the LLP’s outreach endeavors, where their outreach endeavors are explicitly linked to their academic/professional goals.

6.3 Balance Content Type Ratios

Following a critical curation of the messages to be included on the internal page, we recommend the LLP consider the medium of their content. Presently, the LLP internal page consists almost entirely of text. Pages that do include more than text generally include just a few pictures, which generally appear to be more akin to decoration than to boosting content. Given the LLP’s significant
multi-media focus, it would benefit the organization to reflect this in their web presence—including on their internal page. The simplest way to begin this shift is to bring the text to image ratio closer to 50-50 (where currently it sits somewhere around 85-15). Any pictures included should add to the audience’s understanding of the content displayed on the individual page, with guides to aid in the understanding of how any pictures are related to the text included. A simple way to do this is to offer captions to all photos. Additionally, given that the LLP has received critical acclaim for its documentaries, this should be reflected in a way that both displ

6.4 Be Consistent in Multilingual Offerings

One of the features of the home page for the LLP internal site is that visitors have the option to read the content of the home page in Spanish by clicking on a link offering the exact same site in translation. While this is a useful resource, rhetorically it is problematic. It is not stretching to assume that visitors who choose to view the home page in Spanish may also wish to view other pages on the LLP site in Spanish. To that end, it strikes an odd accord to only offer one page in translation. Our recommendation is for the LLP to either recruit someone who can create the content of each of its other pages in Spanish, or to remove the offering entirely so as to not lead visitors to exceedingly high expectations. Additionally, one of the first links on the homepage is a link to the work of Jim Michowitz. While very interesting content that is likely to be interesting to those who are interested in the content provided by the LLP, this page is not hosted by the LLP. As a result, the placement of this link is navigating visitors away from the site just as they are arriving. We recommend that the LLP move this page to a list of external links if it is absolutely necessary, or to remove it entirely.
7 Recommendations for Workflow

The initial re-design of the internal website will need to take place alongside the upcoming redesign of the English department and the Linguistics department. The LLP is already in contact with Melissa Jackson, head of English department web management, to schedule this. This redesign will be headed by intern Karen Eisenhauer in the spring and summer of 2016.

To ensure that prolonged lapses in content management does not continue to occur, we recommend that the NCLLP work with current students in N.C. State’s linguistics program. These students are responsible for maintaining the lab that is shared with the NCLLP. Some lab workers are underutilized - they have tasks which cannot fill 3 hours of time a week. It would therefore be possible and even beneficial to add a lab task assigned to an individual or pair each academic year (or semester, if needed) to periodically keep the website content updated.

To ensure that such a system does not break down over time, we recommend creating a guide to assist those who have been assigned this task, rather than relying on those who have been assigned to train the next person to take the task. The guide should include the following: This guide should include information about how to manage the content, when to manage it, a tech guide, and a style guide to keep the site aligned with the expectations of sites affiliated with N.C. State University.