Protean: The Graduate Liberal Studies Magazine at Duke University
(Prototype)

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Art, art History, and Visual Studies

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Abstract

This analytical essay describes the creation of a prototype online magazine, titled *Protean*, for a Graduate Liberal Studies (GLS) program like the one at Duke University. Industry level production standards were implemented in the creation of *Protean’s* beta or prototype website. The primary steps included: discovery, development, design, and implementation. These four steps were divided into two separate phases. Phase one began with discovery; this involved establishing a target audience for the magazine and developing a needs assessment survey that queried the needs of the target audience. This survey served to help make decisions regarding content and design choices for the magazine. Phase two encompassed the development, design, and implementation steps that incorporated the data gathered from: the needs assessment survey, secondary research on best web design practices, and feedback solicited from the client during a formal product pitch meeting. For this project, the GLS program at Duke University represents the client entity. The culmination of these two phases resulted in: extensive preliminary work, detailed in this essay, a beta website of the prototype magazine, plans for a student and alumni-based editorial board, and a sustainability plan for this publication.
Introduction

I have developed the prototype for a digital Graduate Liberal Studies magazine, using the Graduate Liberal Studies (GLS) program at Duke University as a case study example. The magazine is titled, *Protean,*—which means versatile—to encompass the interdisciplinary spirit of the GLS program, its students and alumni. I drew inspiration from the previous GLS magazine, *Transformations,* and the current GLS website while naming the magazine. The purpose of *Protean* is to create a sustained online magazine for GLS— maintained by GLS alumni and students—that showcases the creative and academic works of the program’s current students, alumni, and faculty; highlights select individuals in detailed profiles; engages the GLS alumni community.

The creation process underwent two phases: the first was a discovery phase that began by defining the target audience. The next step of phase one was to create and disseminate a survey through the Qualtrics Survey System to query the target audience and help define design and content choices for the magazine. The second phase of the project—design and development—was implementation of the UI/UX best design practices to create *Protean’s* beta site. Based on content interests identified by the target audience, I have selected the main sections for the magazine— Homepage, Alumni Corner, Writings, Art, Informal Contests, See What’s New—and defined the site architecture.1

In two separate sections below, I have written: a detailed data report, documenting the data garnered from the survey coupled with my commentary as well as a design best practices

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1The site architecture refers to the organization of the website and how its sections connect and relate to each other.
section that defines common web design terms and includes documentation of the design and content choices I have applied to *Protean*.

**Data Report for Protean**

(Refer to Appendix One for a Comprehensive List of Survey/Discovery Questions and Graphic Representation of the Results)

Phase one of this project implemented an initial discovery process, conducted through the Duke University Qualtrics Survey System. The primary goal of the discovery phase was to gauge interest in a Duke University Graduate Liberal Studies (GLS) magazine and the willingness of students and alumni to submit work to help develop the content of the magazine. The survey, both qualitative and quantitative, was sent to both current GLS students and alumni; it was completed by 131 respondents. In a limited capacity, the nine-question survey could also serve as a needs assessment for the current GLS website as well as the proposed magazine. Based on the results of survey, the respondents were enthusiastic about the prospect of reading and contributing to the magazine I have proposed, illustrating a need for a mechanism to engage alumni with GLS-centric material information relevant to them.

The following figure visually represents the data supporting my original supposition of alumni and student interest in reading and submitting content to the magazine. 88% of survey respondents were interested in the prospect of a Duke GLS magazine, and 72% were willing to submit varied content to the magazine.

The secondary goal of the discovery process was to help inform design and content choices for the magazine. The results of the survey showed that GLS alumni are indeed looking for a venue with information that is of interest to them. Specifically, the results illustrated that most respondents visit the GLS website infrequently, searching primarily for course information or
information about impending deadlines. The GLS website naturally caters to prospective and currently enrolled students, so there is a niche for another mechanism to engage alumni and potentially the larger graduate liberal studies community.²

Questions one and two of the survey gauged the use of the current GLS website, so that I could determine the priorities of the magazine. I believe that course information and recurring programmatic news and deadlines should largely remain under the purview of the GLS website because Protean will primarily operate under the traditional magazine issue format and therefore will not be updated as frequently as the GLS website. Current students may need more real-time news concerning impending deadlines for course registration, graduation etc. Such frequent updates will be better served on the current GLS website. Nonetheless, with the use of RSS³ feeds there is an option for the magazine to include a small section on Protean’s homepage dedicated to updates from the GLS website. However, isolated special events—for example, a book signing or reading by an alum or GLS faculty member—are items I chose to highlight more predominantly in the magazine. In addition to news and events, 24% of respondents visit the GLS site searching for past and current student work; I found that to be encouraging because showcasing exemplary work by students and alumni is a primary goal of the magazine. Below is a graphic representation of the data from question two and a chart with my commentary on each of the selection choices for this question.

² Refer to appendix two for statistical information about the GLS website user trends and use frequency.
³ RSS feeds deliver notification of frequently changing content on different websites.
Question 2: Why do you visit? What type of information do you look for on the Duke GLS website?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Answer Selections</strong></th>
<th><strong>My Commentary</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course information</td>
<td>This I feel should remain largely under the purview of the GLS website aside from possibly “highlighted courses” segments which will be important to maintain the interest of current students as well as alumni.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upcoming events and deadlines</td>
<td>This will be useful in highlighting exciting “special events” such as alumni or faculty book signings in the area, nearby poetry readings, talks, or alumni gatherings etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alumni activities</td>
<td>This could be featured in the alumni news section of Protean’s magazine site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programmatic news</td>
<td>This I believe, should remain on the GLS website because the magazine will not be updated as frequently as the GLS website and current students may need more real-time news concerning impending deadlines for course registration, graduation etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past and current student work</td>
<td>Highlighting articles and snippets of current student and alumni academic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Using the data from questions six and eight of the discovery survey, I developed the site architecture for the magazine. I wanted to have stable sections within the magazine possibly with thematic issue topics that would be issued quarterly or twice a year while still maintaining the interdisciplinary spirit of the GLS program. Derived from the data, the sections of the magazine will include: an Alumni Corner to centralize alumni writing, art and news; a Writings section that lists all of the written posts published in the magazine by alumni, students, or otherwise; an Art section that will do the same; an Informal Contests section that will include quizzes and contests devised by the editorial board for readers; a Homepage; and a “See What’s New” section. These

4 Question 6: What would you like to see in the magazine?
5 Question 8: If yes, what sort of content are you willing to submit?
sections were chosen based on the interests of the target audience, taking into account the sort of information they would look for in the magazine as well as the types of content they are willing to submit to the magazine. The “See What’s New” section was selected later on in the development process after noticing tension between the traditional issue model for magazines and more timely posting available on digital formats. To reconcile the two modes of publication, I have created the “See What’s New” section to allow for intermittent publication of articles outside of the established issue publication timeline.

As mentioned earlier, some of the choices selected by survey respondents were featured in Protean’s prototype more prominently than others. For instance, many respondents were interested in recurring programmatic news such as course information and faculty profiles. I believe that an exhaustive list of information about program courses should remain on the GLS website because it will likely be updated more frequently than Protean. However, if there is a new and exciting course that should be highlighted, we can write an article to highlight that course, particularly if it is a course that is associated with topics that are garnering a lot of interest in the larger Duke University or Graduate Liberal Studies context. Faculty profiles can accompany the articles written to highlight specific GLS faculty and their work; however, if there are detailed, current profiles maintained elsewhere it would be prudent to include a link to that information as opposed to writing an entirely new profile. Below is a graphic representation of the results and a summary of my comments on the over-arching content interests (question six) and submission interests (question eight) listed in the survey.
Question 6: What would you like to see in the magazine?

Content Interests for Online Magazine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Selections</th>
<th>Inclusion in the Magazine: Y/N/Possibly?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current student work</td>
<td>Yes, taking into consideration by Protean’s editorial board and the thematic selection for the magazine issue, submitted current work for the magazine will be included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alumni work</td>
<td>Yes, I want to include an “alumni corner” (working title only) that will include alumni written work and artwork as well as alumni news.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upcoming events</td>
<td>Highlighted events would be of interest to readers. 76% of respondents chose this category. I do not think that an all-inclusive list of programmatic events and deadlines is necessary for the magazine, but hyperlinks to where readers can locate more information as well as RSS feeds to the GLS website will be tenable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty profiles</td>
<td>Yes, articles highlighting faculty work that fits the theme can include a faculty profile. However, I believe it would be most efficient if hyperlinks to detailed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
faculty profiles maintained elsewhere were included in the article as opposed to writing new profiles.

Program courses
An exhaustive list of information about program courses should remain under the purview of the GLS website because it will likely be updated more frequently than Protean.

Other
See below.

Notable entries to the ‘other’ selection and my commentary:

- Informal contests, i.e. topical haikus, trivia questions, response challenges, new word speculations, “on this day” image contests, etc.: Initially, I was inspired by the New Yorker’s caption contest to include something similar in my magazine, and I think it would be worthwhile to include something similar to the respondent’s suggestions.

- Digests from other GLS program magazines and work from the academic GLS community at large: Linking to other magazines and student work would be a useful feature of the magazine, but at this time I have chosen to focus on generating our own content for this magazine as a first-tier priority for the first issue. Devising a way to include other programs’ magazine content (via RSS feeds or another mechanism) is a second-tier priority. This is primarily because including this feature will necessitate thoughtful consideration of what kinds of content that would generate and how often would we update this feature as well as how it would be curated.
Question 8: If yes, what sort of content are you willing to submit?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER SELECTIONS</th>
<th>MY COMMENTARY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic work</td>
<td>This content was the most popular at 47%, so I do want to include some articles about academic work being conducted by students and alumni selected based on the content section guidance and issue theme. Ideally this work would be highlighted within a written article about the author/student and the larger context the work is in conversation with or in reaction to as opposed to inserting the academic essay, etc. wholesale into the magazine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>I created an “Alumni corner” segment to house articles about on-going/completed alumni work (fiction, poetry, art, photography etc.) along with alumni news. This section can include non-fiction narrative writing, creative non-fiction, and memoir.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short films/videos</td>
<td>Based on these responses, videos/short films were not of great interest to the target audience. However, I think that Protean should have the capability to expertly handle video and audio submissions for the future. Therefore, the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The theme I have selected is formatted to handle large video and audio data files. As the need arises in the future, the editorial board can dedicate more time to decisions concerning format, streaming speed and server space.

Other entries to the ‘other selection’:

- Short think/opinion pieces and possibly digital illustrations
- Announcements about special arts events
- Public policy and social critique
- Alumni news: This could be a very powerful feature to draw readers. I have in mind short, eye-catching blurbs written by alumni themselves. It could be an avenue for alumni to indirectly connect with classmates, including: marriage announcements, new children, work/research they’re conducting etc. To achieve this, I have incorporated a submission form or another online tool accessible to readers/users. Curation, however might be a challenge to consider. To avoid inappropriate posting of advertisements and other unsolicited content here it will not be possible to post directly to the magazine’s website without administrative permissions. I have created two email addresses for the magazine to receive the alumni new content for as well as content submissions to the magazine.

As I integrated this data and moved into phase two—content selection, design, and drafting of the magazine’s sustainability plan—I have decided that content should be selected and

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6 Content submissions email address: protean.submissions@gmail.com
Alumni news and general questions or comments email address: protean.magazine.duke@gmail.com
solicited based on the theme of the current issue. To this end, I propose an editorial board to help with editorial and thematic decisions. Ideally, this editorial board will consist of current GLS students and alumni. Because our program has alumni spread far and wide across the United States and abroad, the digital format of the magazine will accommodate remote editors. Moreover, I have selected a content management system to host the magazine which will make editing and publishing content much simpler and faster for those inexperienced with coding. Guidance for submitted content would then be refined and implemented by the editorial board, GLS advisory board, and editor-in-chief.

Design Aesthetics Best Practices

Phase one of the magazine planning and production was a discovery phase during which I sent a needs assessment survey to the target audience—Duke Graduate Liberal Studies (GLS) alumni and students. This survey—distributed via Qualtrics Survey Software—included both quantitative and qualitative questions intended to help inform both design and content choices for the proposed magazine. This best practices segment will expound upon the results of the survey most relevant to the magazine aesthetic and information design. The responses to questions three and four were the most useful for developing the magazine design. I reviewed the websites listed by the respondents and, based on my observations and the written responses in the survey, most users would like a design with:

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7 There is tension between a traditional ‘magazine issues’ model versus ongoing publishing of content. By creating a “See What’s New” section of the magazine, I have devised a plan to create a balance between the traditional model and more timely publication of content possible on a digital platform.

8 Guidance used for the beta site can currently be found in appendix four to be edited and agreed upon by the editorial board at a later date.

9 Question 3: Please list below one or more websites you enjoy or find particularly functional or useful and why?

10 Question 4: Briefly, list one or more websites you dislike and why you dislike it.
• Intuitive site navigation: many mentioned “functionality,” which I take to mean intuitive site navigation.

• Visual balance on a webpage between images and text.

• Search-ability across the site, accessible archives, and a responsive design—meaning that the website is optimized for use across devices such as smart phones, tablets, laptops etc.

Throughout this section, I will clarify the meaning of an intuitive or functional web design, breaking down the characteristics of such a website, explain my ideas for the magazine design, and provide examples of poor and excellent design choices.

To aid in the identification of poor and excellent website designs, I reviewed comments from the survey respondents. In response to question four that inquired which websites respondents most disliked and why, most individuals cited page clutter and distractions as the primary reason why they disliked a particular website. Accordingly, I suggest clean, intuitive, and simple site design to avoid this problem, but what exactly does that entail? Daniel Ritzenthaler comments, “In some cases designs actually need more of something to become simple…So a better definition of simple is ‘just enough for comprehension and the ability to pursue and complete our goals’” (Ritzenthaler, paragraph 3). I concur. In my experience some web editors often assign arbitrary restrictions on content creators. For instance: that sentences be no more than fifteen words long, or paragraphs only three sentences long. Certainly, such directives have their uses and in some cases are appropriate, especially given that many internet users often skim text as opposed to close reading. However, brevity at the cost of relevant and useful content is a disservice to the target audience.

According to Ritzenthaler, a website that can be considered simple yet effective and intuitive, has a “core idea,” incorporated in such a way that it is easily accessible and understood
by users (paragraph 5). While this does not equate to limited content, this principle advocates for effective content that both drives and elucidates the mission of the site as opposed to overwhelming it in superfluous design elements and inappropriate details. For example, consider the *New York Times* (NYT) website ([www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)).

The pages contained within this website have content of interest to many different groups including but not limited to those seeking world news, entertainment news, movie and show reviews and much more. Due to the large and diverse target audience for the NYT website, it has a massive amount of content, but how the stories and articles are displayed on the page is distracting because, while one is reading an article, there are previews of other articles on both sides of that article that draw one’s eye away. Moreover, the black and white color scheme\(^1\) does not lend itself to giving the main content of any given page more weight than the periphery

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1. This is likely due to the NYT aesthetic, stemming from its origins as a newspaper.
content. In other words, the site does not take advantage of best practices of visual weight. *Smashing Magazine* defines visual weight as “a measure of the force that an element exerts to attract the eye” (Bradley, paragraph 3). Plainly, this refers the effective use of size and spacing of content elements on a webpage to guide users to the most important content to minimize distractions.

The solution to the issue of distractions begins with *clearly defined information architecture*. Information architecture is, “…the process by which you break your websites’ content into chunks and then organize those…hierarchically in relation to another in a way that’s logical” (Watrall and Siarto, 7). The relationship between the content organized within the information architecture across the entirety of the website informs the site navigation. Therefore, an efficient site navigation system depends on a well-defined information architecture that details how the content or elements of the page relate to each other. In the design for the magazine, I have included a navigation bar on the main pages to facilitate navigation and connect the separate sections of the website with no more than seven major sections across the navigation bar. The navigation bar features a dropdown menu to indicate a hierarchy to the content and to accommodate growth of the website. I drew inspiration from NPR’s website. It has an organized navigation bar that helps guide users to different information contained within the site while still providing avenues to other information on the website. On the smaller spoke pages that may not have a navigation bar, the *Protean* site features breadcrumbs and “back to the top” links to guide the user back to the main content.

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12 Spoke pages typically refer to content related to but peripheral to the main content pages. A majority of the website’s page’s will have the navigation bar at the top, but as the content drills down into spoke pages this may be replaced by breadcrumbs leading back to the main content.

13 Breadcrumbs are hyperlinks that are normally located at the very top of a webpage that lead a website user back to the previous pages.
Websites with poorly outlined visual hierarchy makes it difficult for the reader to locate the most important content on the page. According to Joshua Porter, professional digital interface designer:

> Visual hierarchy suggests there is a proper way to view content visually: in a hierarchical way... The most important content is at the top of the hierarchy. It’s the visual element you look at first, which then directs you to what to look at next. (Visual Hierarchy, paragraph 4)

For the design of the magazine’s website, the main content is in the center of the page with secondary content relegated to smaller sections on the sides or below the main content. I have taken advantage of empty space to help define separate sections within the visual hierarchy. Blank space as well as purposeful use of color, size, and the shape of elements on a webpage reinforces the visual hierarchy of the page. This is called visual weight. Visual weight also refers

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14 See appendix three to view wireframes for Protean’s website for visual representations of the visual hierarchy.
to positioning and contrasting sizes on a page: “By adding visual weight to elements that are of primary importance and reducing the visual weight on elements of less importance, you help guide the user to the most important content and strengthen the overall design of the page or screen” (Brewer, paragraph 1). Note how the Paper Darts online magazine screen cap below makes efficiently makes use of white space to denote separate sections on the page.

Screen capture of the Paper Darts online magazine homepage: February 2015

Ultimately, to best address the needs of the magazine’s target audience and my preferences, I propose a simple design without being too minimalist. I have selected colors for the magazine using an analogous color scheme with red as the primary link color. The analogous color scheme is a common and popular color scheme often used for websites. This

15 An analogous color scheme is a color scheme that makes use of three colors that are side-by-side (and therefore analogous to each other) on the color wheel. For an example, refer to the images below.
type of color scheme uses three side-by-side colors from the color wheel (Tiger Color: Color Harmonies).\textsuperscript{16}

Screen captures of an analogous color scheme taken from the Tiger Color webpage: Color Harmonies

Additionally, each content page has been designed to accommodate the content displayed there. In lieu of a one-size fits all approach to design that tailors the content to fit then design, \textit{Protean’s} content will be enhanced by design choices that complement the work.\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{Protean} also has a responsive design to suit the needs of readers who use several different devices to access content online. Responsive design optimizes a website for all screen sizes, enhancing the user experience by utilizing a design that adapts and translates the site’s content in such a way that the site layout and integrity (by which I mean the design principles selected by the creator) are largely maintained. By incorporating a responsive design principle, \textit{Protean} will be more accessible across devices (laptop, desktop, smartphones, and tablets), increasing the likelihood that readers will visit the website and share the articles.

\textsuperscript{16} As this product will represent the Duke University Graduate Liberal Study (GLS) program, I have reviewed the Duke Web Guidance when considering color scheme and logo choices.

\textsuperscript{17} See attached wireframes document in appendix three.
To clarify further, when I mention different devices, I am referring specifically to differences in screen size. Ultimately, despite how large or small the screen, is an interface with responsive design will optimize the published content so that it is easily viewed by users. Adhering to this principle, I made sure to use a content management system (CMS) that supported themes with responsive designs.

A CMS allows for publishing and maintaining content online from a central location, often with a “what-you-see-is-what-you get” (WYSIWYG) interface. This interface is akin to a veneer that automatically generates the styling and formatting code in the background while the user inserts content which makes it simple for those without a coding background to maintain a website. I began by choosing between WordPress and Drupal platforms because both are popular open source platforms used at Duke and by the general public. Both have thousands of free and paid themes—pre-designed templates available in order to publish digital content—that are customizable for my aesthetic approach and the needs of the target audience. I chose WordPress for *Protean* because of its user-friendly interface and because the themes are more easily
customizable. Conversely understanding how the theming system works in Drupal was much more difficult.

By February 2014, over 74 million unique business and news websites were using the WordPress system (Ewer); the popularity of WordPress is a testament to the power and capability of this CMS. The versatility and resulting popularity of WordPress sites are likely due in part to the thousands of WordPress plugins that heighten the experience for both users and editors of WordPress powered websites. In February 2014, there were 29,000 WordPress plugins (Ewer); by March of 2015 that number has grown to 36,865 and is growing daily, making the possibility for further extensions and evolutions of websites limitless. In regards to Protean, I have selected plugins that will aid readers and editors in:

- Automatically integrating the current GLS website with Protean as much as desired through Rich Site Summary (RSS) feeds;
- Formatting content without requiring extensive coding experience;
- Integrating social media such as Facebook and Twitter notifications;

Ultimately, I found WordPress more user-friendly for those without a programming background. This will make Protean more sustainable over time because it will not require advanced technical skills of future editors and contributors. Furthermore, the more easily customizable system will lend itself to future evolutions of the magazine over time.

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18Content management system plugins add features to websites that weren’t included in the original codebase, expanding the functionality of the site. With over 36,000 plugins and over 10,000 themes, there are multiple possibilities for originality and customization of Protean’s website.

19RSS feeds deliver notifications of frequently changing content.

20It will be advantageous to take advantage of social media to publicize the magazine and boost readership. For example, we could post notification when new issues of the magazine are available and when featured articles, profiles etc. are published.
Development of *Protean’s* information architecture is only the first step into the production of a vibrant, compelling online publication. The second step is to take measures to ensure the longevity or sustainability of the magazine. Efforts must be made to make the production of new issues and timely articles efficient and straightforward, and therefore feasible for students and alumni near and far to maintain, issue after issue. To accomplish this, I have made design choices described at length above that will help *Protean* thrive and evolve in the future.

At the conception of this magazine, I envisioned a publication with the potential to be lasting with the flexibility to anticipate future evolutions of technology as well as the GLS program. To achieve this vision, I created a prototype that can be maintained and edited by authorized users from remote locations. Second, I chose a content management system to make it easier for those untrained in markup or coding languages to interface with the magazine and publish content. Coupled with useful plugins, WordPress will automate important features of the magazine, such as slideshows for online display of visual artwork or footnotes and auto-pagination for longer written works so that editors can focus on curating and soliciting work for the magazine. Furthermore, the Equise theme I selected and customized for *Protean* supports responsive design that will automatically anticipate future devices ensuring that *Protean’s* content is always accessible for users no matter what device they use.

Finally, I proposed the creation of an editorial board to divide future responsibilities and make content choices. This board should ideally consist of current students of the GLS program as well as alumni that will together pitch ideas for thematic issues, populate the “See What’s
New” section\textsuperscript{21} of the magazine, and curate the Alumni News section as well as work submitted by the GLS community at Duke. Implementing an editorial board will also provide a varied group of individuals with different backgrounds and disciplines, helping *Protean* embrace the interdisciplinary nature of the GLS program.

To summarize:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Design Pitfalls Derived from Primary Research and Survey Results:</th>
<th>Plan to Avoid Design Pitfalls:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distracting with either advertising or poor design choices: which seem to include anything from a distracting layout to overwhelming content.</td>
<td>Attention to visual hierarchy and weight will reinforce the visual framework which should if well-designed align and complement the structural, visual, and conceptual framework of the website. Focusing on maintaining consistency across these areas helped minimize distracting content that might detract from the user experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor content: good content can excuse many design and layout issues</td>
<td>Using the data cited in the data report, content for the magazine was selected based on the interest of the target audience (Duke GLS students, alumni, and faculty), provided that it aligns with the theme of the magazine and the interdisciplinary nature of the Duke GLS program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor site navigation not ‘searchable’</td>
<td>The website has a search bar for querying the entire website. Searching capabilities will be aided by generating good metadata\textsuperscript{22}. Additionally, close attention will be given to the information architecture which will ensure that information will be group in a logical manner and will linked across different</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{21} Because *Protean* will operate primarily under a bi-annual issue model, the “See What’s New” section of the magazine will feature more timely articles published in the magazine that are published before a new issue is issued in its entirely.

\textsuperscript{22} Metadata is information about a webpage or documented hosted on the internet. This could include title, author, a description of the content found on that page, keywords, etc. This information is not displayed on the webpage but can be accessed and searched by internet browsers and search engines to help users locate information.
pages through menus and breadcrumbs, so that individual pages do not lead to a dead end and subsequently poor navigation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not user friendly across devices</th>
<th>Depending on the platform, many web content management systems are formatted with “responsive design” capabilities which allows for optimal display across devices (i.e. Smart phone, tablet, laptop etc.). The <em>Equisite</em> theme selected for <em>Protean</em> has a responsive design.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auto-play sound and videos</td>
<td>Videos and audio files can and will be coded to begin only when prompted by the user.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>SUSTAINABILITY MEASURES:</strong></th>
<th><strong>CONCISE DESCRIPTION</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content Management System (CMS)</td>
<td>Using a CMS will help maintain the magazine in future because as the editorial board members change, this system will allow future editors and contributors to edit content with <em>Protean</em> without needing an extensive background in HTML, CSS, and PHP coding. Moreover, editing the website through a CSM will be faster than hand-coding to accommodate busy schedules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsive design</td>
<td>A built-in responsive design will allow for future evolutions of technology and hand-held devices, so that <em>Protean</em> will always be accessible to users.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial board</td>
<td>Creating an editorial board will divide the work amongst a group to decrease the burden on any one person. This will help to accommodate the busy schedules of volunteer GLS students and alumni. Implementing an editorial board will also provide a varied group of individuals with different backgrounds and disciplines, embracing the</td>
</tr>
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</table>
interdisciplinary nature of the GLS program.

Future of Protean

Detailed above are the results of the discovery, design, and development stages of online magazine creation. While these are important steps and noteworthy accomplishments, there are a few final requirements remaining to move into the final stage of magazine launch. To bring Protean to fruition, first and foremost, I must continue to solicit content for the magazine. The current beta site includes written pieces from GLS alums Linda Jacobsen, Anne Weston, and Stacy Torian, but I would like to include more work before launching the magazine. After sending out a call for submissions to those that indicated an interest in submitting work in the discovery survey a number of individuals responded with interest. However, many noted that they did not currently have time to submit their work. I believe that the summer would be an opportune time to resend the call for submissions in preparation for a fall semester premier issue.

Secondly, during the summer, in concert with the call for submissions, I would like to also invite members of our GLS community to join the editorial board. I have in mind four or five volunteer staffers to help draft articles for the magazine, work with authors and artists to create profiles to accompany submitted work. I would like to convene with them virtually if they are not living in the Raleigh-Durham area or meet in person to begin brainstorming about the future thematic issues and perhaps drafting some of the first articles for the magazine.

Lastly, as we assign roles to the editorial board members and consider what work to include in Protean’s premier issue, the question of copyright should be addressed. Ultimately, Protean’s editorial staff along with GLS staff will need to define the legal rights of the contributors. Who maintains the copyright to their work and for how long? An avenue to
consider is Creative Commons Licensing. While Creative Commons (CC) is not a substitute for copyright, it does allow creators to give permission for the use of their work under their own conditions (Creative Commons). Because the discovery, design, and development steps for *Protean* have been completed, once the editorial board has been selected and copyright guidelines have been settled, we can begin soliciting content in earnest and inserting that material directly into the prototype I have created with minimal effort. I look forward the realization of *Protean*’s potential.

**Conclusion**

Selecting this type of creative project as a culminating project for the Graduate Liberal Studies program was an ambitious undertaking. Reflecting on my experience over the course of the project, I would like to reflect on the following questions: what does it mean to create a magazine for a graduate program in 2015? What challenges and opportunities did it present? And why attempt such a project for a master’s thesis, what literacies did it afford?

As time progresses, it is a fact that those with access to the internet are using it to digitally acquire knowledge more and are doing so with increasing rapidity: “Hundreds of millions of people are, each minute, creating and consuming an untold amount of digital content in an online world…” (Schmidt and Cohen, 3). For graduate level programs it is important to have an online presence in this digital age where current and potential students can access information quickly and easily. Therefore, I felt that in 2015, it was important to help maximize the program’s online potential by creating this magazine on a digital platform, which lends itself to better accommodating a widespread target audience and readership. Furthermore, due to my vision of a student and alumni-edited publication, I needed a platform that was accessible for long-distance
collaboration, and most importantly affordable for a program like GLS. All of these requirements, strongly supported a digital format for *Protean*.

There were several considerations when creating a digital publication. For example, print magazines operate on an issue-based model where a new issue of the magazine is released to the public at regular intervals: weekly, monthly, etc. Digital formats provide the opportunity for timelier publication of material; indeed, in this digital age of social media and worldwide public access to archives, an ever increasing pace of novel, published material is desired and in some ways demanded by online users who have grown accustomed to a constant influx of information. To address this issue, I chose to maintain the integrity of an issue-based format for production of *Protean* while allowing for a segment of the magazine to house breaking news articles that may lose significance if held until the release of a twice-yearly magazine issue. Publishing on a digital format is particularly adept in allowing for this manner of format integration. Another consideration unique to digital publication was how to make it simple for those without a coding background to edit the magazine. This was no minor task as selecting a theme suitable for Protean that was neither complicated nor oversimplified took a lot of concerted thought. The selection process resulted in several iterations of the magazine as the WordPress theme changed to increase the versatility of the magazine’s site layout and better reflect the envisioned product for GLS.

Applying the GLS program as the client for which I created the prototype *Protean* allowed me use the program as a case study for creating an online publication for any other organization or program like GLS. This presented unique possibilities and constraints in equal measures, particularly, striking a balance between my own creative aesthetics and the needs of
the client. Unique to this project, its completion involved the considerations of a client entity that also included members of my thesis examination committee. This required, prior to the start of phase one, clearly defined boundaries and expectations than might not have been required in different circumstances. Protean’s prototype involved professional level web creation that transcended web design to include: discovery, development, design, and implementation, all of which imparted practical skills such as defining a target audience, pitching a developed product, and navigating potential conflicts of interest in a professional setting.

In summation, I chose to undertake a creative project for my master’s thesis because of the practical knowledge and application it could afford me. I wanted to challenge myself in my pursuits and apply the knowledge, firsthand, that I had gained from two years’ worth of coursework in the GLS program. Developing Protean allowed me to evaluate, adopt, and apply industry level web creation standards which gave me a deep understanding of professional-grade production and expectations. Prior to beginning this project, I had an abstract understanding of how something of this magnitude could be accomplished and a limited comprehension of how ambitious an undertaking, creating a magazine, truly is. Building the prototype Protean gave me the opportunity to experience all levels of production, which began by defining a target audience that aligned with the client’s goals. I then queried that audience for data to create a product that adequately suited their needs as well as the requirements of the client, and my own aesthetic design. This process took place during the initial discovery phase and gave me the opportunity to set parameters for myself and the magazine, and subsequently challenged me to adhere to those guidelines while still maximizing the potential of the publication.
Furthermore, creating the prototype for *Protean* forced me to adopt several roles: editor-in-chief—selecting the content for the magazine—design manager—developing a design to complement the GLS interdisciplinary ethos—and liaison between the content and design creation teams and the client. Embracing these different roles provided me the opportunity to develop my public speaking skills by formally pitching my ideas to GLS, and gain hands-on experience of creating a website using the WordPress content management system. This experience and the practical knowledge gained are invaluable to me.
Work Cited


Image Sources:

Analogous color scheme screen capture: <http://www.tigercolor.com/color-lab/color-theory/color-harmonies.htm>

NY Times homepage screen capture: www.nytimes.com/

NPR homepage navigation bar screen capture: <http://www.npr.org/>

Responsive design graphic screen capture: <http://www.creativesci.co/content/responsive-design>

Paper Darts homepage screen capture: <http://paperdarts.org/>
APPENDICES

Appendix 1:

Appendix one, includes a list of all questions in the discovery survey and graphic representations of the results if applicable. See below.

1. How often do you visit the GLS website?

![Frequency of Visits to the GLS Website](image)

2. Why do you visit? What type of information do you look for on the Duke GLS website?

![Information Searched for on Duke GLS website](image)

3. Please list below one or more websites you enjoy or find particularly functional or useful and why?

4. Briefly, list one or more websites you dislike and why you dislike it.

5. Would you be interested in an online multimedia magazine for Duke’s GLS program?
6. What would you like to see in the magazine? Check all that apply.

7. Are you willing to submit work for the magazine?
8. If yes, what sort of content are you willing to submit?

9. Can I contact you to follow up on your responses to this survey and/or for submission of your work for the magazine?
Appendix 2:

This is an appendix of information/data garnered from the survey responses that may be of use to GLS staff while considering updating the GLS website.

**How often do you visit the GLS website?**

Majority of the respondents who answered the “If seldom or never, why not” listed these reasons: (43% answered this question).

- No reason/no need
- There is nothing of interest on the website (particularly for those who have graduated from the program)
- Static content/unaware of updates (particularly for alumni, closely related to the second reason)

![Frequency of Visits to the GLS Website](chart.png)

**Why do you visit [the GLS website]? What type of information do you look for on the Duke GLS website?**

Majority of the respondents to this question visit the GLS website to look up course information:
Miscellaneous:

In response to question six, a number of respondents noted ‘networking opportunities’ as a topic of interest. Perhaps, the GLS staff might be interested and able to include information about networking opportunities on the GLS website?
Appendix 3

Below are the wireframes created for Protean’s beta website. They are visual representations of Protean’s site architecture.
Note: This space will be dedicated to introductory blurb of written articles and submitted work.

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Read more.
Alumni Corner (for alumni work and news only)

FEATURED ALUMNI PIECE

Hyperlink to the featured work or profile.

Alumni News Section

Fiction

Creative Non-Fiction

Poetry

Academic Essays & Research Papers

Alumni artwork

Cassio pluviaque quiique aurum
compos, rea arte tellus nulli nova.

Turba covetique locus terrae.
Effervescère quanto evoluit phoebe
perecit militis furt hoc hanc, hoc
pergrinum securo sine moro darit
unnil quod desvenerant aediles grandia
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nullam qua ore amantes indebita.

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Appendix 4:

Below is list of questions included with the call for submissions email sent to interested parties to solicit work for *Protean*.

When submitting work please take a little time to include the following:

1. Your name and contact information for follow-up.
2. Are you an alumni or current student?
3. What year did you graduate or when is your expected graduation date?
4. Brief description of the work you’re planning to submit to the magazine.
5. What was the motivation for this work?
6. When/why did you take an interest in this type of work?
7. What inspired this work?
8. Have you published or otherwise showcased other work? If so, where?
9. Did the GLS Program influence your work? If so, how?

The answers to these questions will aid in the development of a ‘creator’s profile’ that will accompany your work in the magazine.

**Please send all submissions to:** protean.submissions@gmail.com