



## Building a Personal Academic Website

Many scholars create personal websites to showcase their work, research, and contact information beyond institutional and departmental webpages and networking sites. Is creating a personal academic website right for you? If so, how should you approach it? We've put together best practices and spoken with political scientists who maintain their own websites to help you navigate the process.

### Why Create a Personal Academic Website?

#### *To control your online presence*

As Brian Croxall [wrote](#) at the Chronicle of Higher Education, "As much as it might sound funny to think of professors as needing to engage in brand management, the need to do so will only increase for the foreseeable future." Creating a personal website helps scholars proactively aggregate and display the information they want hiring committees, colleagues, and students to see first online.

#### *To supplement your job search or tenure application*

[Amy Cavender](#), associate professor of political science at Saint Mary's College and a longtime blogger at the Chronicle of Higher Education's [ProfHacker](#), initially launched her website as a simple blog. "I've been blogging on and off since 2005 but I probably started putting together a professional website more seriously as I approached submitting my tenure file," says Cavender. "Because of the sorts of work I do at ProfHacker and the types of things I'm interested in doing in teaching—making sure my students get practical skills as well as the academic content—I thought that an online portfolio in itself could be a good example of the kinds of things that I do."

[Jeremy Gelman](#), an assistant professor of political science at the University of Nevada, Reno, created his personal website before he entered the job market. Gelman says websites are a useful supplement for job candidates. In particular, he says that his website allowed him to provide a more detailed overview of his research for search committees. "It's nice to have your working papers or published papers all in one place. Then [search committees] can see the status of each project, read the abstract, and your description."

#### *To connect with the public, media, and other academics*

Cavender says the audience for her website post-tenure is fellow academics and anyone interested in teaching and technology. Gelman also plans to maintain his website throughout his career. "In terms of communicating outside of conferences and keeping each other updated within our little circles of expertise, I think [websites] are incredibly important," said Gelman. "When I'm thinking about writing on a certain topic, or I'm teaching it and I need to look up a paper or what the newest research is, I go to my colleagues' websites that I know who work on that issue and see what their latest working paper is on."

### Creating the Website

There are three building blocks of a website: the domain name, the host, and the content management system. The domain name, such as yourname.com, can be purchased through a variety of sites, called registrars. The host for your site provides you the space on a server to make your site accessible on the web. A content management system allows users to create, publish, and manage the content they put on their personal site. Some companies

bundle the three building blocks together so you pay for a domain name, host, and content management system all in the same place.

Free content management systems like [WordPress](#), [Google Sites](#), [Drupal](#), and [Joomla](#) make it possible for academics to build websites without knowing how to code. You can install free content management systems such as these even if you choose to pay for website hosting elsewhere. Wordpress and Google also offer free hosting options. Free hosts may place ads on your site and often include their company name in the domain name.

Many higher education institutions offer web hosting and content management capabilities for faculty, graduate students, and postdocs. Using a university content management system lends your webpage the credibility of your institution and is a natural home for students looking for your work and basic information, but may come with some restrictions on design and content. Some institutions also offer support for faculty interested in creating websites. Harvard University's Institute for Quantitative Social Science created and maintains [OpenScholar](#), software for building and customizing academic websites. The institution provides support for Harvard employees but also offers the software for free.

Hosting a site on an outside system may incur additional cost, but allows for customization and flexibility if your place of employment changes. Creating a website beyond the university site can work for technology beginners and experts. Cavender says she started with a simple WordPress blog. Eventually, she says, "I decided I wanted more explicit control over what I could and could not do in terms of functionality...it wasn't too steep of a learning curve to start paying for hosting myself and to run my own installation of WordPress, which is relatively user-friendly."

#### *What will it include?*

The content on a personal academic website will vary based on the owner's professional goals. All websites should include an updated CV, bio, and contact information. If you are interested in speaking with the media, it is helpful to include plain-English summaries of your research interests and any previous media clips. As Gelman notes, including organized lists of current research interests and links to working papers is helpful for fellow academics searching for teaching materials and opportunities for collaboration.

For scholars on the job market, website design can also signal to search committees a candidate's interests and approach to teaching. "There's usefulness in having a place to talk about teaching—how you want to teach, what you've taught, syllabi, and things of that nature," said Gelman. "It's a nice signal that teaching matters to you [and of] how much effort you put into it. The amount of prominence it has on your website, I think, speaks to your priorities as a candidate."

Professional academic websites can be a valuable tool for scholars at many stages in their careers. With an understanding of websites' uses and options, academics can choose the approach that best suits their needs, goals, and skill set.