

Streamlining Maintenance and Access to a University's Academic Catalog

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Abstract

Developing and maintaining an online version of a University's Academic Catalog has increasingly become a priority for enrollment management and IT staff. Many schools are now using the online version of their catalog as their primary working copy and are generating their print version periodically as needed. Managing and accessing this content can be cumbersome without a viable content management solution. Using Digital Architecture's Acalog™ ACMS (Academic Catalog Management System) solution, the process is streamlined for both the end user and the catalog administrators. Built from the ground up by academic professionals exclusively to meet catalog management needs, this product enables various people in the catalog editing and maintenance process to work together to accomplish their goals without a prerequisite of technical expertise. Additionally, prospective students and other web visitors have speedy and intuitive access to catalog data from both current and previous years. Since implementing Acalog™ ACMS at Philadelphia Biblical University, various individuals have been able to directly participate in the editing process to develop a cohesive, intuitive online catalog presence in an affordable manner.

Introduction/Background

Philadelphia Biblical University is an independent private Christian university in southeastern Pennsylvania. The University has a full-time equivalent student body of approximately 1,400 students at the graduate and undergraduate levels. In recent years with the growing trend towards remote/web access and digital format for most pertinent data, it has become necessary to explore options for making our official catalog data available accordingly. We first made our catalog data available by simply posting a digital copy of the print version using Adobe's .PDF format. With the obvious limitations of .pdf for editing, searching, hyper linking, etc. we desired a more web-friendly format. We then posted an html version of the print catalog, but it was essentially a sloppy html export from print publishing software, resulting in excessive clean-up and formatting work. Our ultimate desire was to make a paradigm shift from working primarily with a print copy (generating an online version as needed) to working primarily with an online version (generating a print version as needed). It was determined that some form of content management software to facilitate the ongoing management of the catalog would be necessary.

Considering the Options

To make the paradigm shift to working exclusively with an online catalog for ongoing maintenance, revisions, etc. and abandon the ages-old way of catalog management, we formulated a wish list of features that would need to be available in any sort of solution. These items included the following:

- A user-friendly interface for the web visitor who needs access to catalog data
- Intuitive and easy to use for administrative staff who publish and maintain catalog data
- Ability to archive previous versions of the catalog
- Ability to easily and cost-effectively generate print versions of the catalog to meet the reduced, but ongoing need for print copies
- Ability to have an ongoing editing process transparent to the end user
- Ability to have multiple levels of access and permissions
- A search function to access catalog data quickly and easily
- Compatibility with other areas of our web site, including the “look and feel”
- Cost-effective in both the short term and long term
- Ability to track changes made to catalog data
- Reduce the need for the print version and its associated costs (postage, printing, etc.)
- Streamline management with reduced dependence on IT for routine editing

Given this list of needs and wants, it was quite clear that a content management solution of some sort was in order. As we contemplated the options, we found that nearly all viable options were either full-fledged CM solutions designed for managing an entire web site or were scaled-down versions of such systems geared for smaller applications. Additionally, all were quite expensive, typically in the \$50-\$100K range for licensing alone. In the midst of our search we discovered Digital Architecture’s Acalog™ ACMS product (<http://www.acalog.com>), which was exceptionally well-suited to our goals in virtually every way. Acalog™ ACMS was originally designed from the ground up as an online academic catalog solution. It was developed *by academia for academia* and had no purpose other than to serve as a turn-key solution for schools looking to publish their catalog(s) online.

We made the decision to purchase Acalog™ ACMS based on its compatibility with our needs and wants, our impression of Digital Architecture as a company, the professionalism of their staff, and their affordability.

Requirements

Acalog™ ACMS runs as a hosted solution, resulting in essentially no in-house technical involvement from an IT perspective with regard to ongoing maintenance. Digital Architecture’s competent staff takes care of all upgrades and maintenance to both the software and hardware.

Using the software

Acalog™ ACMS has two primary components—the Publisher and the Gateway. The Publisher is the management interface (requiring authentication), and it is used to manage, edit, export, update, etc. all components of the catalog(s).

Acalog™ ACMS is currently home to both our Undergraduate and Graduate catalogs. The Publisher interface allows our staff to simultaneously work on existing catalogs as well as future catalogs. Currently existing catalogs can be copied over to serve as the groundwork for future years' catalogs. Catalogs are not live/accessible to users on the Gateway until they are enabled accordingly in the Publisher interface. Future catalogs can consequently be edited on an ongoing

acalog⁴™ — ACMS Logout

User Accounts

Institution Catalogs Programs & Cores Courses Version Auditing

Catalog Preview Export

Portfolio Config Portfolio Accounts

Welcome to *acalog⁴™ ACMS Site Administration*, HELP

Current Catalog: **Please begin by selecting a Catalog**

Select a Catalog:
[Catalogs that are "locked" may only be edited by Publishers.]

Select One:

- 2004-2005 Undergraduate Catalog (locked)
- 2004-2005 Graduate Catalog (locked)
- 2005-2006 Graduate Catalog (locked)
- 2005-2006 Undergraduate Catalog
- Sample Additional Catalog (locked)
- Training Catalog

Program: Modern Languages
Event Creation Date: 02/19/2004 09:55:39
Event Creator: Frederick Johansen
Event Comments: Some additional requirements have been in blue and removed text in red.

Modern Languages

General Requirements:

1. Demonstration of listening comprehension, oral, reading, **not received at least a "B" in FRE 205 or 206, GER 205 or take a test in language skills.**
2. Demonstration of comprehensive coverage of literature and of appropriate course work.

Special Requirements:

1. A minimum of 30 credits beyond the intermediate level, in Romance language and German.
2. A minimum of ~~10~~ **12** credits above the intermediate level and at least 18 credits must be in 400 series of courses, i

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Ver. 4.0 ©2004, digital architecture g

basis and published publicly only when editing is complete.

The catalogs published by Acalog™ ACMS are highly customizable and flexible in order to meet the specific goals and structure of a given college or university. Courses, colleges, schools, departments, programs, etc. can all be added, deleted and arranged accordingly in order to build the precise hierarchy for the institution within their Acalog™ ACMS database.

acalog™ — ACMS Site Administration for: Philadelphia Biblical University

Programs Shared Cores

User Accounts

Institution Catalogs

Programs & Cores

Courses

Version Auditing

Catalog Preview Export

Portfolio Config

Portfolio Accounts

List Programs

Current Catalog: 2005-2006 Undergraduate Catalog

List Programs Alphabetically By Program Name
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Select a Program to manage from the list below or **Create a New Program.**

FlashPoint™ Link Key: ★ Active, ★ Inactive, ★ None

Program Name	Status	FlashPoint™ Link	Link
Aerospace Studies (ROTC) [Preview]	Active	★	
All Levels, K-12: Bible Education [Preview]	Active	★	
B.Mus. in Church Music [Preview]	Active	★	
B.Mus. in Composition [Preview]	Active	★	
B.Mus. in Music Education [Preview]	Active	★	
B.Mus. in Performance [Preview]	Active	★	
Bachelor of Social Work [Preview]	Active	★	
Bible Enrichment [Preview]	Active	★	
Bible Ministries [Preview]	Active	★	
Bible Ministries and Youth Ministries [Preview]	Active	★	

Page: 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5

Find a Program

Enter Keyword or Phrase

By Program Title

By Program Description

By Program Code

Search

Within the Publisher interface there are several tools and features to streamline the editing process. These features include:

- Change Notification - Establish lines of approval for making changes to content, communicate with other editors from within the Publisher interface, and approve/reject changes
- Audit Snapshots - Compare changed versions versus previous versions
- Version Tracking - Track all changes to catalog content with detailed audit trails

When the need inevitably arises for a print version of the catalog (accreditation requirements, etc.), the Acalog™ ACMS software has provisions for generating an export file of the entire catalog, suitable for import into a pre-press software application. Additionally, Digital Architecture's staff offers optional pre-press services for handling the specific formatting and final layout of the print version.

The second major component of the Acalog™ ACMS system is the Gateway, which serves as the public user interface to the catalog data. The Gateway is designed using style sheets and templates to match the general look and feel of other areas of the university's web site. It consists primarily (80%) of dynamic data that is pulled from a database and managed primarily through the aforementioned Publisher interface.

When viewing the catalog in the Gateway interface, users can select different catalogs from a pull-down menu. Available options will be all catalogs that have been “published” and typically includes current and past versions of all catalogs that the University is currently managing in the Acalog™ ACMS system.

The screenshot shows the Philadelphia Biblical University Catalog website. At the top left is the university's logo, a red square with a white interlocking knot design. To the right of the logo, the text "PHILADELPHIA BIBLICAL UNIVERSITY" is displayed in a serif font, with "CATALOG" in a larger, bold serif font below it. A navigation bar contains links for "Home", "Admissions", "Academics", "General Info", "Contact Us", and "Directory". Below the navigation bar, the date "Apr 25, 2005" is shown. A search box labeled "Catalog Search" has a "GO" button. Below the search box are radio buttons for "Courses" (selected) and "Programs", and a link for "Advanced Search". A vertical menu on the left lists various sections: "Provost's Message", "General Information", "Academic Information", "Admissions Information", "Financial Information", "Student Life", "Bachelor's Degree Program", "Advance Degree Completion Program", "Certificate Programs", "Academic Departments", "Majors & Programs", "Course Descriptions", "Academic Calendar", and "Directory". On the right, a dropdown menu is open, showing "2004-2005 Undergraduate Catalog" (selected), "2004-2005 Undergraduate Catalog", and "2004-2005 Graduate Catalog". A "GO" button is next to the dropdown. Below the dropdown is a "HELP" link. The main content area features the heading "2004-2005 Undergraduate Catalog" and a sub-heading "Philadelphia Biblical University". Below this is the section "A Distinctive Approach" with a welcome message: "Welcome to the Philadelphia Biblical University online catalog. This site is designed to allow you the easiest possible access to our undergraduate catalog information." To the right of this text is a photograph of students walking on a campus. Below the photograph is another paragraph: "Use the links and search feature at left to find exactly the information you want. You may then record courses and programs of interest in your very own private portfolio. If you need help, click the 'HELP' link at far right."

Visitors may also optionally authenticate to the system (with an email address & password) and maintain a “portfolio” of courses and programs of interest for future reference. This can be a benefit in the college decision-making process or during the advising process for enrolled students.

Pros & Cons

Pros

- The system meets all of our needs, satisfying all of the items on our original wish list. Every department involved in the catalog editing process, particularly those most closely involved, has been universally satisfied.
- Performance is fast and intuitive
- The staff at Digital Architecture is very courteous and professional and has always been very attentive to our needs. They didn't put us in the back seat once we had signed our contract. They honor their quotes and have always been very sincere in every aspect of our interaction with them. Additionally, they were very patient and gracious throughout our long decision-making process.
- Product has been continually developed and improved with customer feedback and needs in mind
- Allows IT to have minimal involvement in the ongoing editing, maintenance and support of the online academic catalog(s).

Cons

- The non-dynamic areas of the catalog, which consist of static HTML pages (message from the provost, policies, calendar, etc.), cannot be edited directly from within the Publisher interface and the process instead entails editing the HTML offline (using an editor) and uploading the static pages using the Publisher interface.
- Modifying the actual design template and/or style sheets cannot be done independently. However, these types of changes are very infrequent and would typically be done only in the case of a site redesign.

Summary

All in all, PBU has been extremely satisfied with the AcalogTM ACMS system and has had no regrets. It has served us well in the short time we have been clients and we highly recommend it to other institutions that are looking for an online catalog management solution.