

Functional Specifications for the Clark Site News Engine

Version 1.0, 6/1/05

Definition and Scope

Our intention is to migrate Clark School news stories and affiliated imagery to a dynamic, database-driven system. This includes:

1. Ability to present portions of or entire news items in different formats on different pages (to be defined below)
2. Ability to search news items
3. Ability to administrate news items through a tool or interface which allows an end user to enter the story, set attributes, upload photos, etc. (e.g., an HTML form.)
4. Ability to set permissions on who can make a news item active/live on the server
5. Ability to manage the date(s) on which an article is displayed as current and subsequently archived.
6. The ability to query and filter news stories by type, category, department, etc. (to be defined below).
7. The ability to send notification to a third party to review an article, and that third party's ability to approve (or decline) it, in a manner similar to that which the mnemosyne listservs use.
8. Ability to eventually expand the use of the system to individual departments and centers within the Clark School. This includes the functionality mentioned above, but within the context of their department and the material they contribute (i.e., they should not have permission to approve news articles for the main Clark site, but should be able to manage their own department-specific news).

Related to this project is the fact that some of the digital signage systems we are considering can also behave dynamically, pulling information from a database. If we are able to tie our digital signage system to our news engine (and/or event engine), we could greatly increase the efficiency and content-population of the signage system.

User Types and Roles

Primary Administrator (Dale)

This user will provide the top level "back-end" maintenance of the database and server-code, troubleshooting, the writing of code to create news templates and queries and assisting the creation of new ones as information is repurposed. This user should also support the implementation of the news engine by departments, centers, and institutes (a future expansion). The Primary Administrator should teach/support the Secondary Administrator, providing any special instructions.

Secondary Administrator (Faye)

The Secondary Administrator will generate requirements, functional specifications, file conventions, and process flow for the Primary Administrator; create visual layout templates, and modify code, templates, and queries where able and necessary. This user will, in the future, provide training and set-up for departments, institutes and centers that

wish to implement the news engine on their sites. The Secondary Administrator will also be an Editor (see below).

Editors (Faye, Missy, Jim McMenamin, Bari, possibly others)

Using a dedicated interface, editors will have the ability to create articles for the news engine, assign meta information (type, category, keywords, etc.), upload accompanying pictures, make corrections and updates to articles, determine whether an article is approved and whether it is “current” or “archived”, take articles “out of circulation” (not literally delete, but prevent it from being viewed on the site), review and approve articles submitted by others, and manually adjust when and for how long an article is displayed on the homepage or as “current.” Editors should also be able to search, filter, or browse the database to examine older articles. Editors should have the ability to modify Contributing Editors’ submissions, but should do so with discretion or permission. (Alternatively, we might consider making this a function of the Secondary Administrator.)

Contributing Editors (to be determined)

These users will eventually be departmental, center, and institute coordinators who elect to implement the news engine on their sites. They should have approximately the same privileges as the Editors, but will only be able to add, change and approve their *own* articles. They may not effect articles created by the Editors specifically for the Clark Site, nor articles created by Contributing Editors from other departments. Contributing Editors may, however, request (or create, if capable) queries for their news pages that will *display* stories from the Clark School-at-large or other departments.

Writers (to be determined)

These users will have the ability to submit news stories, but no editorial permissions (such as assigning meta-data, editing, approving, determining whether an article is live or archived, etc.). Like Contributing Editors, these users may not come into play in the first version of the news engine system. They would likely use an alternate version of the administrative tool (we can hide fields from them via code based on their user-type). Examples of writers could be people who collaborate with departmental communications coordinators, faculty, deans and chairs, representatives of student organizations, guest columnists, etc.

End-Users (Site Visitors)

Visitors to the Clark Site and other sites using the news engine should be able to see current news stories, view summaries, follow links to full stories, and browse or search the archives. We may wish to consider allowing End-Users to submit news “tips” in a similar manner as Writers.

Data Fields

We expect that site visitors will only see a limited number of the following fields (Headline, Blurb, Body, images, perhaps a byline). The other fields will be used for tracking, browsing, searching, and filtering queries.

Name	Required? (Y/N)	Notes
article_id	Y	Unique identifier; key field.
article_type	Y	There are currently three options: News, Spotlight, and Event (In this case, Event means “an event covered as a news item”, and not the event entry in the Calender tool.)
article_department	Y	<p>This field needs to contain one or more variables (or we need fields for all of the variables) which further categorize the article by department, center, institute, program, etc. This will assist browsing and sorting, but more importantly in the future allow a Contributing Editor to query the database for their specific department’s news. Editors should have the ability to indicate more than one department (for example, a nanotech article may be news for ISR, M-CINSE, and MechE).</p> <p>We would also like to be able to flag certain news as about or of specific interest to alumni, and it seems this field could be used for that.</p> <p>See also article_clarksite in “Fields under Development”, below.</p>
headline (or title)	Y	
blurb (or teaser)	Y	A teaser; typically the first sentence or two. Could probably be dynamically generated, but Jim. M. is not going to want words and sentences cut off due to character count.
body	Y	The full article, excluding the Headline.
author_firstname	Y	Alternatively, we could have an authorname field.
author_lastname	Y	
author_email	Y	
author_phone	Y	Full or extension?
article_date OR article_month, article_day, article_year	Y	Can this be automatically generated? This could be the <i>creation date</i> or the <i>date of first posting</i> ; or we could have a field for each. Since some articles are updated, we might consider separate fields. The reason we should consider separate month, day, and year fields is to better sort and display them in the archives (currently they are

		divided by year.)
photo_sm	?	A small accompanying photo that could go on the homepage, accompany the blurb, or be displayed in “tight spots”
photo_lg	Y (?)	The photo that goes with the main article. Currently it is a given but it seems possible that an article could go live without one
photo_caption	Y	A description of limited character length which will have two uses: it will populate the alt attribute, and can be displayed as an actual caption. And, of course, it tells us about the photo for posterity.
callout_quote	N	We occasionally use callout quotes, typically for event coverage which features a speaker.
keywords	Y (?)	For ease of searching/browsing. Alternatively a search feature can search on the Headline, Body, and Photo Caption instead of using this field.
approved	Y	A true/false flag. “approved=true” means the article has gone through the editorial process and can be displayed in some manner on the site. Any article whose approved flag is “false” cannot be displayed as a result of a query. The approved field will also let us “deactivate” articles which for whatever reason are deemed inappropriate for display. Any query for news items would therefore need to include “and approved= ‘true’”. Obviously if approved=false, flags like “current” and “archived” cannot be true (see below), an issue we’ll need to accommodate.

Fields Under Development

The following fields are tied to process and we need advice as to whether they should exist, and how best to implement them.

Name	Required? (Y/N)	Notes
current	Y	A true/false flag indicating whether an article is considered “current news”—that is, whether it is eligible to appear on the home page and among the currently active news articles (as opposed to the archives). If current=false, that could be the flag to send an article to the archives (see below).
archived	Y	A true/false flag indicating whether an article appears in the news archives. It has been

		suggested that all approved articles automatically be included in the archives, even while they are current, for two reasons: it will reduce the amount of work required, and visitors are more likely to see an article in the first place. This field may not be necessary if archiving is fully automated.
semester	N (?)	May not be necessary. Currently we are looking at articles being “current” for as long as a semester. A field like this could help us in automated archiving and/or sorting.
expiration	?	Date field. Was discussed as a possible means of controlling “current” vs. “archived” but it seems like it might be more effort than necessary.
article_clarksite	Y	<p>A true/false field which indicates whether the article is generated by the Dean’s Office and/or approved for use on the Clark site itself. Only Administrators and Editors (not Contributing Editors) should be able to set this flag. The reason this should be a separate field rather than a department indicator is to help us manage and filter what goes on the main Clark site.</p> <p>Example: Missy sees an article Ted Knight wrote for ECE. We don’t want all ECE articles (as specified by the article_department field), just this one, so she looks it up in the database and sets the article_clarksite flag to “true”. It is now eligible to be snagged by our queries as current news.</p> <p>Problems/Issues: Either we would need to scan departmental sites for extra news, and/or Contributing Editors would need to suggest articles they feel would be good candidates for the main Clark site. If the article originated with a Contributing Editor in another department, we may run into conflicts concerning expiration dates and other attributes—what we want may not be the same as what the originating department wants. Is there a way for us to draw from the same well but do custom repurposing, without having to make a duplicate of the article?</p>

We would like the current-vs.-archiving process to be as automated as possible but require manual control or overrides. Some articles are specifically run for a very short period (example: announcing Maryland Day) or requested to be left up for a very long time (example: articles about people who give us *lots* of money).

Mockups

For screen mockups of the news homepage, a current article page, and an archive page, please see:

<http://clarkdev.eng.umd.edu/newsroom/index.html> (the More>> link on the top story will take you to an article, the following link:)

<http://clarkdev.eng.umd.edu/newsroom/newsstory.html>

<http://clarkdev.eng.umd.edu/newsroom/archivednews.html>

Mockups of the administrative side will be created after we have had a chance to discuss functionality in greater detail.