

# Elementary Academic Websites with GitHub

*Guide Prepared for May College 2022 at St. Lawrence University*

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## **Introduction**

When I was in graduate school at the University of Texas at Austin (UT) my stipend barely covered my living expenses. The administration at UT showed no concern for the reality that Austin, TX was becoming one of the most expensive cities in the United States to live in. Yet, the simple truth was that I was expected to maintain a professional website for when I went on the job market.

Some of my fellow graduate students chose to make websites that included those annoying little “Powered by XYZ Company” at the bottom of their site and call it a day. I totally understand that approach and support it fully; cost was key then and it still is a critical factor now. But, for me, that banner drove me nuts and I knew that I could do something simple and cheap if I put my mind to it. Luckily, I didn’t have to because a fellow graduate student in my department, Alex Branham, created an Academic Website Starter Kit on GitHub that I happily adopted. This guide shows you how to adopt that same starter kit and create a simple, easy-to-manage, and affordable academic website. The only cost you will incur is for your domain (usually about \$12 per year).

## **Step-by-Step Guide**

1. Create a GitHub account: <https://github.com>
2. Go to the repository for the starter kit: <https://github.com/jabranham/github-pages-academic-starter-kit>
  - a. Alternatively, you can go to mine:  
<https://github.com/zacmcgee/zacmcgee.github.io>
3. “Fork” the repository as `your-username.github.io` (see the red square in the image below)

The screenshot shows the GitHub repository page for `jabranham / github-pages-academic-starter-kit`. The repository is public and has 72 forks (highlighted with a red box), 29 stars, and 2 watchers. The repository includes a README.md file and a table of files with their commit history.

File	Commit Message	Commit Hash	Date	Commits
css	Sets up github-pages themes	be3f8b9	on Nov 15, 2016	6 years ago
404.md	Initial commit			6 years ago
Gemfile	Sets up github-pages themes			6 years ago
Makefile	Initial commit			6 years ago
README.md	Fix formatting			6 years ago
_config.yml	Sets up github-pages themes			6 years ago
index.md	Initial commit			6 years ago
teaching.md	Initial commit			6 years ago

The README.md file contains the following text:

This is a starter kit for making an academic webpage using github pages. There is a live preview of this available [here](#).

Feel free to fork this project in order to get your own site going. You should be able to fork it and rename it to `<your-username>.github.io` to get started. Please note the license, below.

Also note that the setup has recently changed - the site now relies on `jekyll`'s themes engine. The default theme is minima (and, as of this writing, that's the only one available). Here's a link to a [list of supported themes](#).

Here's a list of things you'll probably want to do right away:

- Change the personal information in the `_config.yml` file (name, email, description, etc)
- Update the `index.md` file to whatever you want. This is the "homepage" for your website.
- Create whatever subpages you want. I've included `teaching.md` as an example template. So that would be served at [www.yoursite.com/teaching](#).
  - These pages will automatically appear in the site's header at the top

That's probably enough to get started right away. Feel free to contact me with any questions you have!

- a. For information on what forking is: <https://docs.github.com/en/pull-requests/collaborating-with-pull-requests/working-with-forks/about-forks>
4. Before proceeding to tinker with anything else you need to purchase your domain because it takes 24-48 hours for it to be established online.
  - a. I use [Google Domains](#), but you can use any domain service you want!
5. Once you have purchased your domain, return to GitHub and create a file called "CNAME" (see images A, B, and C below) and type in the following two versions of the domain you just purchased:
  - i. [www.yourdomain.net](#)
  - ii. [yourdomain.net](#)

A:

zacmcgee / zacmcgee.github.ioPublic

<> Code

Issues

Pull requests

Actions

Projects

Wiki

Security

Insights

Settings

master1 branch0 tags

Go to fileAdd fileCode

zacmcgee Add files via upload

Create new fileUpload files15 commits

_includes	First commit	6 years ago
_layouts	First commit	6 years ago
_sass	First commit	6 years ago
css	Update main.scss	9 months ago
images	Add files via upload	5 years ago
publications	Add files via upload	8 months ago
replication	Add files via upload	3 years ago
syllabi	Add files via upload	9 months ago
404.md	Update 404.md	6 years ago
CNAME	Updating CNAME	6 years ago
Gemfile	First commit	6 years ago
LICENSE	Update LICENSE	6 years ago
Makefile	First commit	6 years ago
McGee_CV.pdf	Add files via upload	last month
README.md	Update README.md	6 years ago
_config.yml	Update _config.yml	9 months ago
index.md	Update index.md	10 months ago
publish.html	Creates publish.html	6 years ago
research.md	Update research.md	7 months ago
teaching.md	Update teaching.md	9 months ago

About

My personal website

Readme

View license

0 stars

2 watching

0 forks

Releases

No releases published

Create a new release

Environments1

github-pagesActive

Languages

SCSS59.9%

HTML39.4%

Other0.7%

B:

zacmcgee.github.io / CNAME in master

<> Edit file Preview changes

```
1 www.zacharymcgee.net
2 zacharymcgee.net
3
```

Cancel changes

Spaces 2 No wrap



### Commit changes

Update CNAME

Add an optional extended description...

☒ Commit directly to the master branch.

☐ Create a new branch for this commit and start a pull request. [Learn more about pull requests.](#)

Commit changes

Cancel

C:

Repository: zacmcgee / zacmcgee.github.io (Public)

Navigation: Code, Issues, Pull requests, Actions, Projects, Wiki, Security, Insights, Settings

Branch: master (1 branch, 0 tags)

Buttons: Go to file, Add file, Code

Repository Name: zacmcgee Add files via upload (0f1125c on Apr 20, 215 commits)

File/Folder	Commit Message	Time Ago
_includes	First commit	6 years ago
_layouts	First commit	6 years ago
_sass	First commit	6 years ago
css	Update main.scss	9 months ago
images	Add files via upload	5 years ago
publications	Add files via upload	8 months ago
replication	Add files via upload	3 years ago
syllabi	Add files via upload	9 months ago
404.md	Update 404.md	6 years ago
CNAME	Updating CNAME	6 years ago
Gemfile	First commit	6 years ago
LICENSE	Update LICENSE	6 years ago
Makefile	First commit	6 years ago
McGee_CV.pdf	Add files via upload	last month
README.md	Update README.md	6 years ago
_config.yml	Update _config.yml	9 months ago
index.md	Update index.md	10 months ago
publish.html	Creates publish.html	6 years ago
research.md	Update research.md	7 months ago
teaching.md	Update teaching.md	9 months ago

Right Sidebar:

- About: My personal website, Readme, View license, 0 stars, 2 watching, 0 forks
- Releases: No releases published, Create a new release
- Environments: 1 (github-pages Active)
- Languages: SCSS 59.9%, HTML 39.4%, Other 0.7%

6. To the extent that any of this process is technical, this step is the most so. Once you save your CNAME file, return to your domain provider (e.g., Google Domains). You now need to tell your domain provider “where” on the web you want it to point. In our case, we want it to point to your GitHub repository so that when people type in yourdomain.net, it displays the content from your GitHub repository.
  - a. Locate your domain’s “DNS Settings”
    - i. With Google Domains, log into your account and then navigate to “My domains” and then select your domain. On the lefthand navigation, select the DNS tab (see image below).

zacharymcgee.net

← All my domains zacharymcgee.net Global DNS settings

Domain overview  
Registration settings  
**DNS**  
Website  
Reports  
Email  
Security

Get a new domain  
Send feedback  
Help and support  
United States (US \$)

Default name servers (Active) Custom name servers

These DNS settings are active. Changes are published immediately, but may take time to propagate

Resource records [Export DNS records](#)

Resource records point to the services your domain uses, including web and email services. [Learn more about resource records](#)

Custom records  
zacharymcgee.net/A and www.zacharymcgee.net/CNAME [Manage custom records](#)

Host name	Type	TTL	Data
zacharymcgee.net	A	1 hour	192.30.252.153
www.zacharymcgee.net	CNAME	1 hour	zacmcgee.github.io.

Required  
Informational only records

DNSSEC [Turn on](#)

Domain Name System Security Extensions (DNSSEC) protect your domain from threats like DNS cache poisoning attacks and DNS spoofing. [Learn more about using DNSSEC](#)

DNSSEC is disabled

Name servers

- b. You need to create a custom record to point to your GitHub repository.
  - i. With Google Domains, select “manage custom records” under the “Resources Records” module (should be the first one at the top of the page).
  - ii. Click “Create new record” and in the new record type the following:
    1. Host name field: www
    2. Type field: CNAME
    3. TTL field: 3600
    4. Data field: your-username.github.io.
    5. Example:
  - iii. Click “Save” button
- c. This step is the reason your domain will take 24-48 hours to go live. The change is applied immediately but it will not propagate online for the period just noted.
7. Head back to GitHub and start tinkering. Start with the instructions from Alex’s starter kit ([here](#)) (or just steps b-d below)
  - a. **NOTE: The host of this starter kit has left academia and no longer maintains his domain. Therefore, the link to the “live preview” does not work. In fact, as I learned the hard way, his domain has since been purchased and seems to host lewd content and so I do not advise visiting the live preview link.** My website [www.zacharymcgee.net](http://www.zacharymcgee.net) also serves as a live preview (but with my style settings and not necessarily the ones included in Alex’s starter kit).

[Create new record](#)
[Cancel](#)
[Save](#)

- b. Change the personal information in the `_config.yml` file (name, email, description, etc)
  - c. Update the `index.md` file to whatever you want. This is the “homepage” for your website.
  - d. Create whatever subpages you want. I’ve included `teaching.md` as an example template. So that would be served at `www.yousite.com/teaching`.
    - i. These pages will automatically appear in the site’s header at the top
8. The pages for your website are edited using R-Markdown language. This language is very similar to HTML in that all you had to do is “tag” your text to make changes. Below I have included a link with helpful tags and an image of my homepage with tags for italics, links, and images in use.

- a. <https://www.rstudio.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/rmarkdown-reference.pdf>

zacmcgee.github.io / index.md in master Cancel changes

Edit file
Preview
Spaces 2 Soft wrap

```

1  ---
2  layout: default
3  ---
4  
6
7  Welcome to my website. I am a Visiting Assistant Professor in the [Department of Government](https://www.stlawu.edu/offices/government) at St. Lawrence
8  University in Canton, NY. I received my Ph.D. in Government from the University of Texas at Austin in 2021. My research agenda centers on American
9  political institutions, especially the U.S. Congress and political parties, as well as on the decision-making processes of elites within the policy
10 process. I am also a Faculty Associate with the U.S. Chapter of the [Comparative Agendas Project](http://www.comparativeagendas.net/us), which actively
11 maintains data series coded consistently for policy content to allow for comparisons over time.
12
13 My dissertation focused on the role of intraparty factions, like the House Freedom Caucus or the New Democrat Coalition, in Congress. The central question
14 driving this work is simple, to what extent do intraparty factions have systematic effects on the congressional agenda? To get at this question I collected
15 and coded the policy agendas of every intraparty faction from 2001-2018, producing an original data set of over 15,000 agenda items. I argue that
16 intraparty factions provide a vital avenue for rank-and-file members to extract policy concessions from party leaders in a highly centralized power
17 structure by utilizing direct negotiations with leadership, position taking, and threat making.
18
19 The analyses reveal evidence of factions influencing the congressional agenda as well as the asymmetric nature of the legislative parties with Republican
20 intraparty factions battling over a small set of ideologically charged issues and Democratic intraparty factions engaging in diverse agendas consistent
21 with their "big tent" coalition. This project represents a first step in a broader understanding of intraparty factions and their role in the modern
22 politically polarized Congress. Moreover, it has been generously supported by the [Dirksen Congressional Center](http://www.dirksencenter.org
23 /print_programs_crgs.htm), [The Annette Strauss Institute For Civic Life](https://moody.utexas.edu/centers/strauss/patricia-witherspoon-research-award),
24 and [The Texas Politics Project](https://texaspolitics.utexas.edu/). My related research, showing the members of the House Freedom Caucus shifting their
25 campaign resources to disproportionately support one another during the 2016 election, won the "Best Paper by a Graduate Student" Award for the Annual
26 Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association in 2017.
27
28 My research has been published in *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, *Political Research Quarterly*, *Policy Studies Journal*, and several edited volumes.
29 Current projects, including working papers, can be found [here](/research/). Requests for drafts of working papers are welcome. To request a draft, please
30 feel free to email me. If you would like a copy of my CV, it can be found [here](/McGee_CV.pdf).
31
32
33
34
35

```

Attach files by dragging & dropping, selecting or pasting them.



## Commit changes

Create index.md

Add an optional extended description...

☒ Commit directly to the master branch.

☐ Create a new branch for this commit and start a pull request. [Learn more about pull requests.](#)

Commit changes

Cancel

9. The final step requires you to publish an HTML file. I created one entitled `publish.html` and just wrote one line of text (you can write anything).



Repository: **zacmcgee / zacmcgee.github.io** (Public)

Navigation: Code, Issues, Pull requests, Actions, Projects, Wiki, Security, Insights, Settings

Branch: master | 1 branch | 0 tags

Buttons: Go to file, Add file, Code

File/Folder	Commit Message	Time Ago
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._sass	First commit	6 years ago
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README.md	Update README.md	6 years ago
_config.yml	Update _config.yml	9 months ago
index.md	Update index.md	10 months ago
<b>publish.html</b>	<b>Creates publish.html</b>	<b>6 years ago</b>
research.md	Update research.md	7 months ago
teaching.md	Update teaching.md	9 months ago

**About**

My personal website

- Readme
- View license
- 0 stars
- 2 watching
- 0 forks

**Releases**

No releases published  
[Create a new release](#)

**Environments**

- github-pages (Active)

**Languages**

- SCSS 59.9%
- HTML 39.4%
- Other 0.7%

10. That's it! You have your website!

- You can see I have created a few more folders and I have some files I host directly in the master directory (like my CV!). You can drag and drop files from your computer to upload them directly to whatever directory you are in.
- You create folders the same way you create files. Instead of typing "teaching.md" when creating a new file, you could type "teaching/" and it will automatically know you want to create a new folder.

*Disclaimer: I am not a computer scientist nor am I a heavy user of GitHub. I will try my best to answer any questions you might have about using this starter kit and guide but, as you can see, it's been 6 years since I created my website. The great thing about this approach is that editing your files and maintaining the website is a breeze. Once you get everything up and running you can just add in your new content every few months and never think about your website otherwise. Happy coding!*