

Dr. Chuck's Web Log

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March 27, 2006

Report of Australia Trip

Hello all, For the past 2.5 weeks I have been traveling in Australia talking Sakai with our Australian partners and friends of Sakai. I visited the following locations: MELCOE (Sydney), Macquarie University(Sydney), Charles Sturt University (Albury), Australian National University (Canberra), Queensland University of Technology (Brisbane), Monash University (Melbourne), and Melbourne University (Melbourne).

The main reason was to talk with James Dalziel about moving forward and getting Sakai to work better with LAMS 1.1. I made a Sakai Interview Video with James at:

<http://www.dr-chuck.com/media.php?id=59>

Most of the topic was about Sakai and eResearch. Most of the universities I visited are pretty happy with their current home grown and commercial LMS solutions.

I gave the following talk (over and over) - feel absolutely free to take these slides, and reuse them in any way you see fit (with or without attribution):

<http://www.dr-chuck.com/talks.php?id=66>

The talk got better as the trip went on - so make sure if I gave you a copy of the "overview" PPT earlier grab this one as well. If you are a Keynote user send me a note and I will send you the "real" version :) I also used the following PPT as well when talking about research:

<http://www.dr-chuck.com/talks.php?id=65>

<http://www.dr-chuck.com/talks.php?id=64>

I also talked a bunch about the eResearch paper (draft attached).

My cell phone photo blog starts here:

http://www.dr-chuck.com/images/2006/03/index.php?img=12-03-06_1514001.jpg

I need to give a hearty thanks to all the people who arranged this and made sure I was never allowed to get lost in the Outback and killed by poison toads: Mike Ribbechi, James Dalziel, Ernie Ghiglione, Fiona Malikoff, Matt Morton-Allen, Vic Elliott, Regina Obexer, Nathan Bailey, Claire Brooks, David Hirst, and many others.

MELCOE, Macquarie University, Sydney (2 days)

The org structure of LAMS is a very small foundation that owns the copyright to the LAMS software, then there is a company called LAMS International which makes money off LAMS in many ways - any code LI writes comes back to the foundation under GPL. MELCOE is an academic center in Macquarie which does grant funded work, also giving its code results to LAMS Foundation.

<http://www.lamsinternational.com/>

<http://www.lamsfoundation.org/>

<http://www.melcoe.mq.edu.au/>

The initial purpose of the trip was to meet with the technical folks from MELCO to discuss LAMS and Sakai. I spent two days with their tech lead Fiona Malikof and Ernie Ghiglione. We covered their next generation "Tools Contract" which is a set of rules that tools must follow to "fit" in with the LAMS system. This contract is covered in some technical detail here:

<http://lamscvs.melcoe.mq.edu.au:8090/display/lams/Home>

The summary is that there are a series of URL conventions between the LAMS and any tool for configuration, playback, printout, etc. If a tool meets the contract LAMS can make it work. We also did some code review of both Sakai and LAMS looking for the best way to implement the Tools Contract in Sakai.

Macquarie University, Sydney (1 day)

In terms of an LMS, Macquarie currently is running WebCT - they are in the middle of an LMS evaluation - I gave a talk with their evaluation committee and it went well. I talked about research agenda and the Twin Peaks repository integration.

<http://www.mq.edu.au/>

Charles Sturt, Albury (1 Day)

Much of this trip was arranged by Mike Ribbechi of Charles Sturt University - many thanks to Mike.

I first met with the teaching and learning group. Charles Sturt is a big distance education place - they are like the Open University in UK. They have a large staff of instructional designers and production support. They have a careful process to produce high quality materials for their courses. They allow instructors to put up optional materials in a Sakai-resources area like tool.

They are not thinking seriously of Sakai as a potential LMS for now. Their LMS is homegrown as a set of connected products they have built over time. They have recently

written a nice course evaluation system in Java - I suggested that this might be a fun thing to move into Sakai someday. I also went into a discussion of TwinPeaks - I talked about it as a way for instructional designers to deliver their leaning objects into a course.

Next I met with the production deployment folks. They will be deploying Sakai in production in support of research in April. They have a strong and well managed team led by Dorothy Cottee (aka Dot). I met with the developers, project managers, production folks, and DBAs.

Next I met with their academics (that is what they call faculty) from their Information Sciences area and we talked about ways to get funding with Sakai.

Reference: <http://www.csu.edu.au/>

Australia National University, Canberra (1 Day)

ANU is an interesting place. Over 2/3 of their staff are non-teaching. They have 11,000 students. They run the supercomputer center called the Australian Partnership for Advanced Computing (APAC). ANU is also Michael McRobbie's most recent stop in Australia before coming to Indiana.

We talked a lot about NEESGrid, Shibboleth, MAMS, and Globus and the difference between research software and production software. We also talked about portals and portfolios as well. We also talked about using Sakai in the EOT activity of the APAC.

There is also a big effort working with DSpace at ANU as well as a strong interest data archive related to high performance computing. One of the current DSpace committers - Scott Yaden was part of the meeting. I talked in great depth with Scott and the other library guys about all of the phases of TwinPeaks including some of the RDF, Web 2.0, and Semantic semantic futures.

The ANU conversation went well into the evening - Robin Stanton and I were still talking loudly about some technical thing well after midnight - much to the chagrin to the other people who having dinner with us :) Here is a picture of the *start* of the evening..

http://www.dr-chuck.com/images/2006/03/index.php?img=17-03-06_0256002.jpg

Did I say that they Australia is really serious about their wines and wineries?

References: <http://www.anu.edu.au/>, <http://nf.apac.edu.au/>

Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane (1 Day)

QUT has an LMS called OLT. They have 40 instructional designers. Their instructional designers like it a lot. It is like Melete but with the ability to place interactive bits

anywhere on the page. In a sense in OLT, Melete *is* Site Setup and things like discussion, etc are just part of the modules that OLT organizes.

QUT is in the middle of LMS evaluation. I did an extensive demonstration of Sakai in teaching (my guest account in Etudes came in really handy here), research (using collab), and e-Portfolio using the nightly server.

Reference: <http://www.qut.edu.au/>, <https://olt.qut.edu.au/>

Monash University, Melbourne (1 day)

Monash is a WebCT Vista shop. It is a recent roll out and they are pretty happy with it.

In terms of research we had a lot of good conversations - I gave my complete NEESgrid and Sakai/eResearch talk and left them with a bunch of papers including the US/UK Sakai in eScience paper.

A new Synchrontron is being built at Monash with a beam line firing up in 1.5 years. We talked about Sakai as part of an e-Research toolset around that project.

Monash has two neat digital library projects. The first is Australian Research Repositories Online to the World (ARROW). This is more about publishing valuable information to the world. This project uses Fedora.

The Data Acquisition Accessibility and Annotation e-Research Technologies (DART) project is about capturing large data sets as might be generated by an experimental facility. DART will use SRB, Fedora, and Semantic technologies.

References:

<http://www.monash.edu.au/>

<http://arrow.edu.au/>

<http://dart.edu.au/>

<http://dart.edu.au/docs/DART%20proposal.pdf>

Melbourne University, Melbourne (1 day)

Melbourne is an "old-school" university (buildings made of sandstone). They have 40,000 students and focus on face-to-face instruction. They are ramping up their campus-wide Blackboard rollout so our conversations focused on Sakai as an eResearch platform.

I spent most of my time with the campus-wide Instructional Designers and media folks. This is a very professional and strong organization which produces very good work. They are in one of the older buildings on campus (made of sandstone), but the inside looks like a California startup company.

They currently have a very nice home grown system which works like a like a super-Melete called NEO (yes it is from the Matrix). Their designers effectively can use NEO to make a sequence of modules, or even clean it up a bit and make it seem like an interactive web site with the little NEO bar across the top. Some of it also reminded me of LON-Capa. They have a quizzing tool.

Probably the coolest thing I saw was a tool they called "strata" - it is a role-based messaging system that is used in a number of different teaching contexts. You pick a role (like a doctor) and things start happening (all messages) - you get a patient report and have to react - based on the reaction something happens. Sometimes the responses are from other participants and other times the responses are canned coming because the student ran across a trip wire. They have success in using it in Medical for problem based learning and journalism courses. I thought this was very cool and wished we had something like this in Sakai because it seemed like a useful pedagogy that is not in common use.

Since Melbourne is a big research place, we also talked about Saki as a research application - I suggested that they start with a simple Sakai to get people working together (meeting support, etc), then they find some of the neat data oriented web silos and wrap Sakai around those data sources to build communities around those sources, and then move towards common data areas using technologies like ARROW and DART.

References: <http://www.unimelb.edu.au/>

Sakai Seminar, Melbourne University

This was an open meeting with 60 attendees both from the Melbourne campus and around Australia and New Zealand.

The first speaker was James Dalziel - he was speaking on Open Source in general - he has a grant to be an Australian version of OSS-Watch (ASK-OSS). This was an early version of a keynote he will be giving April 10-12 at the OSSWatch meeting in Oxford covering open source in general.

I was the second speaker - and gave my Sakai Overview talk for the 12th time in two weeks :) It went very well. Good questions, etc.

Mike Ribbechi of Charles Sturt was the third speaker. He gave a great talk. It was extremely pro-community source and had a bunch of neat analysis in ways I had not previously thought about. A lot of it focused on agility rather than TCO. I thought it was an insightful view of things.

James was the fourth speaker and he talked about LAMS and LAMS-Sakai going forward - an overall good talk.

Neil McLean of DEST was the last speaker.

Sakai Partners Meeting

The overall wrap up for the two weeks was the Sakai Partners Meeting Friday in Melbourne where all of the folks on the trip came together in a single meeting.

We discussed how the Sakai partners would present and organize themselves in Australia. They will soon have a web site as a starting place.

We had a discussion about eResearch - I presented some ideas that I called "Putting Science at the center of eScience" and suggested that we write a white paper describing the vision in some detail.

The University of Auckland was invited as a potential Sakai partner - after the meeting a few of us hung around and they demonstrated their recently rolled out local LMS called CECIL. CECIL is written in .NET it is quite impressive - looks like Microsoft Outlook - A combination of Sakai features and Melete features but with an outstanding look and feel using Ajax, drag and drop.

Reference: <http://www.cecil.edu/>

Conclusion

Most universities were quite happy with their current commercial or home-grown LMS systems so much of the discussion focused on research applications of Sakai. We had a lot of good conversations about SakaiBrary/Twinpeaks, Portfolio use of Sakai, Australian Wineries, poison toads, and other topics.

Another important theme was our work in standards and commitment to working with commercial vendors - things like Tool Interoperability were well received as it gives them a chance for their commercial LMS systems to perhaps play in the Sakai world (especially eResearch).

All in all a great two weeks. Thanks to all the folks who took time to meet with me.

Posted by csev at 07:30 AM