Notes on Meetings with Sarah Porter,
Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC)
October 7 and 8, 2005, Washington, DC

Background

Ms. Porter was in Washington, DC attending a Digital Library Federation meeting. I thought some of the informal conversations could be shared with others. She graciously permitted me to do so

On Sakai

I asked Ms. Porter for her comments about Sakai. She said:

- JISC hopes the forthcoming IMS Tool Interoperability specification will be robust and can be used for tool development, and

- Sakai will produce a framework consistent with the IMS specification.

  Comment: The following day I shared an e-mail from John Norman to the Sakai Requirements Working Group that suggested the need for a framework separate from the Sakai "enterprise package." Several tools have been developed through JISC projects that fill a unique need. For example, the University of York led the development and integration of tools for assessing mathematics, especially algebra. This tool was cited by Michael Feldstein as one in the "long tail" of those specialized tools that provides useful functionally, but not needed by all users in all disciplines or for all pedagogies. Sakai has had requests for the Samigo assessments and the Berkeley grade book tools operating separately from other Sakai tools.

  There is general agreement in the UK a framework is needed to support the use of tools, and a significant effort is being made to realize that goal. There may have been an unacknowledged "pause" in developing a JISC reference implementation framework expecting the Sakai Tool Portability Profile to provide guidance.

She also said the Sakai community is important and she hopes it emerges [from the grant-funded project] as an innovative, contributing, and sustainable community. She confirmed the JISC has in place agreements with DEST (Department of Education, Science and Training) in Australia and with SURF in the Netherlands for cooperative efforts and would like to have an arrangement with a similar U.S. organization (Sakai may be a candidate)

> Comment: JISC has funded the OSS Watch project to inform the higher education community about the use of open source software. There have been some discussions about the model for long-term support open source software products.

Higher Education in the UK

She corrected my understanding that the higher tuitions and student loan programs were introduced this fall in the UK. This move toward "market driven" higher education will begin next year. Tuition at the public universities (with one exception) will increase from £1,200 to £3,000 next year. Because the cost of education is closer to £6,000 "universities seek overseas students who typically pay from £10,000 to £15,000 tuition or more, depending on the subject of the course."

She also confirmed the Further Education colleges are already offering higher education courses and access courses to encourage progress to universities (foundation degrees). I mentioned the age of Open University students is beginning to decline as more university-age students are enrolling in OU programmes.

On Moodle

Because JISC is providing Moodle support through some of its Regional Support Centers, Jon Allen briefed Ms. Porter on Martin Dougiamas' meetings in Washington, DC and, the forthcoming MoodleMoot Savannah. Jon commented about Sakai Chief Architect Charles Severance's meeting with Dougiamas suggesting she may want to review Chuck's video for a more personal report.