Sakai Newsletter

March 9, 2006

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1. Virginia Tech's Workshop on Research and Sakai

From Jeshua Pacifici: On Feb 22, Virginia Tech's Educational Technologies gave a workshop on Research and Sakai. The workshop went well and nearly all of the faculty were interested in Scholar, Virginia Tech's implementation of Sakai. I framed it as an "ongoing dialogue" with researchers, and opened with some of Sakai's differences from Blackboard (our current enterprise system), emphasizing how open source lends itself to collaborative development and how users have the ability to influence tool and UI development.

I presented slides to give the participants an idea of how various research projects might position Scholar in different research scenarios. I spoke about the following issues: working with distributed teams, working one on one with colleagues or grad students, the need for project administration and account management, communication tools, and the use of a basic repository of materials.

We closed with a demo of the functions of Sakai/Scholar that highlighted collaboration. The participants were very responsive and asked questions throughout the demo and for 30 minutes at the end. We would like to set up a site with resources for Sakai institutions to address the role of Sakai and research.

For those interested in contributing to a site for Sakai and Research, please contact me at jeshua@vt.edu.

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2. The Word from Walla Walla: Sakai and Smaller Institutions

From Keiko Pitter, Chief Technology Officer, Whitman College: Given the recent discussion involving Sakai, I thought I'd share Whitman College's experience with Sakai.

Whitman is a small liberal arts college in rural Walla Walla, WA, with 1400 student FTE and an IT department with just 20 staff. Yet, we are in the middle of a successful Sakai pilot. In fact, it looks like we will have a full implementation in fall 2006.

We had been using Blackboard for the past six years -- just the Basic version. When faced with the need to either move to the Enterprise version or to pursue another option about one and one-half years ago, we decided to pursue Sakai. Although we could have experimented/piloted with Sakai for free, we joined Sakai Educational Partners Program (SEPP) for $5,000/yr in November 2004 to show our serious commitment to the project. The membership was not a requirement -- in fact, there are many institutions that are using/piloting Sakai without joining SEPP or the Sakai Foundation. Just about every process happens transparently in the public forums.

Although Whitman College seems to be doing fine with one staff member (with good Java knowledge) supporting this project, there are consultants available who assist smaller institutions with Sakai implementation. I know of one consulting firm that currently supports about 50 institutions throughout the US -- all small colleges (2,000-6,000 students). Also, consortia of small colleges are finding Sakai to be a strong platform since it is not simply a course management system, but rather a framework that supports all levels of collaboration, including inter-institutional.

While it's too early to discuss TCO (total cost of ownership) for Sakai, I am certain that a fully supported instance of Sakai will be quite a bit below the cost for Blackboard Enterprise. So far, assessments of faculty and students at Whitman are uniformly

positive. The Sakai tools are agnostic to size of school and the array of tool choices is growing based on the pedagogical models that we in higher ed need.

And for that shameless plug -- my Sakai staffer, Mike Osterman, and I will be presenting/sharing our experience at the EDUCAUSE Western RegionalConference on April 24-26 in San Francisco. Our presentation is titled "Can Sakai be implemented at a small liberal arts school?" Do join us.

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3. Explore Sakai -- The Collaboration and Learning Environment for Higher Education

Sakai's Marc Brierley, Mark Norton and Jim Farmer will present the following:

- Sakai Concept Community (including Welcome and Introduction)
- The Sakai User Experience
- Architecture and Development

Thursday, 26 May 2005, 9:00-17:00 ETH Zurich, Main Building (Rämistrasse 101), Room HG D 16.2

The Motivation: The hype in the field of Learning Management Systems (LMS) is high. Many universities have in recent years deployed LMS based on in-house developments, on open software environments or on commercial products. It is unclear at this time what to expect from the future: Will there be new standards for LMS? Will some products excel in the market or will we be confronted with many competing platforms?

One thing we have learned in the last years is that the introduction of an LMS is a time consuming activity involving many persons and processes inside a university.

One interesting innovation in the field of LMS is provided by the Sakai project. This project is a joint effort of a number of leading US universities, including Stanford and MIT, with the goal of creating a common platform. The platform is licensed as open source (against a minimal fee) to other universities.

In this workshop you will learn about the architectural and organizational aspects of Sakai. In addition you will have the opportunity to use the application with different roles: As professor, as student or as application manager.

To see the goals and agenda , go to:

http://www.ethworld.ethz.ch/events/explore/sakai

4. Sakai's Whyte Briefs SUNY Education and Information Technologists

Sakai Foundation's Anthony Whyte briefed SUNY Wizard Conference attendees on the status and direction of the Sakai Foundation and the Sakai software. More than two hundred education and information technologists heard his presentation at the SUNY Training Center's semi-annual conference March 1, 2006 in Syracuse.

Pat Carey from Sakai commercial affiliate IBM Corporation described how IBM sees combinations of open source and proprietary software serving the core mission of colleges and universities. Mike Zackrison from Sakai commercial affiliate Unicon Inc. reminded attendees the selection of partners -- both open source and commercial -- should be done in the context of long term relationships. He observed Unicon Inc. began its support of open source early in uPortal development and now supports Sakai software as well as its Academus software. Moodle partner Bryan Williams summarized lead developer Martin Dougiamas´ MoodleMoot Savannah presentation saying the Moodle community's focus is on effective teaching and learning, not the technology itself. WebCT Chief Architect Ajay Sharda, Angel's David Mills, and Binghampton University's Carol Bell representing Blackboard urged interoperability using open standards.

Sakai Foundation's Dr. Charles Severance joined the information sessions the following day. At the previous day's session Rob Lowden, Indiana University, described the Sakai Project and its transformation into the Sakai Foundation. The panel was moderated by Jim Farmer, Georgetown University, a Sakai partner.

For information on viewing the presentation slides, send email to Jim Farmer, jxf@immagic.com

5. Sakai Ranks #1 in the Category of "Open source or open source compatible applications being most considered right now"

In the article, "The State of Open Source Software," on the Alliance for Higher Education Competitiveness site (http://www.a-hec.org/open_source_state.html), Sakai ranks #1 in the category "Open source or open source compatible applications being most considered right now," coming in at 28%

6. OpenCourseWare Presentation

John Dehlin, Director of Outreach for COSL (Center for Open and Sustainable Learning), Utah State University, will present: "Sharing your Educational Materials with Colleagues and the World through OpenCourseWare"

Two sessions will be held at the University of Michigan on Tuesday, March 21, 2006. To register, go to one of these sites:

https://www-a1.lsa.umich.edu/es_conf/app/DisplaySession.asp?sessionid=1006
https://www-a1.lsa.umich.edu/es_conf/app/DisplaySession.asp?sessionid=1007

Description: In 1999, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) started a project called OpenCourseWare (OCW) and began making their university course materials available to the world, for free, on the Internet. Today, the materials for over 1200 courses can be found on http://ocw.mit.edu. Michigan, through the activities of the School of Information and the Duderstadt Center, has been investigating the value of an OCW site for the University of Michigan. Many other universities, including Johns Hopkins, Harvard, Tufts, Utah State, Notre Dame, and several Japanese universities, are creating OpenCourseWare sites as well. These sites are providing tangible benefit to the participating universities, departments and faculty -- and to learners all over the world. In addition, an OpenCourseWare consortium has recently been formed to provide support, awareness, and membership affiliation to all institutions who are interested in joining the OpenCourseWare movement.

In this session, we will discuss the costs and benefits of OpenCourseWare (from an institutional, professorial, and learner perspective). We will also discuss the state of the OpenCourseWare movement, and the technological infrastructure that is available to assist universities in creating their own OpenCourseWare sites. Efforts to make it easy for faculty to move material from their CTools class site to a UM OCW site will be described. We invite all those interested in discussing OCW possibilities to attend. Faculty who are interested in placing their course materials in a Michigan OCW will be shown how.

7. Vancouver Sakai Conference Updates

From Wende Morgaine:

- Registration for 5th Sakai Conference in Vancouver opens March 10th!

- Developer Bootcamp will be held on the first day of 5th Sakai Conference in Vancouver -- more details to come!

8. Join the Sakai Accessibility Mailing List

From Mike Elledge: If you are interested in being on a mailing list for discussing, reviewing, suggesting or critiquing Sakai Accessibility, please send email to Mike Elledge at melledge@msu.edu

The Sakai Accessibility Page can be found on Confluence:

http://bugs.sakaiproject.org/confluence/display/2ACC/Home

9. Results of the Requirements Community-Wide Poll are Now Available

To see the results, go to:

http://sakaiproject.org/requirements/results.php

The Institutional Representative polling period continues through next Monday, March 13th. Those results should become available the following day. After polling is complete, we will further fine-tune and clarify the Requirements based on comments received during the polling period.

Subsequently, we will strongly encourage existing project teams to consider addressing Requirements that match well with those projects' existing needs and resources. We also hope that highly-ranked Requirements will be those for which individuals in the community volunteer their resources. To that end, we will be facilitating the formation of new project teams around specific Requirements or groups of Requirements. These teams will reflect a balance of both the interests of those in the community volunteering to do the work, and the ease with which the necessary work can be organized into technically feasible, autonomous components.

Many groups have already expressed an interest in working on the Requirements they posted during the Requirements gathering phase. Look forward to a formal call for additional volunteers in the coming weeks. In the meantime, if you are interested in working on a specific Requirement, please don't hesitate to note your intentions via a Jira comment on that Requirement.

10. Events

5th Sakai (with OSP) Conference in Vancouver
May 30 - June 2, 2006

CANS Exploration 45-Minute Live Webcast
Friday, March 17 at 10am (GMT –6)
For more details , go to http://cans.missouri.edu/