Sakai Newsletter

July 27, 2006

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1. The Sakai Foundation Announces the Release of the Sakai Collaboration and Learning Environment, Version 2.2.0

Our thanks go out to the dozens of dedicated volunteers from around the world for their tireless work on this release. With fixes or enhancements covering more than 500 community-reported issues, Sakai 2.2.0 offers improvements in many different areas. Among the highlights are:

- Improved functionality in numerous existing tools

The Resources, Assignments, and Schedule tools are now "group-aware," allowing access to be restricted to groups defined by site administrators. The Help tool incorporates some style improvements and is updated with current content.

- Closer integration with the Open Source Portfolio

Releases of OSP, an existing suite of tools supporting portfolio activities, are now synchronized with Sakai, and OSP is available as a provisional tool in Sakai. Using OSP, individuals can collect items, reflect, design portfolios, and publish them to designated audiences. Instructors and program administrators are able to provide structure and guidance to an individual's work using step-by-step (sequential) wizards, matrices of goals/standards, and hierarchies to organize related work.

- New provisional tools developed by Sakai community members

These include: Message Center, a discussion and messaging tool, and Post'Em, an automated system for reporting grades and comments to individual site members, both developed at Indiana University (USA); Search, a Google-like engine for searching site content, developed at the University of Cambridge (UK); and, Summary Calendar, a compact calendar view for a site or user's Schedule events, developed at the Universidade Fernando Pessoa (Portugal).

- User interface, consistency, and accessibility improvements

FCKeditor, an improved WYSIWYG editor first used in Sakai 2.1, replaces HTMLArea as the default editor throughout Sakai; HTMLArea is still included and can be set to the default if desired. Work to simplify and refine skinning capabilities in Sakai continues in this release, and the three top-scoring skins from the recent Skin Contest (Soy Bean, Tofu, and Bamboo) are included in the distribution. New French and Catalan interface translations and an update to the Japanese one are also available in this release as part of an expansion of internationalization efforts. Accessibility enhancements for this release include accesskeys for common functions (Save, View or Preview, Cancel or Delete, Save Draft, Help) and the extension of heading tags to include form labels and table subjects.

- Major technical enhancements and new developer resources

The restructuring of the Sakai framework into more logical units is complete with this release. Coupled with changes to the main subversion repository, the changes should improve future collaborative development efforts. In addition, Sakai user records now use two sets of identifiers, one internal that is unique and permanent, the other external and changeable depending on organizational needs. Finally, a "Programmer's Café," first presented at the Vancouver conference in June, uses this release as the primary platform to introduce programmers to the Sakai environment and facilitate tool development.

For more information about Sakai and to download the 2.2.0 release, please visit:

   http://www.sakaiproject.org/release

For information on volunteering to work on any aspect of Sakai, contact a Project Lead:

http://bugs.sakaiproject.org/confluence/display/MGT/Directory

Release notes for Sakai 2.2.0 can be found at:

http://source.sakaiproject.org/release/2.2.0/release-notes.html

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2. rSmart Group to Present Their Sakai CLE (Collaborative Learning Environment) with IBM at the LinuxWorld Conference & Expo

We would like to inform you that The rSmart Group will be presenting our Sakai CLE (Collaborative Learning Environment) with IBM at the LinuxWorld Conference & Expo. This event will take place in San Francisco August 14-17 at the Moscone Center.

About The rSmart Group -- The rSmart Group is the leading open source application software company serving the higher education market. rSmart packages, certifies, deploys, and supports a suite of enterprise financial and collaborative learning applications for colleges and universities. As an active member of open source projects like Kuali and Sakai, rSmart is able to provide its clients with software applications specifically designed to meet the unique needs of institutions of higher education. This collaborative approach allows rSmart to offer colleges and universities open source applications that break their dependence on traditional proprietary software vendors. Please visit www.rsmart.com for more information. For more information, visit http://www.rsmart.com

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3. Unicon to Present Open Source Online Campus Solutions at Summer Conferences

Unicon, Inc., the leading independent provider of enterprise portal, collaboration, learning, and integration technology for higher education institutions, will be demonstrating and presenting its latest products and technologies to create, enhance, and expand online campuses at industry conferences in late July and early August 2006. Featured products and technologies include its Academus Web Portal and Web Content Management system, the Sakai Collaboration and Learning Environment, uPortal Web Portal technology, and more.

Academic institutions face a number of challenges and opportunities that can be addressed through open source and online campus technologies. Key issues include: increasing student capacity, generating more revenue, improving the quality of the educational experience, branding and marketing, IT support, teaching and learning, and

student retention. Unicon's strong team has an excellent track record for understanding higher education's needs and the proven ability to implement technology solutions that meet its customer's functional requirements and budget.

See Unicon at the Following Events:

- Campus Technology 2006 (Booth #210) - This annual conference will be held at the Sheraton Boston Hotel in Boston, Massachusetts, on July 31-August 3, 2006

- Merlot Conference 2006 (Booth #2) - To be held August 8-11, 2006 at the Westin Ottawa Hotel in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

On Wednesday, August 9, 2006 from 2:30 PM - 3:30 PM, Unicon VP of Product Management Mike Zackrison will co-present with LiveText a session titled "Strategies for Tenure, Accreditation, and Collaboration." Mike will deliver an update on the community-source Sakai Collaboration and Learning Environment and provide a strategy for getting started.

For information about Unicon, go to: http://www.unicon.net/

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4. It's Not Too Early to Begin Thinking About the Next Sakai Conference!

The next Sakai Conference will be in Atlanta, Georgia, December 5 - 8, 2006.

Registration for the conference is not open yet, but you can book a hotel room. The conference will be held at:

Atlanta Marriott Marquis
265 Peachtree Center Ave.
Atlanta, GA 30303

The room block is already set up. To reserve a room, call and ask for the Sakai Group at 1-800-MARRIOTT, 1-888-855-5701, or 404-521-0000.

Mary Miles
mmiles@umich.edu

5. Article in Campus Technology: "Kicking Off Community Source Week – Sakai Vancouver"

In Campus Technology, this article includes photos of the individuals mentioned. See http://www.campus-technology.com/article.asp?id=18793

Community Matters.

Open source enthusiasts from higher ed institutions around the world converged on Vancouver, BC, this past spring for a week of co-located conferences, including Sakai, OSP, and JA-SIG's uPortal. Attendees of the Sakai conference heard from keynoter Mitchell Baker, "Chief Lizard Wrangler" and president of Mozilla, the technology company widely known for its Internet applications Firefox and Thunderbird. Baker's talk was loaded with perspectives on open source. Her mantra? "The community matters."

Executive Director Named.

The Sakai Foundation Board capped its conference with the announcement that University of Michigan Software Architect and high-performance computing researcher Charles Severance would become the foundation's executive director. Severance's recent work has spanned Sakai, the NEESgrid project, and the NSF Middleware Initiative grid portal project.

In a Blue Moon.

Mike King, IBM's director of market development/education industry, detailed the company's latest contributions to the open source community in higher ed. Software assets include SCORM Tracker, a plug-in for tracking learning materials using the standard; and a presentation converter to convert PowerPoint and Open Office presentations to SCORM objects. IBM also is expanding support for the developer community, and will provide a senior architect to the Sakai community. King talked about the potential for commercial offerings of Sakai, and touched on a plan to pilot a hosted service.

OCW Tool for Sakai.

At one of the many concurrent sessions, University of Michigan Collaborative Technologies Laboratory Director and Sakai Board Chair Joseph Hardin described a new tool being developed to "make it possible for anybody who's using Sakai as their collaboration and learning environment—their course management system—to easily put

their materials, if they wish, in an OCW (OpenCourseWare) site and make them available to the world."

Commercial Support Grows.

Institutions interested in Sakai don't have to feel limited by their internal capacity to work with open source software, because vendor support for just about any configuration is available today. rSmart introduced its own commercial Sakai CLE (Collaborative Learning Environment) at the conference, and a large team provided extensive information and demos. President Chris Coppola, who also is on the board of the Sakai Foundation, summed up his enthusiasm for Sakai: "I'm proud that so many of us at rSmart are working among this amazing community of people with such an important mission and unprecedented potential to achieve it."

Demo Fest.

Unicon, Elluminate, and other vendors, plus institutional developers such as Virginia Tech, Indiana University, and others, offered a mix of technical demos ranging from discipline-specific tools, quizzes, and assessment tools, to podcasting and IBM's "Classroom of the Future" scenarios.

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6. Alan Berg's Blog on the Free Software Magazine and Linux Today Websites: "I've been browsing: Sakai 2.2 released and new distros to try"

From the blog: "Released Thursday was Sakai 2.2. With a growing community of Educational establishments using this product as their online presence or a significant part thereof; it is only a matter of time before Sakai breaks into the mainstream conscious. If you have a spare five minutes and a reasonably fast connection then I would say it is a fun product to try. The quick demo gives you an idea of the products potential. And it's just a simple matter of unpacking and running a startup script.

"I must admit I'm not exactly neutral on the subject! I had the pleasure of reading the distribution groups and interacting with a number of the positive thinkers, we call developers, as part of my full time function at the University of Amsterdam. It is a pleasure to see the product out the door after a 15 cycle QA bash and it goes without saying that I wish everyone luck with the next vigorously QA enforced software cycle. Nice to see product quality and functionality roughly marching in parallel with each other."

To see the full text, go to either this site:

http://www.freesoftwaremagazine.com/node/1690

or this site:

http://www.linuxtoday.com/news_story.php3?ltsn=2006-07-25-017-26-OS-RL

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7. Michigan Jewish Institute (MJI) to Deploy Sakai this Fall

"The Michigan Jewish Institute (MJI), located in Oak Park and West Bloomfield, Michigan, is planning to deploy Sakai for the fall 2006 semester. We used it in a test mode during the winter term 2006, and were very pleased with the capabilities found with Sakai. It's a great alternative to Blackboard."

Kerry Sanders, Director
Network Services
CIS/Cooperative Computing Program

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8. rSmart Expands Management Team

The rSmart Group has announced that Rob Howard has joined the company as Vice President, Client Services. Mr. Howard has extensive background in the implementation and support of enterprise solutions for higher education, both as an IT manager and consultant at Georgian College in Ontario, Canada. He most recently held the positions of Senior Project Manager and Account Manager with SunGard Higher Education (formerly SCT).

Mr. Howard will be responsible for overseeing and expanding the rSmart network™ (RSN), a web-based, personalized support portal designed for the unique needs of schools adopting rSmart supported open source software. "I'm delighted to join this creative and dynamic group of professionals. The adoption of open source solutions in education is on the cusp of a huge expansion world wide and I am proud to be part of the team of innovators developing a new generation of commercial services offerings for this important market," Howard said.

The rSmart Group
www.rsmart.com

9. New Lead Developer Position Open at UC Berkeley

University of California, Berkeley, is now accepting applications for the position listed at: http://jobs.berkeley.edu/   (job # 004777).

This is a great opportunity for an experienced developer who enjoys or is intrigued by the prospect of working in the Higher Ed eLearning space while living in the Bay Area. Feel free to contact me if you have questions or want additional details: oliver@media.berkeley.edu.

Oliver Heyer
Acting Development Manager
Educational Technology Services UC Berkeley

10. LAMS Conference 2006 -- Deadline for Papers extended

The first international Learning Activity Management System (LAMS) Conference will take place at the Conservatorium of Music, University of Sydney, 6 - 8 December 2006.

Registration for the conference is now open, and the due date for conference papers and abstracts has been extended to Wednesday, 9 August, 2006. Also, delegates who would like to give a presentation, but who do not wish to submit a full or concise paper, may submit a proposal in the form of an abstract (see guidelines and categories):

   http://lamsfoundation.org/lams2006/papers.htm

For more information about the conference, go to:

   http://lamsfoundation.org/lams2006/index.htm

11. Events

Campus Technology 2006 Conference
July 31 – August 3, 2006
Sheraton Boston Hotel
Boston, MA
http://www.campus-technology.com/conferences/summer2005/

Merlot International Conference
August 8 - 11, 2006
Westin Ottawa Hotel
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
http://conference.merlot.org/2006/

LinuxWorld Conference & Expo
August 14 – 17, 2006
Moscone Center
San Francisco, California
http://www.linuxworldexpo.com/live/12/

1st European Sakai Day
September 6 – 7, 2006
Luebeck, Germany
http://www.oncampus.de/sakai

6th Sakai Conference
December 5 - 8, 2006
Atlanta Marriott Marquis
Atlanta, Georgia

LAMS Conference 2006
First International Learning Activity Management System (LAMS) Conference
December 6 – 8, 2006
Conservatorium of Music
University of Sydney
http://lamsfoundation.org/lams2006/index.htm