SAKAI FOUNDATION ENGAGES SOFTWARE FREEDOM LAW CENTER TO ADVISE ON ELEARNING PATENTS THREAT

August 17, 2006 -- Ann Arbor, Michigan. In the wake of recent efforts to limit the free and open sharing of innovation for online learning, the Sakai Foundation has retained the Software Freedom Law Center (SFLC), an organization directed by Eben Moglen and dedicated to providing advice and legal services to protect and advance free and open source software, to evaluate the recent Blackboard patent, its impact on the educational community, and to advise on legal matters regarding the patent.

Students, faculty, tax payers, and the general public have benefited from a decades long pattern of true community- and user-driven innovation in educational software. This work has been widely shared to further enhance the effective use of Information Technology for teaching, learning, and research. The Sakai Foundation and Sakai's open source collaboration and learning software embody these values by giving anyone the freedom to innovate, reuse, and share in the area of online education and research.

The recent announcement by Blackboard that it is attempting to assert patent rights over simple and longstanding online technologies as applied to the area of course management systems and e-learning technologies, and its subsequent litigation against a smaller commercial competitor constitutes a threat to the effective and open development of software for higher education and the values underlying such open activities.

Sakai has engaged the SFLC to assess and respond to the patent, but the Foundation believes that the core issue is much broader than the current technology in question. Sakai is working with the SFLC and others of like mind to develop a long term common defense effort, and encourages everyone to contribute to the SFLC to support its efforts now and in the future to aggressively challenge bad patents in the area of educational and research software.

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The Software Freedom Law Center (http://www.softwarefreedom.org/) is an organization which provides legal representation and other law-related services to protect and advance Free and open source software. The SFLC is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, and donations made to it are fully tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law.

Sakai (www.sakaiproject.org) is an open source Collaboration and Learning Environment. Many users of Sakai deploy it to support teaching and learning, ad hoc group collaboration, electronic portfolios and research collaboration. Sakai is a free and open source product that is built and maintained by the Sakai community. The Sakai Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to coordinating activities around Sakai and the Sakai community to insure Sakai's long-term viability.

Contacts:

Dr. Charles Severance, Executive Director
Sakai Foundation
csev@umich.edu

Joseph Hardin, Chairman
Sakai Foundation Board of Directors
hardin@umich.edu

Dr. Brad Wheeler, Vice Chairman
Sakai Foundation Board of Directors
Director of Sakai Commercial Affiliates
bwheeler@indiana.edu