



Sakai Newsletter

October 5, 2006

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1. New Sakai Commercial Affiliate: Serensoft

From their brochure:

“Serensoft provides various technology and management services to colleges and universities throughout the United States. Through our ‘Providence Methodology’ and its related focus on customer service, we have developed close relationships with our clients, and they have come to depend upon our flexible and customized solutions to their technology needs.”

“Over nine months ago we began our involvement in the Sakai and OSP community with an eye toward contributing to the community and benefiting our client base with

expanded expertise. We have several instances running that we have begun using to demonstrate capabilities to institutions.”

For more information about Serensoft and Sakai, go to:

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

2. Atlanta Conference Updates

Greetings, all y'all, from the Sakai Atlanta Conference Program Committee. The 6th Sakai Foundation conference coming in December is shaping up to be one of the best to date. We have facilities both spacious and convenient at the Atlanta Marriott, including proper support for wireless internet connection and plenty of room for BOFs, a full program of workshops and hands-on training, and a plethora of entertaining options when you're ready for downtime. We're even considering a video track with Sakai-oriented videos competing for prizes. The Program Committee is actively seeking your input and participation. First, please register! Your proposals are still being solicited, or if you have an idea for a session to do in cooperation with others, contact the program chair. And, as always with a participant-run conference, we need volunteers both as conveners and recorders. Recorders will receive equipment and training for podcasting, and will be able to upload their results right at the conference.

Get moving, and we look forward to seeing you there!

Important dates:

NOW: Conference registration is open. Hotel reservations are open. The rooms are going fast – reserve now for best selection. The hotel conference rate guarantee closes November 6th. The conference rate is effective December 3 through December 10.

September 30 Proposal submission closes. Note: Proposals are still being accepted, but hurry!

October 15 Accepted presenters notified and tentative schedule published.

November 1 BOF signup begins.

November 6 Hotel conference rate guarantee ends.

December 5 Preconference events. Sakai for beginners, Sakaibrary, hands-on workshops, case studies, and more.

December 6 Conference opens. Keynote speaker, opening ceremonies, Wednesday reception.

December 7 Tech demos and poster presentations at evening reception.

December 8 Final day. Closing ceremonies, committee/staff debriefing.

Brigid Cassidy
Sakai Atlanta Conference Program Committee

3. EIfEL Organising the Fourth International ePortfolio Conference

EIfEL (European Institute for E-Learning) is organising the Fourth International ePortfolio conference this coming October 11 - 13. We are preparing a second Plugfest as well, and there will be an exhibition area during the conference.

Here are some useful links:

Conference home page: <http://www.eife-l.org/news/ep2006/>

Plugfest: <http://www.eife-l.org/news/ep2006/plugfest>

Current sponsors and exhibitors: <http://www.eife-l.org/news/ep2006/sponsorandexhibit>

Looking forward to discussing your participation in ePortfolio 2006,

Kind regards,

Philippe Verstraete
philippe.verstraete@eife-l.org

4. Introducing New 2.1.x Branch Manager

Please join me in welcoming Brian Jorgensen on board as Branch Manager for Sakai 2.1.x. He has graciously volunteered to take over the task from Lance Speelmon and David Haines, whose universities moved on to 2.2 quite awhile ago and who no longer have the time to contribute for this task. Thanks to Lance and David for their efforts bringing this far.

As Brian is just getting started, please give him a chance to find his footing before you bombard him with too many questions :) He has already started to put together an informative 2.1.x Confluence page:

<http://issues.sakaiproject.org/confluence/x/bm4>

I would encourage those of you interested in 2.1.x to contact Brian and let him know you're out there. I'm not sure myself how "big" the 2.1.x community is at this point. (If you are running Sakai in production, regardless of the version, let me put in a plug that you make sure your information is present and/or up-to-date in the list of Sakai Implementations, <http://issues.sakaiproject.org/confluence/x/ukE>)

Peter Knoop
Sakai Project Coordinator

5. Article: Vula - University of Cape Town's New Connection

As of 2008, Vula will replace both Connect and WebCT, which are being phased out over a two-year time-frame. Vula will become the central learning and collaboration environment at UCT.

Vula, an initiative in operation since February 2006, has so far been used in over 100 courses across six faculties (representing 6300 users), supporting more than 50 project sites.

The Centre for Education Technology has been in charge of Vula's development. According to Stephen Marquard, Learning Technologies Co-ordinator at the Centre, Vula has generally been very well received by both students and staff. Student tutor, Amrish Bisson, is a big fan of the new system. "As a lecturer and Head Tutor in the Economics and Finance department, I have found Vula to be one of the best tools, not only to streamline administration in the course, but also to communicate with lecturers, tutors, and students alike," said Bisson.

However, some students have raised concerns about having to switch to Vula; criticizing UCT for wanting to fix something that is not broken. In response to concerns levelled, Marquard replied: "Vula is built on an open-source platform developed by the Sakai Project, a consortium of universities. This means that it is therefore more flexible and sustainable than either buying an off-the-shelf commercial package, or developing the software completely on our own."

Asked what changes users can expect, Marquard added that: "It has a different look and feel, but also has new capabilities, and can support a broader range of uses. For example, students can use it for project groups by creating new worksites. New tools include a Wiki tool, which can be used for collaborative writing or developing a knowledge base, and a Search tool, which will search all content, announcements and messages in Vula sites. UCT will also be adding the best custom-developed features from Connect to Vula, such as the ability to send SMS messages."

The word "Vula" means "open" in various African languages. It was chosen from over 100 submissions from UCT staff and students in a naming competition in 2005. Vula is looking to open new doors to all its users. "In the long term it will ultimately be more beneficial to both staff and students," Marquard confidently predicts.

Grant Shub

Varsity, The Official Student Newspaper of the University of Cape Town
September, 2006

6. New Online Learning and Collaboration Tool for NWU

Education at the North-West University (NWU) will soon receive a new lease of life with the introduction of an online collaboration and learning tool, called eFundi. The tool, powered by Sakai (an online collaborative and learning project), is aimed at supporting teaching, collaboration, learning and research in higher education cycles.

Joseph Hardin, director of Collaborative Technologies Laboratory at the University of Michigan and Board Chairperson of the Sakai foundation, was recently invited to the NWU to present a workshop on best ways to implement the tool.

However, according to NWU project coordinator, Boeta Pretorius, the process of putting the tool in place is already underway at the university. "We intend to start with the implementation early next year, if all goes according to plan," he said. "We start with three pilots, one per campus, starting this week and running for the rest of the year."

Upon implementation, a user support group will be mobilised to support the effective running of the project.

Sakai is a free open source product built and maintained by the Sakai community.

eFundi comes from the Zulu word Funda which means learn. Fundi is a master of learning and the e in front of Fundi stands for electronic.

7. Sakai Announces June 2007 Amsterdam Conference

The Sakai Foundation is pleased to announce that the June 2007 Sakai Community Conference will be held in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. The dates will be Tuesday - Thursday, June 12-14, with pre and post conference sessions and activities on Monday the 11th, and Friday, the 15th. This will be the first European venue for the Sakai Community Conference and we look forward to working with all our community and especially the Universiteit van Amsterdam on the conference. The site will be the new Movenpick Hotel Amsterdam City Center for the Tuesday-Thursday meetings. See you in Atlanta this December, and Amsterdam next June.

Joseph Hardin
Sakai Conference Chair

The Universiteit van Amsterdam and the City of Amsterdam are very pleased that Amsterdam will host the Sakai 2007 June conference. The university will work closely with the Sakai Foundation and the Sakai Community to make the meeting a huge success. The conference itself is happening in one of the most modern buildings of Amsterdam in an astonishing setting on the waterfront, next to the canal area and the city center, and we intend to host the pre- and post- conference meetings in university buildings in the historic center. The open cosmopolitan spirit of Amsterdam fits perfectly with the open source spirit of the Sakai community.

Frank Benneker
Universiteit van Amsterdam

8. The Michigan Higher Education Sakai Conference

On October 3, IBM hosted the Michigan Higher Education Sakai Conference in Lansing, Michigan. The purpose of the conference was to introduce Sakai and show how it fits in both large and small institutional settings.

Speakers included James Duderstadt, President Emeritus of the University of Michigan, Joseph Hardin and John Leasia, University of Michigan, Hannah Reeves, The rSmart Group, Daniel Tyger and Noah Botimer, Saginaw Valley State University, and Jenny Chow, IBM.

9. Open Source Without a Roomful of Programmers

rSmart has received editorial coverage (as an Editor's Top Pick) in the October issue of Campus Technology's "EDUCAUSE FLOOR SHOPPER" feature regarding open source support in higher education:

“If you’ve just attended sessions on the Sakai Collaborative Learning Environment or Quali Financials and want to get involved but don’t think you have enough technical expertise on your campus, you’re certainly not alone. Open source proponents often hear, “But how on earth will we support it without an army of programmers?” Whether you have reservations about open source or are a full-fledged supporter, there’s no question that open source is a hot topic in higher ed technology. So before you leave EDUCAUSE, check out rSmart’s booth. The company offers versions of both rSmart Sakai CLE and rSmart Quali Financials as boxed products, and can help you tailor them to your campus. With rSmart Sakai CLE, you can run a collaborative learning environment and choose from more than 30 tools to help you facilitate course, project, or portfolio work. rSmart Quali Financials is available immediately (as of October 2006) for implementation at institutions with modest financial systems needs. And if your campus needs support, just ask the rSmart team. Booth 535/537.”

Campus Technology

<http://www.campustechnology.com/article.asp?id=19328&p=2>

10. Unicon Announces Reseller Agreement with Zimbra to Provide Email & Calendar Products to Higher Ed

Unicon, Inc., has announced an agreement to resell the Zimbra Collaboration Suite (Network Edition) of email, calendar, and messaging products to the higher education market. Unicon will provide the Zimbra products to academic institutions via direct sales, as an ASP hosted service, and as a dedicated hosted solution. With educational discounts, Zimbra email and messaging has a very low Total Cost of Ownership for institutions and allows them to provide robust, feature-rich solution for their students and also generate branding awareness and advertising revenue from merchants locally and nationwide. Zimbra supports virtually all desktop environments including: Linux, Macintosh, and Windows.

Unicon will be demonstrating the Zimbra products at the upcoming EDUCAUSE Conference (Booth #1121) in Dallas, TX this October 9-12, 2006 and at the League for Innovation 2006 Conference on Information Technology (Booth #401) in Charlotte, NC on October 22-25, 2006.

"Zimbra's powerful, AJAX-based user interface for administrators and end users provides a tremendous opportunity for institutions looking to provide enhanced communications for email, calendaring, and mobile technology to their ever-changing student, faculty and alumni populations," stated John C. Blakley, CEO of Unicon, Inc. "Institutions can benefit from the powerful TCO advantage of Zimbra, the innovation of a modern messaging platform and the support for mobile devices and clients like Microsoft Outlook."

"We welcome Unicon to the Zimbra partner community and are excited to work together to accelerate the adoption of the Zimbra Collaboration Suite to more educational institutions," said Scott Dietzen, President and CTO. "Together, we enable educational institutions to quickly and cost effectively implement a modern messaging and collaboration solution that today's universities require to support their digital lifestyle."

Unicon Product/Service Offerings with Zimbra:

Direct Sales & Implementation: For this solution, Unicon would work with the institution to determine functional specification and integration needs, and then implement the Network edition of the Zimbra Collaboration Suite including email and calendaring as part of the institution's Web portal and other online campus services.

ASP Hosted eMail solutions: Within this environment, Unicon provides a low cost, flexible, highly functional, hosted solution of the Network edition of the Zimbra Collaboration Suite. Unicon provides full System Administration and Technical Support for its customers in this environment. In addition, Unicon provides various tiers of storage and flexible setup configurations.

Dedicated Hosted eMail solution: This environment provides dedicated hardware for the installation of the Zimbra Collaboration Suite for our clients. Within the dedicated environment, clients can have complete control over the configuration without any limitations on the number of eMail boxes. Unicon provides optional system administration and customer support for either the Open-Source or Network Edition of the Zimbra solution.

Information About the Zimbra Collaboration Suite and Zimbra:

Zimbra Collaboration Suite (ZCS) 4.0 is modern, innovative messaging and collaboration. For more information, see: <http://www.zimbra.com/products/solutions.html>

11. University of Cape Town Poll Tool Voted a Hit

The University Of Cape Town, driven by a deadline to have a poll tool available for voting in our student elections, is almost ready. See Voting figure 1.

(https://www.connect.uct.ac.za/sakaiwiki/index.php/See_Voting_figure_1)



The screenshot shows a web interface for a poll tool. At the top, there is a 'Vote' button and a help icon. Below that are links for 'Add Poll' and 'Permissions'. The main section is titled 'Poll list' and contains a table with the following data:

Question	Opening	Closing	Results	Remove?
Which of the following statements comes closest to your views on the origin and development of human beings?	15-Sep-2006 01:00	30-Sep-2006 21:00	Results	

Below the table is an 'Update' button.

Even though it was used during the voting process which ended last week, we still need to make sure all functionality requirements are met and take it through a QA process, before releasing it publicly.

Our legacy (course management) system has a poll tool which is used to gauge students' opinion and the results are usually made available immediately for all to see. We have seen usage of the tool grow so much and become such a necessity, that we could not imagine telling staff to migrate to Vula (our version of Sakai) without there being a similar alternative. So, when asked whether Vula could be used in the student elections, we said "yes" — even though we had not even started the developing poll tool! We saw it as an opportunity to increase the awareness of Vula. We posted each candidate's information on Vula and they also included our URL on their election posters which was advertised all over campus. Only approximately 10% of students logged on to vote, so we look forward to improving that next year.

The tool allows one to set a question, or set thereof, to the participants of a site who then select up to a specified maximum number of options. It also allows one to set the availability period and the results are dynamically created and made available to those with appropriate permissions. The results include the number of votes, overall percentage each option received, as well as how many people voted.

Setting up a poll is easy. See Voting figure 2.

(https://www.connect.uct.ac.za/sakaiwiki/index.php/See_Voting_figure2)

Edit a poll

Question

Additional Instructions (if applicable)

Opening

Closing Date

Options

[Add option](#)

Human beings have developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life, but God guided this process. [Edit](#)

God created human beings pretty much in their present form at one time within the last 10,000 years or so. [Edit](#)

Human beings have developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life, but God had no part in this process. [Edit](#)

Limits:

What is the minimum number of Answer Options that can be selected?

What is the maximum number of Answer Options that can be selected?

Release results:

- from opening date
- never
- to participants who have voted
- after closing date

1. Type in a question
2. If necessary provide additional instructions e.g. You may select a maximum of 3 options from the list
3. Select the availability periods and when results should be released
4. Indicate the maximum and minimum number of answer options that a participant may select
5. Create the answer options
6. Sit back and watch the votes roll in!

Greg Doyle
Centre for Educational Technology, University of Cape Town
<http://www.cet.uct.ac.za>

12. Events

ElfEL Fourth International ePortfolio Conference

October 11 - 13

Oxford, England

<http://www.eife-l.org/news/ep2006/>

Unicon's Sakai Developer Training with Mark Norton

October 16 - 18, 2006 in

Chandler, Arizona

For more information or to register for the workshop, visit the training section of

www.unicon.net

6th Sakai Conference

December 5 - 8, 2006

Atlanta Marriott Marquis

Atlanta, Georgia

http://www.sakaiproject.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=418&Itemid=567

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>

Sakai Amsterdam Conference

Movenpick Hotel Amsterdam City Center

June 12 - 14, 2007

Amsterdam, The Netherlands

www.sakaiproject.org