

Report to Sakai Board on Section Awareness for the 2.1 Release

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A. Section Awareness, as scoped for the Sectioning and section aware Tools.

Please see the 2.1 Section Awareness Diagram at the end of this document. It is intended to answer a few basic questions about the relationship of the sectioning tool and the 3 section aware applications, Tests & Quizzes, Gradebook and Announcements. It also gives a general view of what various roles are able to do in the sectioning tool and the section aware applications themselves. A couple of things to note:

1. The requirement to reconcile SIS data with Sakai data has been dropped. It is far too complex to tackle for this release. That is why the sectioning tool is either in an essentially locked down mode if SIS section data is made available to it or completely editable when there is no SIS section data. This black and white split is **not** a long term solution.
2. How the sections are created and populated does not matter to the section aware tools themselves. What you're able to accomplish in T&Q, Gradebook and announcements is identical, assuming all the relevant data is provided to the Course Management API.
3. Subsites based on sections are not part of the overall section awareness effort's scope. There is more on the issue of subsites in the meeting summary below.

It's important to understand that the diagram does not cover various critical, complex dependencies. These largely pertain to Sakai site management -- how is it that sites are created and populated (as opposed to sections) -- and what relationship does it have to course management. The Sectioning Tool does **not** control the membership of a course site. The meeting summary below treats various issues related to this general theme.

B. Summary of 2005-08-08 Meeting on Section Awareness Dependencies

Attendees: Mark Norton (SEPP), Craig Counterman (MIT), Daisy Flemming, Marc Brierly, Charles Kerns (Stanford), Daphne Ogle, Chuck Severance, Joanne Sui, Zhen Qian (Michigan)

Meeting Objective:

The goal of this meeting is to ensure that Sakai work on which the sectioning and section aware tools are dependent aligns with the overall requirements and schedule of the 2.1 section awareness effort.

1. Framework issues

A. Sakai currently does not have a way of pulling in section related data. These "providers" will be written by early October according to Chuck

B. Section awareness requires a new OOTB Sakai role, TA. This will be supported.

C. Scheduling of framework related work is to evolve over the next couple of weeks from the elaboration of the design documents Chuck is working on. Definitive answers to some fundamental framework support questions may be still up to be 6 weeks out.

2. Course Management API

A. A course site will have a one to one relationship with a course offering. This assumes a simple parent-child structure with zero or more secondary sections per site. There are enterprise integration, functional and UI implications for this that have not yet been fully treated as of this writing. See section 3.C.

B. The requirements of the Sectioning Tool API are actively informing the fine tuning of the Course Management API.

3. Legacy Admin Tools

The sectioning effort assumed that other administrative application level changes would be kept to the minimum required to meet the needs of the sectioning effort as it was defined in Boston.

A. Chuck: Generic groups in scope, as are subsites based on sections. "In scope" here means that these will not only be supported by the framework, but exposed in the UI for 2.1 as well. There seemed to be general agreement that the sectioning capability is a superset of grouping and that the former ideally would be built on the latter. In reality, a lack of time dictates that these will be parallel efforts.

B. Oliver: As it stands 2.1, will have A) 3 section aware tools at the site level – GB, SAM, Announcements B) a generic grouping capability and C) the ability to create subsites out of sections. UI and spec work for the latter 2 has not yet started. It must start ASAP, as the interplay among all of these should be designed carefully. The issue of who will do this work will be raised in the tools team VTC on Weds., 8.10. Again, allowing for the combination of section aware site level tools with "site aware" tools at the subsite level is a very complex UI problem: "Why can't I set up my own gradebook for the section 20 subsite so that it works with the gradebook the instructor has for the lecture?"

C. Marc and Daphne's redesign of the legacy admin tools was not discussed.

Addendum: The one to one relationship between course offering and site has implications for the design of worksite set up and site info. Basically, the current check boxes that allow a user to associate multiple "rosters" -- whether these are courses or sections -- will probably need to be replaced with radio buttons. The work of combining course rosters and associating them with a single site is an enterprise integration issue. In other words, there needs to be some sort of institutional metadata "glue" that combines the rosters into a single course offering as required by the Course Management API and the Sectioning Tool UI.

The section awareness effort as it is defined, then, requires what may be perceived as a loss of site management "flexibility" within Sakai, since it does not offer replacement functionality via subsites. The Sakai project lead has, however, decided that generic groups and subsites are to be delivered with 2.1, at both the framework and application levels, essentially making up for the lack within section awareness (naturally, groups and subsites have uses outside of the course context).

In my opinion the time and resources to do anything beyond what can perhaps be accomplished at the framework level simply don't exist. Because timing and resources require that it be a partial move towards meeting the various Higher Ed course management use cases (with a minimum set of dependencies), section awareness may well entail handling Sakai site management in 2.1 differently, without a fully adequate replacement for current practices.

SECTION AWARENESS in SAKAI 2.1

