

## **The Sakai Sponsor's overview of Sakai Pilot**

Date: June 12, 2006

To: Faculty Committee on Educational Technology

From: Sakai Pilot Sponsors

We are writing to convey what we have learned to date from the Sakai Pilot. Please find attached our current answers to the questions posed in your call for participation of March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2004. The detailed answers represent the consensus opinion of the Sakai work team, which drew from a number of campus departments.

The UCLA Pilot involved 37 courses over the past year and was supported by 9 part-time staff members from across four different departments. Three versions of Sakai were introduced; each integrated with ISIS for authentication to the system and Registrar data for authorization to classes. Based on these experiences, the Pilot team gained experience to be able to answer the FCET's questions. More specifically, these questions indicated the areas of greatest need in terms of resource requirements to achieve greater utility from the current Sakai releases.

One key question we have been tracking is whether the Sakai community and the Sakai effort could transition successfully to solely community funding as Mellon funding ended, and create a sustainable structure. Based on the past year, the team believes that Sakai is a viable option for UCLA. We note that the Sakai Educational Partners Program (SEPP) has continued to grow, a broad-based board of directors for the Sakai Foundation was elected, the first set of Sakai fellows was announced, and major corporations continue to become affiliates. We have also been evaluating whether UCLA could demonstrate the ability to sustain a collaborative effort. Paralleling SEPP, the UCLA Sakai work team and sponsors group have shown the ability of cross-departmental groups to work effectively together.

Apart from the details of the answers to your original questions, there are some general lessons to be drawn from our experience to date.

### *Organizational Lessons.*

We have successfully demonstrated a cultural shift and the real possibility of ongoing collaboration between distinct operational units at UCLA. Participants in both the pilot sponsors group and the project work team were drawn from many campus departments, and over time different players were more or less active in the project. At every stage of the process, we learned a lot from one another and the experience helped to develop a shared understanding of all that is involved in running a CMS that is being used by multiple constituencies. We found this to be a compelling model, which can serve as an example of how to operate a centralized system with distributed management and stakeholder governance.

At the same time, we encountered obstacles to this kind of sustained collaboration. Early on, we noticed that it was sometimes difficult for the project managers to exercise the authority they needed. It would be a good idea to formalize things a little (via job descriptions, reporting lines and performance evaluations). We encountered institutional barriers, such as the fact that the staff achievement award funds are set up in a way that makes it difficult to award cross-departmental teams.

Or the fact that data center schedules for power outages were sensitive to fiscal close dates, but not to the end of the academic quarter.

We are proud of what we have done so far, by reorganizing and redirecting local resources, but we are also keenly aware of how much we have been unable to do because of the limited resources available and the voluntary nature of participation. A substantial infusion of new resources, including dedicated staff, would make a big difference.

Despite these issues, however, the lesson to be taken away is that this kind of cooperation is a realistic option for UCLA.

#### *Participation in the Sakai Community.*

As our report notes, there have been several Sakai conferences which team members attended. In each case, they brought back reports of an increasingly vibrant international community. It is not a starry eyed community; even early adopters, such as UC Merced, were aware of the rough edges of earlier code releases (there have been three or four since we started the pilot). It is also an open community: all issues are out in the open, and things like usability, initially a fraught topic, are clearly being addressed.

Before the Sakai Foundation was launched, there was something of a divide between the “core schools” that started the project and the Sakai partner schools. But this is now giving way to a genuine meritocracy, led by an elected board and driven by the contributions of confident participant institutions. It is also now clear that enough resources are being committed, as the initial Mellon and Hewlett Packard funding ends, for the project to flourish. The community procedures for setting priorities and focus development resources are developing at a healthy pace. Notably, many of our sister UC campuses are now both using and contributing to Sakai. At the same time, the recent release of the first commercial version of Sakai (rSmart Sakai CLE; [www.rsmart.com](http://www.rsmart.com)) and the launch at UNISA in Africa of an instance supporting 100,000 distance education students, demonstrate some of the flexibility of both the system and the community.

#### *Future of the Pilot Project.*

A couple of months ago, the Sakai Pilot sponsors decided that we would continue committing resources to the project at the current level, either until a campus level decision is made or until July 2007, whichever comes first. There are of course many things we could do as we continue the pilot. We would like to get experience with developing integrated Sakai tools and perhaps explore the Graduate Tools package, for instance. We could also attempt to create a local community, mirroring the Sakai Educational Partners Program, to garner resources to support new pilot partners. We are looking forward to exploring these possibilities further, and to providing any other information that the FCET requires.

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