

# SAKAI SUCCESS STORY

## STANFORD UNIVERSITY, PALO ALTO CALIFORNIA

Sakai provides  
**SIGNIFICANT POTENTIAL &  
OPPORTUNITY**



**In** 2003, Stanford University found itself at a crossroad. The learning management system (LMS) was becoming a more significant component of teaching and learning, and the university's homegrown system was too expensive to maintain. Assessing the options, all of the commercial LMS platforms lacked significant functionality that Stanford required and the flexibility its faculty and students demanded. Recognizing significant potential and opportunity, Stanford joined the University of Michigan, the University of Indiana and MIT to jointly develop the next generation of coursework tools, Sakai.

Ms. Lois Brooks, director of academic computing at Stanford explains. "We buy a great deal of software. We are very selective about what we choose to develop. Supporting the development of Sakai was critical to us because it supports that which is most core to the university. We must provide learning

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and collaboration experiences that reflect the quality of Stanford. Sakai was the only option that enabled this.”

“Today, we believe Sakai to be the most adaptable, interoperable, reliable, and scalable platform for learning and collaboration,” continues Ms. Brooks. “With a development community that includes more than 1,000 developers, more than 100 contributing academic institutions, and the support of many companies, its rate of innovation is unparalleled. In addition, because of the community development and because I can leverage the infrastructure for multiple modes of learning and academic collaboration, the ability to have a continually improving system is affordable.”

# A STUDENT CENTERED EXPERIENCE

Built by educators for educators, Sakai provides a remarkably student-centered platform for learning. Dr. Alyssa O'Brien, lecturer in Stanford's Program in Writing and Rhetoric, explains, "I have used most of the learning management systems available today. Sakai provides the most efficient and tailored learning experience for students."

"Other systems have a lock-step interface. With Sakai, there is great configurability. I love that I can shift the content of the interface available to my students. I prioritize my students' focus by adding, deleting and re-organizing components to a course. As a course progresses, I add links as they become relevant. This prevents students from being mired down in material before they require it."

Ms. Helen Josephine, head librarian for engineering, agrees. "Stanford University Libraries is the eighth largest library in the US. As librarians, we grapple with how to make this significant and ever-expanding array of resources and services most readily accessible to students and faculty. Sakai is a critical medium to achieve this aim. The Sakai platform allows us to integrate relevant and supporting resources and library content into each course. This allows students and faculty to access everything in one place, and to have it available anywhere. The most relevant research and articles become persistent tools, integral to each course."

## Rich Assessment and Evaluation

In order to ensure that class time is dedicated to those things that provide the greatest value to students, Stanford University Language Center encourages all of its instructors to move formative assessment and evaluation outside the classroom. With the ability to integrate flexible tools including audio, audio recording, and the use of video, Sakai enables innovative types of assessment to be administered online to all students. In addition, the tools and medium allow students to gain rich and broad feedback that would normally only be possible in a one-on-one meeting with the instructor.

Dr. Ken Romeo, academic technology specialist for the Language Center, uses Sakai to improve his Oral Presentation course for foreign graduate students. With the ability to easily upload and post videos, Sakai provides the opportunity for students to gain more experience presenting, as well as the opportunity to gather richer feedback. "I video-capture students' practice presentations and post the individual files in each student's drop box. The students watch these and write a reflection or they come to my office and we play back and discuss the video. For years, teachers have tried to do this with VHS tape, USB drives, and email, but copying and transporting the presentations have been prohibitively time-consuming. We are able to do more presentations and the students are able to comment on their own work more accurately."

Dr. Christine Alfano, assistant director of the program in writing and rhetoric, also uses Sakai for presentations. "Prior to using Sakai, the peer feedback during presentations was only moderately helpful. Students did not want to provide constructive feedback, or, if they did, it sounded harsh. In addition, when good, constructive feedback was provided, it was often difficult for those presenting to internalize the feedback on the spot. With Sakai's discussion threads, students receive a great deal of rich, substantive feedback on their presentations. The comments are archived for the students so they can read and internalize the feedback at a later time."

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# TRANSFORMING THE CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE

Although Dr. O'Brien appreciates the efficiency and productivity gains achieved with Sakai, it is the improved educational experience that is most compelling for her. "In one of my courses, students were each asked to bring an article to class to discuss. The class was very shy, and I was unable to engage them in discussion. After an unsuccessful start, I asked my students to enter the chat feature in Sakai and to post short synopses of their articles. The students then began to dialogue about one another's articles online within the chat feature. By the end of the class period, we had 13 pages of incredibly rich and sophisticated online discussion. It was a powerful experience for all of us. At the end of that experience, we discussed the dynamics we experienced that day, and worked together to build understanding about how we could bring that level of dialogue into live discussion. In addition to providing an innovative medium for engagement, the process allowed us to reflect, to understand the group dynamics that prevented an initial rich discussion in class, and to improve that moving forward."

Dr. O'Brien is also excited about the possibilities Sakai creates globally. "I work with people in Sweden, Egypt, Singapore and Poland. They all use Sakai. As we look at the increased focus for internationalization and the growing trend for multi-disciplinary and multi-institution research, Sakai provides the key that makes this not only possible, but also easy. It is really at the forefront of education."

Dr. Alfano appreciates the power of consolidating such a breadth of tools in one learning space. "I am a proficient technology user and I truly benefit from having so many tools available to me under 'one roof.' From my home page to the discussion forum to the chat room and the wiki, I am able to create a significantly better learning experience for my students."

Dr. Alfano notes that Sakai also supports innovation among instructors who are less-savvy technology users. "Sakai brings many tools to the novice technology user very easily. An incredible breadth of tools right there with no need for further research, investigation or registration. Seeing the tools, available and easily accessible, instructors begin to ask themselves how they might use them. This creates new opportunities and possibilities, and lowers the barriers to entry. It is very user friendly."

## Looking Forward

"In its infancy, no one knew what online commerce would look like," explains Dr. Romeo. "Amazon.com fundamentally shaped both the practical reality and the vision of online commerce in the greater economy. In the same way, we have no blueprint for online teaching, learning and collaboration. However, with a rapid pace of innovation driven by educators and researchers, and the breadth and configurability of the platform, Sakai has the adaptability to provide both the path and the vision to education, fundamentally shifting how we and our children grow and learn."

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### 2007-2008 School Year Sakai Statistics

Courses: 2867

Files: 175,440

Announcements: 32,614

Assignments published: 1,954

Unique users: 18,179

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