

MUNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

SAKAI SUCCESS STORY

The University of Michigan was one of the founding institutions of the Sakai Collaboration and Learning Environment (CLE) and the largest initial contributor of code. “There was nothing accidental in the creation of Sakai,” explains Dr. John King, vice provost for academic information and professor in the School of Information. “It grew out of a research project to build online infrastructure for support of globally distributed communities of scientists. We realized that the future required online support for distributed communities of learners in all aspects of the learning process -- teaching, research and administration. We needed an environment we could control, so we built it. Other institutions shared our ambition, and joined us. That was the beginning of the Sakai movement.”

Today, in addition to pervasive adoption of the Sakai architecture for the university's collaborative learning environment, the University of Michigan's leadership and administrators are leveraging the Sakai environment to streamline the administrative needs of students, faculty and staff.

TRANSFORMING THE EDUCATION EXPERIENCE



Dr. Aileen Huang-Saad won both the 2008 University of Michigan Outstanding Professor of the Year Award and the 2008 Teaching with Sakai Innovation Award for her innovative teaching in her two semester course, Biomedical Engineering Graduate Innovative Design Team. In the course, graduate students explore their own solutions to biomedical challenges, from concept inception to prototype design. “Students spend the first semester exploring biomedical challenges. I post research articles on specific clinical challenges prior to each class. A physician then lectures about the challenge, answering students’ questions and participating with them in brainstorming

solutions. The idea generation process continues outside the class in Sakai’s wiki tool, where students generate class concept design documents, challenge each other’s ideas, and self-organize into design teams around a particular challenge or concept by the end of the semester. The second semester is dedicated to prototype development. In this portion of the course, each design team has its own collaboration site, enabling each team to establish the roles, structure and resources that best suit its needs.”

The 2007-2008 year was Dr. Huang-Saad’s first year teaching the course and her first experience teaching with Sakai. “This course must be adaptive, self-organizing,

and highly collaborative for innovation to occur most effectively. Sakai was critical to this process. Students self-assembled, collectively selecting and designing the tools that best met their needs. In particular, the students’ ability to design the wiki to meet the needs of class-based concept design documents was crucial to their success.”

Dr. Huang-Saad continues, “Sakai does not dictate one way to design or teach a class. This flexibility in the platform, coupled with the best-in-class tools developed by educators, enabled us to have an exceptionally collaborative and engaged learning experience.”

SUPPORTING THE DISSERTATION PROCESS

In 2001, a study was conducted by the university's Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies and the Collaboration Technologies Lab (in the Digital Media Commons) to understand how to better support doctoral students in the dissertation process. The resulting action was the development of Grad Tools, a web-based tool in Sakai that reduces the administrative burden doctoral students face.

Mr. Rex Patterson, director of information and technology services at Rackham, explains, "There is significant administrative burden during the dissertation process, particularly towards the end. This is often the most taxing time for the student with the dissertation itself, as well. Grad Tools reduces the administrative burden, allowing the student to focus more wholly on the content of the dissertation."

Today, Grad Tools' personalized, secure environment has over 1500 graduate student sites at the university. Each student has access to chronological, department-specific dissertation checklists that can be tailored to any student's particular requirements, a centrally located repository for all dissertation-related links and resources, secure document sharing capabilities, and an online collaboration environment for the student and dissertation committee members. In addition, it provides 1GB of reliable back-up space for the student's dissertation and all the tools to which students have become accustomed with Sakai. Ms. Donna Huprich, director of academic records and dissertations, notes, "The feedback we hear from both the departments and the students is that it is helpful and easy to use. Having one place to find everything is very powerful."

STREAMLINING ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATION

One of the recent academic administration projects to utilize Sakai is the university's annual promotion and tenure process. The University of Michigan typically reviews between 160-200 faculty promotion and tenure casebooks each year, each more than 100 pages long. Prior to streamlining the process on Sakai, four hard copies were required of each casebook.

Over the past four years, the university has gradually introduced the electronic process. This year, the university did away with all paper casebooks, and every school and college submitted its casebooks in Sakai. Significant efficiency gains were seen with this process change. "Both the units and those coordinating the process have realized significant time savings," states Ms. Lesley Bull, administrative specialist for faculty affairs. "In addition,

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we are utilizing significantly less paper, we eliminated ergonomic challenges in the workplace, and we reduced the amount of secure physical space required for these highly confidential documents."

The need for a highly secure environment was one of the reasons Sakai was selected as the platform of choice for this process. "Confidentiality is of the greatest concern in the faculty promotion and tenure process," explains Ms. Kati Bauer, assistant vice provost for academic information. "Sakai provides us with the security we require in a fully online process. We can easily establish unique permissions for each casebook based on the reviewers assigned to that particular review, facilitating committee members access to a shared, secure work space."

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Scalable, reliable, interoperable and extensible, Sakai is designed to meet the needs of institutions today and tomorrow. Dr. King explains, "Our goal is nothing less than the transformation of learning. We foresee dramatic improvements in the quality of learning, but we also see great gains in productivity and access. This is a global vision, but of course, we are starting here at home."

SAKAI STATISTICS

U-M faculty create more than **7,000 course sites** each year.

99%+ of Ann Arbor campus students, and **85%+** faculty use Sakai (CTools) for course support.

23,200 course sites and **18,000 projects sites** have been created since Fall 2005.

Average peak use each week exceeds **5,600 simultaneous users**.

Maximum peak use in a semester exceeds **7,500 simultaneous users**.

More than **110,000 U-M users** have created CTools accounts.

In a typical month, more than **45,000 unique users** access CTools.

The most elite institutions with the most exacting standards use Sakai. So can you. Commercial affiliates like rSmart can provide the services and support you require to ensure success.

