



Uses of Scholar (Sakai) (other than as a Learning Management System)

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How other Schools are using Sakai

In January 2008, the Sakai User discussion group held a spontaneous online discussion on various uses of Sakai beyond those of the typical Learning Management System (LMS). (In this article, names of contributors are associated with ideas only where the contributor provided detail about how sites have been or could be used. For a list of contributors, see the end of this article.)

Concentrating primarily on project sites, the participants came up with many different uses of sites based on their own and other users' experiences. The original file can be found within the rSmart Knowledge Base at <http://rsn.rsmart.com/ics/support/KBSplash.asp> under the title of "How do institutions use Sakai other than as an LMS?"

Student uses of project sites

- Facilitate collaboration on course-related projects (e.g. group presentations) and other group work.
- From Daphne Ogle: Used project sites to plan, create share and review group work. In a couple cases we gave our instructor access to the site when they were interested in progress. The projects ran anywhere from all semester to a week. The group work was anything from writing a research paper to completing the entire user-centered design

process to design a product (and all the artifacts created and iterated on along the way). Project teams were created off-line but it sure would be interesting to support the team creation process (sometimes ad hoc, others based on skill sets, schedules, etc.) and automate project site creation with the "right" ties back to the course site (ex. final drafts in project sites sent as assignments to course site with all the right information like all student's names, etc.)

- Support student study groups (for course exams, preliminary exams, placement tests)
- Support student organizations (student government, Greek fraternity/sorority, ethnic & religious groups, etc.).
- Monitor status toward dissertation and maintain digital backups of dissertation.
- Provide cohort continuity and tracking.
- From Maggie McVay Lynch: When we admit a class of Nursing Students they are put into a project site that will be available throughout their 4 year program. This site serves as a meeting place for students, an introduction place for students to meet next terms faculty prior to course sites going live, a place for social networking within the cohort. We also have similar sites for our graduate cohorts.
- Provide a student file store.
- From Chuck Severance: Some sites use the WebDAV support in Sakai as a general purpose place for students to store data as they move from lab to lab - a student file store. By combining this function with their LMS they reduce the number of Enterprise services by one.

Faculty and/or student uses of project sites

- Maintain group email lists.
- Get to know members of any group via discussion forums, chat, etc.
- Support research by enabling communication and having a shared file space between institutions.
- From Clay Fenlason: Beyond managing communications and file sharing, the key extra piece here is adding external project sponsors to the site so that they can review some of the activity.
- Manage communication and document draft circulation among doctoral committee members.
- Provide an orientation site - materials, communication, schedules, and posted announcements for incoming faculty and students.
- Track hours worked.
- From Luke Fernandez: Our student workers get paid every two weeks and right before the pay period is due I verify their hours in our payroll system. Ordinarily they punch in and punch out using a phone system but it fails quite regularly. So as a backup I have them log their hours in the Wiki. I used to have them send me email but sorting through my inbox was a pain. The wiki works great for this verification task!

Faculty and staff uses of project sites

- Support statewide shared curriculum initiative.

- From Maggie McVay Lynch: Used where partner schools, from community college to universities, have agreed to having the same nursing curriculum (outcomes, cases, assessment, etc.). This curriculum is created, discussed, and shared with all the partner schools through a project site.
- Facilitate professional development.
- From Maggie McVay Lynch: As our faculty are spread around the state at five different institutional locations, the development efforts are challenging. In addition to physically traveling from one site to another, we encourage each site to do their own development. However, all of these efforts are recorded (web conference or videoconference streams) and indexed on a project site, along with the handouts, articles, or other presentational pieces.
- Share resources across a particular unit.
- Support the work of committees (governance, budget, admissions, etc.) - provide a repository for meeting minutes and other materials, conduct discussions online, use Drop Box to hand out sensitive documents securely to members of a University committee, etc. From Stephen Rehberg: The Fellowship committee uses it to collect and disperse data to the candidates for scholarships such as Rhodes. Another initiative uses it to collect and review essays from high schools (mostly in Africa). Another committee uses it to help collect recommendations and other documentation necessary for medical school applications. This is for seniors and recent grads.
- From Brad Wheeler: Last year I chaired the search committee for the next dean of one of our professional schools. Given the multi-campus organization of the school and ties with alumni, the committee had 14 members from all over. Absolute confidentiality is **essential** for this type of search and handling of applicants. We used a typical site with Resources, Listserv, Schedule, and Wiki. All applicant materials were turned into secure PDF files with a file password (using Acrobat Pro) for an additional precaution. We used folders in the Resources tool for each candidate's materials, and then nested the candidates in folders of "Applied" "Interview" "No Interview" etc. as the search progressed through various stages over 6+ months. These simple tools provided a great way to organize the work of the committee and keep everyone in synch with the progress of the search. It has now been adopted for other searches too.
- From Luke Fernandez: The candidate search committee posts all the resumes and CVs of applicants in the Resources tool. Committee members visit the resumes/CVs and use one of the polling/assessment/quizzing tools to assess/rank the candidates. We used this for a recent Arts and Humanities College dean search and included all of the faculty from the college in the site. It provided a lot of exposure to Sakai and it expedited a lot of administrative tasks for the provost's office.

Other possible uses

Noah Botimer suggested the following possibilities:

- A case study in a Computer Science / Software Engineering curriculum looking at the construction of the system

- Folks looking at various Java standards testing if their components or containers work with our environment
- A school having a "bake-off" to see what cool tools their local community might want to build for their installation without staffing an official development team.
- Design and usability curriculum embedding review of the interface.

Related discussion

Noah Botimer noted that Sakai provides the following to his institution:

- A collaboration / learning system
- A framework for building collaborative tools
- A community of schools, affiliates, and generally cool/brilliant people
- A foundation of visionaries to steward the system, framework, and community

Sean DeMonner made the following points about the value of Sakai:

- [It allows you to] bypass bureaucratic hurdles to getting "approval" for other lists, which we've consciously avoided in our Sakai implementation. It's simply easier to create a new site and add people in an ad hoc way than to follow the steps of other campus services. If other campus services had not been so controlling, this probably wouldn't have been perceived as a benefit of Sakai. As it is, we have the appearance of innovation. Hey, I'll take what we can get ;)
- [You can] enjoy the power of a unified environment: This is the same place where your course sites are, etc. Isn't it nicer to have all my collaboration stuff in one place rather than navigating across several systems?

John Norman suggested these uses of My Workspace:

- Backup for my USB stick when traveling (with unlimited capacity in our case).
- Maintain the wiki in My Workspace as a mobile to-do list and
- Use it as a store of interesting links.

Additional resources

Listen to discussions, view PPTs (including screen shots of sites), etc.

- Vancouver Session on Project Sites in Sakai (useful docs):
<http://confluence.sakaiproject.org/confluence/display/Conf2006Vancouver/Sakai+Project+Sites+-+Who+Uses+Them+and+Why>
- Newport Beach session on Projects Sites in Sakai (three valuable attachments):
<http://confluence.sakaiproject.org/confluence/x/PgBy>
- <http://confluence.sakaiproject.org/confluence/display/Conf2006Vancouver/Sakai+Project+Sites+-+Who+Uses+Them+and+Why>

Contributors

- University of Michigan: Steve Lonn, Noah Botimer, Chuck Severance, Sean DeMonner, Joseph Hardin
- Georgia Tech: Sherry Clouser, Stephen Rehberg, Clay Fenlason
- University of Cambridge: Harriet Truscott, John Norman

- Indiana University: Brad Wheeler
 - Oregon Health and Sciences University: Maggie McVay Lynch
 - Weber State: Luke Fernandez
 - UC Berkeley: Daphne Ogle
 - rSmart: Nate Angell
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Help! I need Support!

Recommendations


For best results in using Scholar, use the following web browsers:

- Windows: Internet Explorer 7.1 and newer, Mozilla Firefox 3.0 and newer
- Macintosh: Mozilla Firefox 3.0 and newer

Browsers that are *not supported and will not work well or at all*:

- Safari, Camino, Opera, or Google Chrome

Help & Assistance

- Refer to the help menu within Scholar (by clicking `Help` or  onscreen).
- Consult the Online Course Systems web site for manuals, quick-start guides, FAQs, video tutorials, and more at <http://www.edtech.vt.edu/ocs/scholar/>.
- Try searching the VT Answers KnowledgeBase (<http://answers.vt.edu/>). Enter “scholar + keyword” in the search box.
- Contact 4Help (<http://4help.vt.edu/>, 231-HELP)
- For one-on-one LIVE help, the InnovationSpace (1140 Torgersen Hall) is staffed to help you make the most of Scholar. Visit the InnovationSpace website at <http://www.is.vt.edu/> for the hours of operation or make an appointment.