

Uses of Sakai

Uses of Sakai

This is a page to gather together the various ideas about how to use Sakai that people have placed on the lists. This is variously thought of as "Uses of Sakai," "Project Site Uses of Sakai," "Beyond the LMS," or "Collaborative Uses of Sakai." In short, any uses of the Sakai Collaborative and Learning Environment that stretch beyond the typical classroom use. Feel free to reorganize or add to this page, or append materials such as talks, research papers, whatever helps us capture the variety of uses that people are putting Sakai to.

January 21, 2008

Conference Presentations -

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 (useful docs) <http://bugs.sakaiproject.org/confluence/pages/viewpageattachments.action?pageId=7471166>

email list postings -

Via Nate Angell - the presentations by Steve Lonn at UMich and Mara Hancock of Berkeley at that same Newport panel on project sites included quantitative data: <http://confluence.sakaiproject.org/confluence/x/PgBy>

This thread reminded me to upload my slides from the panel on Sakai project sites at the Newport Beach conference, which is now available at: <http://confluence.sakaiproject.org/confluence/x/PgBy>
Embedded in my slides are actual uses of Sakai project sites collected from the community as well as numerous screenshots of Sakai project sites.

I was hoping to get a version of my presentation up with audio, but that will have to come later.

Vis Steve Lonn

Wow... I can list a whole plethora of potential uses.
Here's a few that we know are happening here at Michigan:

- Students use project sites to collaboration for their course-related projects (e.g. group presentation)
 - Student study groups (for course exams, preliminary exams, placement tests, etc.)
 - Student organizations (student government, greek - fraternity/ sorority, ethnic & religious groups, etc.)
 - Doctoral students here use a modified form of project sites called Grad Tools for monitoring their status toward dissertation and maintaining digital backups of their dissertation (similar to what Anthony was talking about)
 - Faculty have sites for professional development or shared resources across a particular unit
 - Faculty AND students use project sites for research, especially communicating and having a shared file space between institutions
 - Faculty and staff also use sites for their various committees (governance, budget, admissions, etc.)
 - Staff have used sites for training purposes (e.g. HIPAA training)
 - Staff and faculty use sites for reviewing grant proposals, book chapter proposals, etc.
 - Staff also use sites for maintaining information for tenure and search committees
-

Via Maggie Lynch

I agree with everything Steve Lonn listed in his wonderful quick list of 10 project site uses. Here are three more uses from OHSU:

1. Cohort continuity and tracking. For example, 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.

2. Statewide shared curriculum initiative 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.

3. Faculty Development efforts. 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 (webconference or videoconference streams) and indexed on a project site, along with the handouts, articles, or other presentational pieces.

I suspect there are even more examples. But these come to the top of my head.

Vis Stephen Rehberg

Good question, Sherry. In addition to the many examples you have seen already, I have a couple of more to add.

1. The Fellowship committee uses it to collect and disperse data to the candidates for scholarships such as Rhodes.
2. Another initiative uses it to collect and review essays from high schools (mostly in Africa).
3. Another committee uses it to help collect recommendations and other documentation necessary for medical school applications. This is for seniors and recent grads.

Via Noah Botimer

The posts in this thread cover most of the normal stuff except portfolios, which are a whole discussion alone. Sparing that, the other thing I'll mention just to prod another side of the conversation is:

Using Sakai, not necessarily as a large installation, but as a learning/exploration/testing tool for software folks. Here are some quick thoughts of activities that might be fun:

- 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

These geeky things are probably not the scenarios you're looking for, but they illustrate how this is a living project you can touch. It's very different from a large vended system of some flavor, where the ability to download a copy and tinker on your laptop just isn't there. And the community is extremely encouraging around this kind of behavior.

I suppose I'm also trying to mention that "Sakai" is at least four things to us:

1. A collaboration / learning system
2. A framework for building collaborative tools
3. A community of schools, affiliates, and generally cool/brilliant people
4. A foundation of visionaries to steward 1-3

So, when someone asks "what can I do with Sakai?", the perspective is usually #1, but we shouldn't forget 2-4. In so many ways, we're like the Eclipse project, with a vibrant community around a set general tools for building really cool specific tools. Where we differ is that we have large-scale deployments with varied institutional contexts, where many of the end users are non-technical. That brings a whole new set of responsibilities and opportunities.

Via Luke Fernandez

The following is a very pedestrian use but has come in very handy:

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!

Via Chuck Severance

Some sites do 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.

Another purpose of Sakai is to be able to write applications that need access to Enterprise data and role information - Sakai then becomes a simple "Enterprise bus" for an organization - perhaps not the only "Enterprise bus" - but one alternative. Sometimes this is a university and other times this is an organization.

There is a number of things that happen in smaller organizations where Sakai becomes more of a general purpose resource - sometimes Sakai is the only place on a small campus that everyone ends up with an account

- so Sakai effectively becomes a SSO system for a small organization. I see Quali Student and other Quali projects in the future expanding this general purpose role on small schools but for now Sakai is kind of a beachhead in those schools.

Some schools even use Sakai as their campus "portal" - the place where people have a personalization area - this is not their main outreach/marketing campus page - just the main page for folks to log into.

These ideas are in the margins and Sakai may not be the ideal software for solving these problems - but given that folks need an LMS and have Sakai - they do try to solve these functions with Sakai to improve efficiency and reduce the overall number of services.

Via Harriett Truscott

We use it at Cambridge for all sorts!

Handing out sensitive documents securely to members of a University committee (using Dropbox)

Making sure that graduate students with disabilities are matched up with the college that can meet their needs best (i.e. so that a college with a room adapted for a deaf student actually gets a deaf student to use it!)

For a PhD supervisor to share files with his PhD student

For libraries to do their internal planning and administration

Via Daphne Ogle

This is great list Clay! I'd love to see us pick up steam in Sakai's ability to support these kind of project-based activities. Understanding them is the first step, eh?

One more for your list...

-Student group project site – as a grad student at Michigan (where students were allowed to create project sites) we 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.)

Via Clay Fenlason

I'm preparing a talk for new faculty on "other" uses of Sakai sites, and I've been drawing together a few concrete examples from actual users as a kind of collection of site recipes. Here's an initial list of some broader categories, but I'd be happy to hear about others:

- 1) The ListServ site - we all know this one, of course. Although it's less than an exciting use of the software, it just so happens that our population finds it easier to manage this in Sakai than any of the other campus services that are arguably better suited.
- 2) The Editing Room - we've had faculty add external collaborators and editors to a site and compose an entire book for publication using the Resources tool. The simple policy choice of allowing external guest access is what makes this one work, despite the fact that the Resources tool is really not designed for this.
- 3) The Doctoral Student site - students add their committee members and use the site to manage communications and document draft circulation.
- 4) Program administration site - we have one enterprising associate dean who uses the Assignments tool to get project proposals, review them, and return them to the submitters with comments and acceptance/rejection notices.
- 5) The Research Project site - beyond managing communications and filesharing, the key extra piece here, again, is adding external project sponsors to the site so that they can review some of the activity.
- 6) Orientation site - materials, communication, schedules, and posted announcements for incoming faculty and students. Very sharp spikes of usage (just those couple weeks before a term opens), but something that's definitely sprung up.

It's interesting, though not entirely unexpected, that none of these purposes reflect particular strengths of the software. Some of them owe more to simple policy decisions and flexibility (i.e. allowing people to create their own sites and add anyone they like, including external users) than functionality, and some of them succeed despite frank weaknesses in functionality to support them. Part of me cringes with the professional distaste that a carpenter might feel while watching someone try to hammer nails with a wrench. But then part of me sees this as the beginning of driving collaboration that's really relevant to campus needs from the ground up, and I need to watch and learn.

Via Luke Fernandez

This one may fit under the "Program Administration Site" but it might deserve a separate entry:

"The Job Candidate Search Committee Site." The 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.

Via Clay Fenlason

Anecdotally I think these contribute:

- 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 🍌
 - 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?
-

Via Sean DeMonner

Michigan has been tracking the evolution of project site usage on our campus for some time now (anyone can create a project site in our instance). In fact last Summer in Vancouver Stephanie Teasley and Emilee Rader participated in a panel along with Wendy Morgaine Jeff Narvid to present some findings on the topic. Slides from that panel are here:

<http://confluence.sakaiproject.org/confluence/display/Conf2006Vancouver/Sakai+Project+Sites+-+Who+Uses+Them+and+Why>

While we've seen project sites similar to all of your use cases, it seems that the largest area of growth is in administrative uses. These range from the use of Resources to replace the departmental file server to admissions workflows and tenure tracking processes. We've also thought about how our Sakai instance might be used in a pandemic situation to maintain business continuity for the academic, research and administrative missions of the University; project sites figure prominently in that discussion.

Via John Norman

Thanks for this Clay. I have for a long time wanted to ask the "Yes, but what is it for?" question on any number of issues. I see this as a really important development, even if we only document why you should *not* try to use Sakai for any particular purpose.

Don't forget the My Workspace examples:

- 1) backup for my USB stick when travelling (with unlimited capacity in our case)
- 2) wiki in myworkspace as a mobile todo list and store of interesting links

Also we have sites for primarily for resource reservation (using calendar OR wiki)

Via Brad Wheeler

I'll add another slight variant on the typical "committee site" use. 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, 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.

Posted here, not in above email thread:

Institutional Knowledge Sites – One example being graduate students self-organizing in a department to create a project site to share their materials and additional notes, in order to help future Teaching Assistants (TA's, or Graduate Student Instructors, GSI's) come up to speed on particular courses and teaching with particular instructors.

Our graduate student body is about to experience large turnover with nearly 1/3 of us graduating in the coming months. We are in serious danger of losing institutional knowledge on teaching. One of the frequent complaints of GSIs in our department has been the unavailability of past teaching materials for courses when the previous GSI has graduated. To address this problem, we created a [USER:Sakai] classroom repository with folders for all of the commonly taught undergraduate courses in our department. This repository contains activities, labs, and other resources, forming continuity from GSI to GSI.*

To ensure that we don't lose valuable knowledge when you graduate, we encourage you to take just a few minutes to visit the course repository and upload useful information from the courses you have taught. If you are currently a GSI, you should already have access to the site. If you are not a GSI but would like access to upload materials, simply reply to this email.

**Keep in mind that all GSIs have accessed to these resources, so sensitive material like keys should probably not be posted for courses which might be taken by graduate students.*