

Help Systems Workgroup

I changed the name of this group to Help Systems workgroup, because there is already a working group in Sakai that is dedicated to the help tool itself. I am interested in focusing this discussion around how schools are delivering online help in general. Inevitably, this discussion will also involve how people are using the help tool in Sakai and how the tool could be improved or re-envisioned.

In preparation for our 2.5 release of bSpace, Berkeley has been re-evaluating how we deliver help. We've already contacted many Sakai schools about some of their practices, but I'm still interested in other schools feedback as we continue to develop requirements.

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Help System Topics

Delivery Systems for Help

There are variety of existing strategies for linking a Help System to Sakai. (Please correct me if I miss-represent any of these strategies)

Sakai Help Tool:

Sakai has a built-in tool for Help Topics called the Help Tool. The Help Tool is a 3 frame web page that includes a search box frame, table of contents frame, and main content frame

- **Out of the Box (OOTB) Help Tool:** These help topics are located with-in the Sakai installation. The content for these topics is typically submitted by a tool developer and is maintained in the IU Knowledgebase. Many schools have found the OOTB Help Tool content to be either insufficient or unrepresentative of their installation's needs.
- **Customized Out of the Box (OOTB) Help Tool:** Berkeley was using this strategy until Summer 2008. Each changed file in the help tool required our operations team to create a branch in our version of Sakai. This was logistically a hassle and made it difficult for us to justify necessary changes to the help content. Any changes to the help content would not take affect until the next scheduled deployment.
- **Help Tool with External HTML Files:** This strategy allows a Sakai instance to use the Help Tool with their own help content. Using this strategy, a Table of Contents can be built and links to the context-sensitive help  in Sakai can be routed to specific pages using an index file (help.xml) that uses a specific documented format for structuring the TOC and managing the links.

External Website/Application:

- **External Website:** It is possible to create your own website and use help.url instead of help.id to point directly to external website pages. This strategy does not require/use the help.xml file, but rather relies on the external website's navigation and organization. The help.url property for each tool is set within the properties file of the tool.
- **External Web Application:** The difference between an external website and web application is subtle. Using the **help.redirect.external.webapp** property in sakai.properties, Sakai can redirect all help links to the base url of an external website. Their is no configuration using help.url properties required, so the external web application must handle and translate each of the url requests.

Types of Media

Topics/Types of Help

Evaluation & Analytics

