

# Board Minutes 2006 July 13

Sakai Foundation Board of Directors Conference Call  
July 13, 2006

This document contains minutes from the conference call of the Sakai Foundation Board of Directors held on July 13, 2006. Corrections, suggestions should be sent to Joseph Hardin and Mary Miles.

These minutes capture both the discussion and formal resolutions of the board. Simply because something was discussed does not mean that it is the agreed-upon position of the board. When the board makes a formal resolution to approve an item, it will be noted as such in the minutes. If there is no such notation, readers should assume that the minutes are simply the notes of the board discussions.

Board members present: Mara Hancock, Joseph Hardin, Chris Coppola, Chuck Severance, Brad Wheeler, Jutta Treviranus, Mary Miles (staff)

Topic: Updates

Chuck is drafting a User Interface roadmap document based on his conversations and visits with Jutta. He will begin writing and then circulate the document for discussion. This will be done in parallel with the kind of activities that are being discussed in the Pedagogy group.

Chris asked how Sakai could go about getting the folks using the UI stuff in front of the design instead of behind it. Brad responded that Kuali is being entirely driven by the functional side. Joseph asked for the process for tool input, and the process for UI issues. Mara responded that there may be some teams with no UI experience and want would like to get that experience, and others may bring that piece already and don't want additional input. It's a good practice to have the design in up front, but when you get down to doing the work, it's often easier to do it locally.

Joseph asked Chris to develop a form that defines the types of "fundamental" issues that need to be corrected. If we can find a way to get concrete about the significant issues, we can begin to address them. Brad listed one issue as "developer as user" of Sakai, putting technical folks in charge of thinking about how things work, instead of the end user. Sakai will be different from Kuali, in which the financial community would agree on things that Sakai users may not. Kuali is fussier about things than those experienced in Sakai. They are heavily represented in the whole design process.

Brad suggested creating a Sakai functional council, a group of representatives that are all teachers or researchers, with overall design authority. Below that is a sub-committee that is focused on the details of each module (tool sub-committees for us). The business process differences among the schools are different but could we bring some structure like that to bear? Mara replied that Sakai attempted to do that in the grant phase with the tools team but now that we are in a more open community, the controls over defining the ways we work on these projects are not there. Brad added that in Kuali, the functional council and sub-committees are all investors. Could we consider that you buy limited terms on these councils or committees through something like the investment fund? Jutta questioned whether that would generate the best results in terms of interface. Chris called it a hybrid - and suggested that those who have the money might not be able to put in the resources in terms of people. The Kuali functional council has authority, make decisions and they are adhered to. In Sakai that's not practical as tools are widely distributed and there is very limited restriction. Mara stated that she was having a hard time visualizing faculty as the functional group and having them be the ones who do the functional design. It's a whole different mind-set.

Chris commented that it doesn't seem like anybody in the organization specifically owns this problem. Joseph added that this is a key point; it's the same kind of feeling that there were no fellows that were pedagogists, they were all technologists. We don't have anyone at a higher level that is identified as the place you go if you are interested in something. Joseph felt that this was not the time to do a roadmap because it looks like you are pushing the problem into a technical dimension immediately, when people are looking at how they can get involved.

Brad added that a thousand little things would improve the user experience, but these may be different from getting us on the right track for future work. He is supportive of working a little lower on the food chain for the moment. Chris suggested that something like that starts with a group of people like the board and others agreeing that this is a priority above other priorities in trying to influence a large number of people in the community to rally around that for a period of time. Brad suggested that a foundation staff position may be required; someone to be the "people point" for this job. Chuck agreed that hiring people is one way to solve the problem, but it's not the only solution. Chuck asked if Brad would be willing to assign Stacy Morrone to develop a triage list among the community. This would allow the board to develop someone who has the ability to perform the function and then put them on staff. The nice thing is that we start small and adjust and make progress. People have established that they deserve a position before we simply enforce them on the community.

Jutta pointed out two things that are of concern to her. The contributions we can get are great and we should use those - Gonzalo is getting great support. It would be good to see the entire landscape and identify areas that need help. One of the big problems is a lack of consistency from one tool to another, not simply throwing resources as a single tool. Sakai needs a technical roadmap as well as a design roadmap. Even though there are people stepping up, there is not a clear leader. Brad proposed the thought exercise of whether the Kuali structure would be of value. Vivie replied that the board has had this conversation but has not been in a position to take action. Brad continued that the lesson learned is that we were too overwhelmed to take action. Vivie suggested that Sakai use the community to identify those issues and then go out to all of the teams and charge them to outline what has risen to the top as an issue in UI and bring it all back and then try to determine core issues. The board needs buy-in from the entire community. Vivie suggested starting small, identifying five key points of collision that we can all agree to improve. Jutta added that a process is needed to determine the correct process to fix those points of collision. Mara suggested a usability camp where we bring people together and go through a process where we look at the usability issues and determine what the ideal process.

Chuck noted that there is a little bit of good news here as the community has come together on the requirements process and many of the requirements have addressed some of these issues. If you look at how the ordering of resources in the resource tool worked, high requirements got the attention of the developers and the developers asked for help from user interface people. Everything was done voluntarily, and everyone got value from the process. The developers don't want to do design, but if there is no direction on the design, it's painful. The people who want to do design don't really want to do the work. Mara replied that we don't have enough designers. Jutta added that it's a common problem of open source community projects. We should not beat ourselves up so much, just look at the type of people we want to recruit.

Chris stated that this points to the need for someone to lead the effort. There's no single point of responsibility to follow through to change and adapt when something doesn't work. Kathleen is ultimately responsible for control of the Kualu system. She uses a functional command and control system. Need someone who is constantly influencing and building consensus. Developers don't live under the unreasonable expectations of the functionality triangle. Functional council has a sub-committee on very detailed things that can do the work all the way back to acceptance testing of what comes back from the developers. He suggested that the entire board should be on the lookout for someone who has the capabilities to these sorts of things.

Joseph added that Chuck has to figure out if this is one of the highest priority issues and if it deserves Sakai resources at this point. Then he has to figure out how to get the resources to get the person we are talking about. Jutta suggested that this should be more than one role. Joseph asked if there was someone on the board who would like to begin working directly on this. Jutta was asked to have some possible solutions available for discussion at the next meeting. Joseph suggested that the advocacy/pedagogy group also be included in this discussion. Chris noted that if we identified and defined a leadership role, and maybe identified a person for it, external funding could be found. Jutta added that even Mellon would possibly fund something of this nature.

Action Items:

Jutta will put together more definition around the domain of UI within Sakai, what are the existing problems, what are some ways to deal with them.

Chris will put together some ideas on this whole idea of leadership for a strong functional area.

Chuck will post a statement in the public arena that he is working on this document. In addition, Chuck should post an Executive Director's report.

Topic: Conference updates

A spreadsheet on the costs of previous conferences has been sent to the board. In order to hold a conference in Amsterdam, the board will have to make a commitment to spend sufficient resources. The Board was asked to make suggestions as to how to save money. Conferences have gone from costs of \$60/person to costs that are around \$85/day. Between Austin and Vancouver, the conference grew from 2 ½ day to 4 days. One way to save funds would be to go back to 3 full days and then cut back on some of the costs.

Brad stated that it is clear that we have to end at noon on Friday. Joseph advocated that we never meet on Friday, but end on Thursday night. This would require tailoring the program so people make a decision to stay for the full conference. The things to put at the end are some of the tutorial stuff or things where you don't naturally have 100% attendance. Expansion should be targeted for the earlier sessions, not the later end. If you go to 3 days, the morning of first day is pre-conference, and afternoon of the third day is a workshop. There are also concerns about the quality of sessions. Chuck stated that as IMS Learning Impact picks up, we might want to adopt that conference and have two Sakai tracks at that conference. Maybe the thing to do is have more rather than bigger.

Topic: Member Benefits Project

Chris stated that he had floated something around earlier about talking with our member organizations to understand why they are members, what they expect for being members, and what they perceive to be the greatest value to being a member. He continued that he wrote it up as a short one-page description and just needed to make sure it's consistent with everyone's expectations and see who wants to help. The board agreed that this was a good start. Joseph offered his assistance as well. He suggested matching board members up with partners to work on this effort.

With no further business before the board, the call ended at 2:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Miles