

Learning Management Systems (LMS) for CSU – Sakai Selected

In June we indicated that two short-listed solutions, Moodle and Sakai, were to be further evaluated for the CSU Online Learning Environment.

The decision of the OLE Steering Committee to select Sakai was a unanimous one based on its long-term potential as a learning & teaching and broader academic collaborative environment for CSU. The frameworks and their tools were evaluated in terms of a set of user-oriented, technical and governance criteria. A great deal of information was gathered from hands-on testing, interaction with current users and websites, forums reports etc. While there were some differences between the frameworks, the overall rating of criteria did not differentiate Sakai and Moodle. Both were deemed very suitable for CSU's purposes.

An analysis was then undertaken to assess the solutions on their overall philosophy and the approach of their communities to learning and teaching, support for collaborative research, technical development, and governance. It was on the basis of a holistic assessment of all these considerations that Sakai was chosen.

The Program Team has developed considerable expertise which will support the Sakai implementation. A phased approach will be adopted with an 'out of the box' trial of e-portfolio to start in October 2006 to a limited audience and further trials and consultation will occur in 2007.

The fully integrated framework, linked to other CSU systems, will be implemented by the start of 2008 and will continue to be extended. During the development phase there will be opportunities for significant input to the design and functionality of the system from staff and students. Through the process we hope to achieve a well-integrated and effective online learning environment that can be tailored to CSU's needs.

Since then a detailed quantitative evaluation of Sakai and Moodle has been undertaken, looking at both the framework and the tools. This evaluation, involved:

- Documenting a list of key questions for reference sites
- Audio conference with a few comparable sites of Moodle and Sakai users, supplying clearly defined reference site questions in advance
- Emailing reference site questions to some select sites in both communities
- Expose key stakeholders to both products to ascertain their input on requirements (as applicable).
- Gain supplementary information from Sakai conference (US) and Moodle conference (UK) in June and July 2006
- Study reports that do a comparison between Sakai and Moodle
- Study the two official websites of Sakai and Moodle
- Hands on analysis of Moodle and Sakai via a test sites set up in DIT

This quantitative analysis of the framework and tools

So while both frameworks can be customized to behave like each other, two fundamental ideals were kept in mind during this assessment:

1. The team focused on the general premises and intent of the framework rather than present features and functionality
2. The team ensured the Overarching Concerns were constructed in a way that supports a clear and concise decision

The OLE Steering Committee selected Sakai based on:

- Unlimited roles and levels allowed, increasing access and control
- Evidence of commitment to integrating to portals
- Technical community
- A high percentage of users are universities
- An established structured governance model
- Proactive in adhering to standards

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The fully integrated framework will be implemented by start of 2008.