Building a Collaborative Web Team in a Distributed Computing Environment

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All presentation materials available online: http://www.asu.edu/webdevelopment/
Arizona State University

- Three campuses plus extended education serving almost 50,000 students
- Close to 8,000 faculty and staff
- Approximately 180,000 pages
- 2 million hits per week on the primary ASU web server
The Web

**What went right**–

- Lots of content
- Enthusiasm for the medium

**What went wrong**–

- Almost exclusively controlled by techies
- No perceived strategic value
Two Models of Web Development

Distributed
(or non-centralized)

vs.

Centralized
Federalism Model

**Central Authority**
Establishes the “What” and the “Why”

**Units**
Determine the “How”

**Example** –
**What and Why**: Focus on research and prospective students because that is core to mission

**How**: Improve recruiting information online, raise profile of research efforts
Characteristics of a Federation

- Charter
- Distinct units
- Autonomy
Advantages of Federalism

• Flexible
• Nimble
• Strength in Diversity/More Options
• Balance of Power or Shared Decision-Making
Federalism Requires a Different Kind of Leadership

- Faith in the ability of units to solve their own problems and figure out the “how”
- Willingness to forego command and control
- Understanding that no one person or group is uniquely qualified to manage everyone else
“The Vision Thing”

“The purpose of a clearly communicated vision is to give meaning and alignment to the organization and thus to enhance the ability of all employees to make decisions and create change”

– Warren Bennis

*Our Federalist Future: The Leadership Imperative*
The ASU Web

• By 2000, the ASU Web had close to 180,000 pages and received two million hits per week. But the site was plagued with dead links, and out-of-date information.

• As an institution we could not identify the content providers.
Starting Over

- How does the web fit with ASU’s mission?
- What is, or should be, the role of the ASU Web Team?
- What services can be provided (at current staffing and resources.)
- What services are needed?
- Considerations for future development.
The Road to Building a Web Governance Structure at ASU

Recognition that:

• ASU values representation and consensus
• ASU values autonomy
• Demand exceeds resources
Change in Focus of the ASU Web

- Giving content and technical issues equal weight
- A recognition that the web has marketing and information dissemination value
- An increase in web-based services both inside and outside the university
Input from Deans

The Provost surveyed the Deans/VPs for:

- their top three priorities
- current web projects
- centrally provided services
- a representative to serve on a strategic oversight committee
“The Web Developers Group at Arizona State University exists to help develop the abilities, enhance the quality of work, and improve the inter-communication of those who create and maintain web pages at ASU. The group holds meetings regularly that feature demonstrations of the latest web technologies, answers to audience questions, and other Internet and computing information of interest.”
WebDev

• Monthly meetings during the academic year covering a wide variety of web-related topics
• Golden Pixel Award to recognize outstanding web development
• Special topic sessions for hands-on training
• Online Resource Repository (The “Jukebox”)
• New initiative to formalize WebDev’s charter and make it a consortium
Web Advisory Group

• The representative advisory group for all university-level web projects.
• Membership includes representatives from all colleges, campuses, and administrative units.
• Meets once per month during the academic year.
Web Advisory Group

**Charge:**

- to prioritize services and content for university-wide development efforts;
- to foster communication across colleges and units;
- to tie the use of the web to university mission;
- to improve the end-user experience.
Priority Setting Team

Charge:

• Meet three times a year to discuss web development trends and set priorities for university web development.
Web Project Team/IT Web Team

Priority Setting Team

Web Quality Assurance Group

Web Developers Group

Web Advisory Group

Web Project Team

IT Web Team
Web Project Team

**Charge:**

- A new team with the primary responsibility of managing, coordinating, and creating content and services for the university-level web pages.

- This team will also contribute to content development for ASU’s portal.
IT Web Team, the Web Project and Distributed Developers

IT Web Team

Distributed Web Developers from Units/Colleges

Web Project Team
- Web Projects Coord.
- Web Project Manager
- Web Editor/Publisher
- Web Graphic Designer
- Student: Programming
- Student: Graphic Design
Quality Assurance

**Charge:**

- Ensure that the ASU Web communicates ASU’s key messages.
- Communicate to the university community on issues related to logo usage and branding.
Challenges

• Need to exert power vs. autonomy of a unit
• Information silos
• Desire for complete local control
• Suspicion of IT and central administration
• Disenfranchised groups
• Change is difficult even if it’s a change for the better
Benefits

- Create a network of developers
- Create a culture of information and resource sharing
- Reduce burnout by facilitating networking among developers
- Share efficiencies
- Increase productivity
The secret to successful change management is to never use the words “change” or “management.”
Questions

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