

Faculty Senate Feedback on the Issue of Content Management Systems:

I begin this report by stating that no faculty members were appointed to the Content Management System (CMS) Task Force by the Faculty Senate and no member of the Faculty Senate was formally appointed to this task force. The following comments and all feedback is being given as a result of the task force being asked to solicit input from all end users of any content management system. The following comments in this report are presented by the Faculty Senate after several conversations with multiple faculty Departmental end users that currently are using Plone and with a number of Departments that use a wide variety of web management systems that do not involve either of the two systems currently being discussed. It is the belief of the Faculty Senate that the value of having the end users feedback and input in this report can not be underestimated and that serious weight should be placed on their experiences and time already committed to developing their Departmental web-based materials. Additionally, at our meeting of June 17, 2008, we had no budgetary numbers to financially compare the two competing CMS systems, Plone and CommonSpot. Obviously, since resources are a major component of the final decision, that factor at the time this report was prepared was not considered in our analysis.

In our opening comments it should be noted that we appreciate the fact that most of the details in the choice of these kind of powerful and highly functional software programs is lost on the end users. Application users rarely need or even want to have the kind of inside information that makes these programs so useful to them. That being said it is not unfair to characterize that those same users rarely want to make changes on systems that they have already begun to commit to extensively. All faculty members that I contacted strongly support the identification and choice of a content management system for the design and management of web-based materials. The two systems identified are both competent systems and for Departments that are not currently using Plone their opinion was that they would be fine with either choice provided that training was available for any members wanting to learn the chosen system.

The issues with the faculty were more contentious when in discussions with Departments that currently employ Plone or are in the early stages of developing materials using Plone as their management system. The following is a list of concerns that are noted by this report.

- It is stated in the Task Force's preliminary report that only 35 sites out of 295 sites are currently built in Plone but it is unclear how those sites are counted. I know of two Colleges outside of COLS that employ Plone and they are made up of multiple Departments or teams. Was the College counted as one entity or split out as I am sure it was done for COLS? This might change the actual percentage noted in the report (which is actually slightly understated anyway).
- It is noted that the faculty are in favor of Plone based on the argument that it is being successfully used in a number of different academic environments (and has been for some time), that this system has the advantage of ease of usage, some support resources are already in place or in preliminary development for *our*

- specific University* (previous training, user manuals, etc.) and that this product is viable for an extended foreseeable future.
- The argument that any changes from this already deployed system over an extended period of time (up to two years as noted in the preliminary report) is a significant negative that resonates strongly with the faculty.
 - Of the faculty that were consulted a slight majority marginally preferred open source software and its transparency to the special interests of commercial software systems. Mostly the faculty were ambivalent regarding this fundamental issue.
 - The faculty seemed unmoved by the arguments for CommonSpot that we would benefit significantly from having other UW System schools who have adopted this system previously. Four of the five CommonSpot benefits are linked to this mutual support argument thus making it appear somewhat stronger a choice than it may be. Past experience has shown that resources would still be needed to adapt these materials to some degree to our University anyway. The cost benefit, however, can not be dismissed if additional schools adopt this system. Additionally, the likelihood of a quick and efficient rollout using the commercially available CommonSpot system fell on relatively deaf ears with faculty in light of the recent negative experience with PeopleSoft. Again, in the end it worked out, but if your argument is based on ease of usage and quick deployment, many faculty members are extremely skeptical.
 - A stronger argument and one which the faculty share an interest in is the integration of rich-media applications. This is a valid and strong positive argument in the eyes of the faculty, however, since the preliminary report notes that these applications employing Plone have not yet been attempted it makes direct comparisons in this area invalid. After all if integration were possible in Plone (yet to be determined) then this actually becomes a very strong argument for staying with the Plone system.

I have tried to present what I believe to be the sense of the faculty regarding the issues that most directly concern them in regards to choosing an appropriate CMS. Since I am aware that this task force is looking to formulate a specific recommendation to the Chancellor's Administrative Group, I believe that the faculty would recommend that we continue to develop our website in Plone and build on support materials within that CMS. I must add that this recommendation comes with an added caveat depending on what the budgetary cost/benefit analysis reveals. I want to retain the faculty's right to alter this recommendation based on those results.

Obviously, since we are not a formal member of the committee, it is the responsibility of the CMS Task Force to include this feedback in the most appropriate way they see fit. I would like to have a sentence included in the Executive Summary of your report that reflects that the faculty through the Faculty Senate was solicited for feedback. My recommendation would be something like, "Feedback from the faculty was solicited through the Faculty Senate and their input considered in the choosing of an appropriate CMS," placed as the second sentence. The actual language you use is, of course, up to you and your task force.

