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Teaching with Free Software, Open Formats, and Collaborative Culture: Trials and Tribulations

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Tutorial and Workshop Proposal for AMCIS 2009

Submission Date: February 28, 2010

Workshop/tutorial Title: Teaching with Free Software, Open Formats, and Collaborative Culture: Trials and Tribulations

Duration: ( ) Full Day (x) Half Day

Classification: (x) Tutorial ( ) Workshop

Abstract

This tutorial aims to address the possibilities of teaching Information Systems courses with Free and Open Source Software (FOSS), open media/document formats and collaborative culture. What began as an experimental approach, largely fueled by a near-zero software budget, has given us insights into the pros and cons of such an approach. The tutorial will address methodologies, strategies and fit with curriculum.

Workshop Leader Information (Please attach a copy of your resume in your email submission)

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Additional Workshop Presenters (copy for each one)

Name:
Affiliation:
Postal Address:
Telephone:
Cell:
Fax:
Email:

Speakers' background, description of workshop, and envisioned activities during the workshop (please provide information for each speaker)

The speaker is Associate Professor of Information Systems at San Francisco State University. He has been teaching for over 15 years in the general areas of MIS and Decision Sciences. His courses focus on collaborative technologies, free and open source software (FOSS), compliance, governance and strategy. He is also active in the professional community and contributes to several FOSS and Creative Commons projects. He currently organizes and manages the San Francisco Bay Area chapter of the One Laptop per Child project. Apart from providing value

to his students and colleagues, this project/tutorial represents an interesting intersection of the speaker's interests in various professional and personal domains.

This tutorial is based on the use of the following software, content and approaches:

Free Software is software that comes with access to source code and freedom to make changes. Open Source is a variation on the theme in that it emphasizes on the fact that the source code is open. Both approaches provide access to a large collection of software that can be used at no charge.

Open Formats apply to any kind of digital media where the format does not require a proprietary mechanism to process data in or out of the format. Common examples of such formats are HTML, SVG, and ODF. Although not a requirement, but we often see that FOSS projects gravitate towards open standards and formats.

Collaborative Culture can be loosely defined as the culture of freely sharing content, media, creative works with an understanding of preservation of copyrights, while being permissive about reuse and remix. Creative Commons is the most prominent representation of this concept. A subliminal undertone of the collaborative culture process is that collaboration cannot be facilitated unless we have open standards and formats, and free access to software to manipulate these formats.

This tutorial will be based on the findings of an undergraduate multimedia elective in the information systems curriculum at San Francisco State University. The course title is "Multimedia Business Application Development". Its objective is as follows:

- understand the role of multimedia in business;
- identify issues such as standards, interoperability, and media management in managing a heterogeneous Information Systems environment;
- describe the challenges in integrated management of multimedia in the Information Systems infrastructure;
- evaluate licensing, copyright, intellectual property rights related to multimedia;
- use standard approaches in the sourcing, acquisition and implementation of multimedia.

The use of FOSS began as a budgetary constraint. We simply had no money for software licenses. So, we started looking into FOSS titles. One of the key challenges was to find software titles that not only exist in the FOSS domain, but also have binaries available for Windows (most common platform in the Business school) and MacOSX.

The open formats addressed in this course are:

- PNG: Portable Network Graphics
- SVG: Scalable Vector Graphics
- Ogg family
    - Vorbis: Ogg Vorbis is an audio format
    - FLAC: This is Free Lossless Audio Codec
    - Theora: Ogg Theora is a video codec. It has intersections with the HTML5 video tag.

    - Speex: This is a codec used for voice (VoIP).
- ODF: Open Document Format is the default format for OpenOffice.Org and is standardized as ISO 23600
- OOXML: Microsoft's Office Open XML document format standardized as ISO: 29500:2008

Collaborative Culture: We use the Creative Commons project extensively to 1) provide access to licensed media for modifications in class, and to 2) examine licensing approaches to commercial and non-commercial media. The sites used in our course are: Flickr, Wikipedia, and ccmixter.org

The final group project in this course is based on a Web 2.0 platform. The students are required to submit a rudimentary business plan, and then the group implements a Web 2.0 portal to fit that plan. This project results in sites that are corporate sites, information portals, community portals, market exchanges, and community sites. We use Drupal, a FOSS web 2.0 platform. We will explore some of these sites in the tutorial.

After addressing these topics, we will look at what works and what does not. How do such approaches fit with the curriculum? What do students ask for? What are employers' interests? This should lead to a fruitful discussion.

Special Requirements

Note: Regular equipment includes a computer, projector and screen.

( ) Computers
(x) Internet Access
( ) Others, Please specify: _____

Note: Regular equipment is OK. An Internet connection will be a "good to have" but is not necessary.

Audience

Insert a description of likely participants

Maximum number of participants:_____35_____

Specify the requirements for the audience such as computer, special software, and Internet access etc., in the following:

If the audience bring their own computers (PC or Mac) they will be able to participate in the tutorial and its related demos and assignments. We will have Live CDs on hand for the attendees.