

Notes From a Meeting with Blackboard Inc. Friday, April 22, 2005, Washington, DC

Publisher's Note

On May 3, 2005 a draft copy of these notes was provided to a representative of Blackboard, Inc. asking if there are errors in the text or suggestions to improve the accuracy and presentation of the discussions. These notes are being distributed May 16, 2005 without comment by Blackboard, Inc. The reader should be aware the views expressed in this document may not be consistent with those of Blackboard staff who participated in the discussion.

Context

While serving as the uPortal Project Administrator, Chris Etesse was uPortal's Blackboard contact. Recently Chris was named head of Blackboard's international consulting division. Chris suggested I continue Blackboard liaison. Jan Day would be the contact. This was an initial meeting with Jan Day and her colleagues

David Yaskin, Vice President of Product Strategy, Bob Alcorn, Senior Architect, and Afroze Mohammed, Director of Marketing, joined this informal meeting with Jan Poston Day, Director of Standards and Interoperability.

Summary

- Blackboard representatives plan to attend the SEPP Summer Conference June 8-10, 2005 in Baltimore, Maryland.
- As part of the IMS Tool Interoperability Project, Blackboard expects to demonstrate the exchange of data from an assessment module to a grade book at IMS' Alti-Lab Conference in June.
- Blackboard is following the WSRP specification and implementations, and could provide access to Blackboard as a WSRP portlet in a compliant portal.

The Sakai Project and Sakai Educational Partners Program

I began the discussions describing the status of the Sakai Project. Sakai version 2.0 with significant architectural changes and added features available summer, production implementations at Michigan and Indiana and pilot implementations at about 20 other colleges and universities, and integration with the grade book and Foothill's Melete authoring and Etudes presentation tools. The Sakai Educational Partners Program Summer Conference June 8-10 is open to all with presentations on Sakai 2.0, meetings of the Discussion Groups, and sessions on Sakai governance.

I commented that Sakai Conference Chairs Chuck Powell and John Norman asked the conference be open to anyone (within the capacity of the facilities); online registration for

non-members is now available. I encouraged Blackboard representatives attend to observe and hear the presentations and discussion. Afroze Mohammed confirmed that Blackboard staff would attend.

I said the organizational form of Sakai and outline of its future roadmap would likely emerge from this conference. Sessions on the Sakai framework, Sakai tools, Melete, grade book, and Samigo (now Sakai) assessment

Status of the IMS Tool Interoperability Project¹

Bob Alcorn said he expected the project to be successful because of its extremely limited scope. He said he expected Blackboard grade book would be able to receive summary data from Samigo (the Sakai assessment module) or another.² He said the data exchange was being done using Web Services messaging. He complimented Sakai Technical Liaison and Research Programmer Anthony Whyte for his work.

Comment: At a Sakai meeting with publishers, Sakai Chief Architect Chuck Severance said Tool Portability would be completed and demonstrated at IMS Global Learning Alti-Lab, June 20-22, 2005 in Sheffield, United Kingdom. This would include two-way communication between grade book and Samigo.

When asked, Alcorn said information about the Blackboard Building Blocks program was publicly available and was contained in the Software Development Kit (SDK).

The Blackboard Portal

David Yaskin said Blackboard provided portal services as part of Blackboard's Community System, in the future Blackboard may be available for use in WSRP-compliant enterprise portals. He cited uPortal integration as one.

Comment: Blackboard's October 15, 2004 Community Service Brochure describes portal services saying "Blackboard's Portal Web Services provide a rich set of standards-based web services that can act as a stand-alone portal or as a feed to multiple institutional portals on and off campus. Every portal on campus can have immediate and secure access to school information, online classes, exam results, student portfolios and more."

¹ IMS Global Learning Consortium, Inc.

² At the Sakai Developers Meeting April 28-29, 2005 at Stanford University, Sakai Educational Partners Program Anthony Whyte said Sakai would demonstrate interoperability between the Sakai software and a standalone version of the Samigo assessment tool. Sakai Chief Architect expects WebCT to demonstrate interoperability between Samigo and WebCT. Whyte said they are all developing to two WSDL-based specifications. Consonance with IMS policies, neither the WSDL files or the draft specifications are yet available to the public.

Blackboard and WSRP

David Yaskin commented that Blackboard was following the WSRP standard and its implementation. Blackboard is considering the use of WSRP so Blackboard could become a WSRP portlet in a compliant enterprise portal.³

Interoperability Center

Staff at Georgetown University are interested in an interoperability center where developers could test interoperability of tools and authors and publishers could test interoperability of content.

Comment: Georgetown may be unique; the University holds Blackboard's Annual Building Blocks developers conference and is an active member of the Sakai Educational Partners Program.

Jan Day commented Blackboard was interested in participating in interoperability initiatives.

³ At the suggestion of Chuck Powell, Yale University, subsequently a Blackboard representative was invited to a meeting with WSRP Technical Committee Chair Rich Thompson and Apache Software Foundation WSRP4J committer Julie MacNaught held Thursday, May 12, 2005 at Yale University. Because of the very short notice, no representative could attend.