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Creating an Online Literary and Arts Journal: An Interdisciplinary Use of Technology and Web-based Resources

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Creating an Online Literary and Arts Journal: An Interdisciplinary Use of Technology and Web-based Resources

Cornerstone #: 3

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Goals Outlined

Our overall goal for this project is to create a website that builds an increased awareness of Pace's literary magazine, *VOX Arts & Literary Journal*. Over the years, the paper version of the magazine although somewhat effective, has become lacking in certain areas. We wanted to create something that would really get *Vox*'s name out there and generate more involvement from the students as well as faculty and administrators. We felt that by having a website, students and faculty can post and submit their works all year round, instead of twice a year as it is now. With more submission options such as posting poetry, prose, artwork, and other such pieces, more students and faculty would submit more works.

By having a paper issue as well as an online issue, we can offer more positions to our students here at Pace. The paper issue is put together by a group or assistant editors and lead by an editor who is supervised by a faculty member. Our online team, however, employs student positions such as site manager, producer, designer, two programmers and faculty supervision positions in which there are three. Not only would this website create that increase awareness we desire, but it would also increase student involvement as the students would run the site. They will be in charge of maintenance, accepting/ denying submissions, creating the featured sections on the home page and making other changes as they see fit. Out of attempts to maximize awareness, we will be in fact drawing in more interaction between the magazine and the Pace community.

Our second goal is to create a website that is user friendly and sustainable. The user friendly aspect is something that is very important to us going into this project. We want students, faculty and even outside users such as parents and publishers to be able to view the students' work with ease and to be able to navigate throughout the website in a smooth and translucent fashion. We feel that having a website that is too confusing to use or too complicated will serve as a huge detriment to our overall goals. As for sustainability, we want to make a website that can be easy kept up throughout the years long after the initial web team leaves.

Also, we plan to attempt to get donations so that we potentially augment funding of the journal. Sustainability is something that is very important to us and something that we realize we need to work hard on.

The third goal is to create a web design that is simple, yet visually appealing. We want to really push the V*ox* brand and utilize the classical nature of the print issue. This way the web site and the printed magazine have uniform characteristics and are equally recognizable as products of *Vox Arts & Literary Journal*.

<u>Progress</u>

Organization
In order to reach our first goal we performed many tasks. We first selected our faculty consultants who would help generate ideas and support and supervise the student works. Next we made a timeline and work flow of when we wanted to accomplish certain things by. This work flow included the hiring of students workers, getting space on the server for the site, and finalizing the website's design.

In order to get started on our project, we held an application process for the positions we create. The student positions were as follows: site manager, producer, site designer, and two programmers. By integrating student and faculty personnel, we partially achieved the aspect of our first goal involving involvement. With a student lead effort to create this website, the students have taken on more responsibilities and feel a great connection to the project.

Communications
Once we had our first meeting, we established how the rest of the project will lay out. We decided that to achieve all our goals we would have to stress efficient and effective communication. We accomplished this by creating a Blackboard shell in which members of the group could post things they have been working on. Also, that group allows any user to email the entire team and post notes and comments about meetings. We also decided at our first meeting to convene once a week for the rest of the semester. We started in March and met every week until the end of May.

Workflow & Design Specifications
During these meetings we focused on creating a workflow for the website. This consisted of creating a list of the specifications we wanted. We discussed everything from links and navigation, to the specific manner in which we wanted submissions to be handled. At our meetings, we also compared many different websites of online journals and magazines and complied lists of features we wanted to have on our site and things we thought made websites confusing and not user friendly. These lists help us finalize the aspects of the website and qualities of the individual pages that we wanted so all we have to do is program those pieces.

Navigation
In trying to create a web site that was interactive and user friendly, especially for students, the hiring of student workers on the project was a key element. No one knows better how to create an interactive website for students, but the students themselves. While we were viewing the various websites and creating our workflow, many ideas were contributed by the staff that is instrumental in creating a webpage that is very interactive and user friendly. The careful placement of links and the addition of a homepage link are aspects of our site that we feel will provide the user with an easy and simple navigation experience. Looking at comparable websites was a part of our meetings that was crucial to the development of our workflow. By seeing first hand aspects of sites that made those sites confusing

and displeasing allowed us to create a workflow that we are excited about and one that is user friendly. This workflow contains such details as what links and in which order the links appear, the addition of a bar of links on the bottom of the page, which version of submission mangers to use and what adjustments must be made, etc.

Design
In the meantime, we also generated over 30 designs for the website and reviewed the designs at our meetings. During those meetings, we asked everyone what their opinions were on each design, and we asked what we could improve. By our May 19th meeting, we have a finalized home page and design that we are ready to code.

In realizing the importance of our next goal which is creating a simple and unique design, we wanted to make sure that the VOX brand was pervaded throughout the website. In our design stages, the VOX logo was the central element in creating the basic template for all of our pages. Also in our discussions of the design, our programmer worked with the designer to create templates that would be conducive to all types of prose and art that we wanted to promote.

Ongoing Involvement
By having continuous meetings and working diligently to fortify the relationship between students and faculty, we are well on our way of meeting out first goal and increasing the involvement of students and faculty.

Sustainability
Another goal was to create an interactive and user friendly site that is sustainable. In each of our meetings and in the generation of the workflow, everything we wanted to accomplish and all the qualities we wanted our sight to have, we discussed the sustainability of the programming behind these aspects and wanted to make sure that in years to come, any other programmer can come in and be able to fix things. Also, the issue of funds was brought up. Maintaining we space can be a costly expense. We decided to have a donations area in which people including publishers, fans, and parents can donate money to VOX. In order for this to be accomplished, we are currently working with Student Development and Campus Activities to link the donations tab to Vox's agency account. We also plan to make adjustments to the print run, so that we are assured to have funding for online hosting and content delivery. The quick and simple transfer of funds that VOX can be used for online development and to make *Vox* the strongest online presence it can be.

Impact on Students/ Faculty

In the grand scheme of things our project has indeed had an impact on students thus far. Not only has this project provided jobs for five Pace students but it also generated much interest within the Pace community. Many students are eager to see the site and submit their own works. Of course, at this time we cannot exactly measure the number of students reach with our project as of now. But when this project reaches its completion, we hope to have impacted the entire Pace community.

Our project has an impact on Pace's faculty. Currently on our web development team, we employ three professors who work with the students. They take on supervisory roles and aid the students in performing tasks. Dr. Murthy is a professor who is part of the computer science department and gives advice on how to format the web site as well has how to accommodate all the different features we want to use. Dr. Collins is part of the English department and also gives advice and suggestions. She uses her experience with literature to help the team create a very user friendly environment. She makes sure

that the prose and poetry will be able to be easily read by the viewers. Dr. Poe is the team leader and has great knowledge both of literature and English as well as the technical aspects of sight building. These faculty members have served as a large part of this project and will continue to be a large part of the project.

Our Next Steps

Our next steps involve completion of programming and the launch. Over this half of the project, we have taken monumental steps to actualize the website. Now that we have created workflow and completed design, our next step is to program the information and make the actual site. Our programmers are currently working on gather different programs they can use as well as creating their own applications that they will use to build the site. We also have to meet with Student Development and work out the terms of the donations. Once we finish programming, we will have to review the site and fix any glitches and errors. Uploading all the content and previous issues, in the context of site production, is something that we will also have to do. We will also have to teach the VOX editors how to use the site and approve submissions. The last thing we will do is launch the site and enjoy the interaction with the entire Pace community.

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