

P1 – Needs Assessment Document

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Section 1: Identification of Areas of Need

I serve as the President of the Webmasters User Group at Western Michigan University. In recent years the University has begun a significant organizational change process regarding how it manages and presents content on its institutional Web site. An informal survey was conducted to measure two things: if a staff member primarily served as a web master and how much time the staff member allocated towards maintenance of Web content. The current plan is to implement a content management system where individual staff can access a Web-based system to author, review, and approve content for the Web. During the transition to the new system a majority of the staff with Web related responsibilities will continue to maintain their individual Web sites using Adobe Dreamweaver software.

In several Webmaster Users Group meetings individual staff members have indicated a need and desire for training and support in using both existing and new Web authoring tools. An assessment of staff development needs in regards to Web development, design and writing for the Web would be ideal at this point in time in order to prepare an adequate strategy for staff support and development for those who will be using the new content management system as well as for those who will likely continue to use their existing web publishing methods for a year or more.

The following document presents an approach to conducting a needs assessment of Western Michigan University Web masters in regards to training and support needs. The assessment presented is based on experience of the author, based on 10 years worth of training and support, as well as best practices described in guides for conducting technology needs assessments in an educational setting.

Section 2: Needs Assessment Instruments

Regarding the value of implementing a self conducted needs assessment, Fleit suggests that it is far more desirable to utilize self assessment methods to discover areas for improvement or change before such problems become so dire that an outside consultant and much stricter restitution is required (Fleit, 1994). The individual Web masters who maintain Web pages for administration, colleges, programs, offices, centers, and student service organizations could utilize a self-conducted needs assessment to determine which needs for training and support are most important. Based on the results, those who are well suited to deliver professional development to the group could collaborate and address those needs specified in the assessment. Fleit recommends using a four step self-assessment: “asking the questions, answering them, evaluating the results, and constructing an action plan based on what the results reveal” (Fleit, 1994). A six part self-assessment questionnaire is recommended by Fleit which covers planning, policies and procedures, facilities and staff, products and services, organizational and external relationships, and funding (Fleit, 1994). When developing our needs assessment instrument and strategy we will consider the areas and sub sections recommended by Fleit.

For assessing the status and standards of technology maintenance and support on campus for Web developers, we will utilize the recommended technology support questions specified in the Educause Student Guide to Evaluating Information Technology on Campus as a model. In terms of technology support, the guide recommends considering what hardware and software standards exist on the campus, the types of support services offered and when they are accessible, and if there is a plan for keeping hardware and software up to date (Educause, 2006).

Finally, we will consider the theoretical framework utilized by the NCREL enGauge framework for effective technology use. The six conditions specified by the framework include vision, practice, proficiency, equity, access and system (Ncrel, 2000). Each of these conditions also includes several

indicators which can be considered to measure the overall effectiveness of a technology training and support implementation.

A draft of the Webmaster Users Group needs assessment has been prepared utilizing the free SurveyMonkey.com web questionnaire service and is accessible online from:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=XBDLcKovjuet_2b_2bkQLYX6BA_3d_3d. Please note that the free version of SurveyMonkey.com allows only ten questions to be added to a survey at a time. In order to implement a full survey tool for the needs assessment a commercial license for the tool would need to be purchased. In the final section of this document we will explore the strategy recommended for implementation of a needs assessment for training and support for Web developers on WMU's campus.

Section 3: Strategy for Implementation of Needs Assessment

Our needs assessment will be implemented internally within the Webmasters Users Group. The assessment will ask questions about existing resources, support, time allocation, and training needs. Upon completion, the entire group will have access to the results and evaluate the findings. Based upon the findings of the needs assessment the group will implement training and support measures that address the needs measured in the assessment.

An announcement regarding the creation of a needs assessment will be made at the monthly Webmaster Users Group meeting. Members will be encouraged to take part in drafting the assessment in order to make certain that all necessary areas and concerns are addressed. A sample of all materials cited in this document will be provided to those members who participate in creating the assessment. Upon completion of the assessment tool an invitation will be e-mailed to all Webmaster Users Group members. A set period of time for completion of the assessment will be described to participants. After a period of two weeks has past, a reminder will be sent to all Webmaster Users Group members who

have not completed the assessment. When the deadline for completion of the assessment has past the results of the online survey will be tabulated and reviewed by a principal investigator and members who participated in drafting of the assessment. A report will be drafted and presented to the Webmasters User Group. Within the report a set of recommendations will be presented. The group at large will be asked to endorse the recommendations or to make changes to the implementation plan based on group discussion. An implementation team will be formed from Webmaster User Group members and training and support will be delivered to the entire group based on the recommendations endorsed from the needs assessment report.

It is our belief that this needs assessment strategy has a strong potential for success. An assessment that takes into account the needs of the overall group, is openly discussed, whose findings are reviewed and endorsed will yield a workable staff development implementation plan that meets the desires and needs of the entire Webmaster Users Group.

References

Fleit, L. H. (1994). Self-Assessment for Campus Information Technology Services. *Educause.edu*. Retrieved September 26, 2007, from <http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/PUB3012.pdf>

Student Guide to Evaluating Information Technology on Campus. (2006). *Educause.edu*. Retrieved September 26, 2007, from <http://www.educause.edu/elements/attachments/studentguide/StudentGuide.pdf>

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