

Overview of a Study on the Potential Need for an Open Source Software Support Organization
Ithaka Strategic Services
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The goal of this study is to evaluate the landscape and market environment for open source software (OSS) created by and for the higher education community, to assess the need for an organization to promote the support and adoption of these OSS projects, and to define this organization's mission and service model, should we determine that such an organization is desirable. This overview provides background and our plan for completing the study.

Background

In recent years over a dozen open source software (OSS) projects have been launched among higher education institutions with the aim of meeting the community's needs more effectively and at less cost than do commercial options presently available. Proponents of these projects argue that academic institutions have unique needs that are not well served by commercial vendors because the sector is too small to support a robust competitive market, particularly in areas of critical interest to higher education institutions such as course management and financial systems. As a result, a common view is that existing options do not have the features required or allow for cost-effective customization. Many administrators are also concerned that academic institutions are ceding too much control for mission-critical tasks to commercial vendors. OSS advocates argue that open source software can address these issues, and moreover that higher education has proven it can produce high quality and innovative software, since a number of commercial applications prevalent in higher education originated within academic institutions.

Several of these projects have gained considerable traction. Moodle, an open source course management system, launched in 2002 and now boasts a community of over 9,100 sites and nearly 90,000 users across 147 countries. uPortal, which allows academic institutions to provide abridged and customized versions of their campus Websites, has been adopted by hundreds of institutions worldwide. A third major project underway is Sakai, an effort led by staff at the University of Michigan, Indiana University, MIT and Stanford to design, build and deploy a new Collaboration and Learning Environment (CLE) for higher education. Many of these projects have received foundation grants in addition to funds and staff time contributed by academic institutions themselves.

There is a concern in the community that adoption of OSS is hindered by uncertainty about future support for and improvements in the software. Furthermore, without some attempt at coordination, it is possible that multiple projects will attempt to form independent administrative structures, resulting in duplication of costs. The creation of a new organization, referred to here as the "Organization for Open Source Software" (OOSS), has been proposed to address this need. This concept has received significant interest from the community and from a group of senior college and university administrators. There is a desire for further exploration of the need for such an organization and for a clearer definition of what its mission and areas of activity would be.

Paul Courant, Professor of Economics and former Provost at the University of Michigan, has agreed to lead a study in collaboration with Ithaka, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to accelerate the productive uses of information technologies for the benefit of higher education around the world.* Michael Carter, a consultant with decades of experience in academic computing and instructional technologies with major universities and leading companies in the technology sector, is also contributing

* Ithaka has received funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for this study, and is seeking additional funding from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation as well as a small number of universities and colleges.

to the project. In this study, we will identify the most important software applications used in higher education, noting the OSS and the commercial options currently available for each. We will assess which software packages have been successful and why in an effort to identify areas where there is a strong rationale for higher education to develop its own software. We will then consider whether the software needs of higher education will best be met through a 'laissez faire' approach, allowing commercial software companies and OSS projects to evolve naturally, or whether there is a need for some sort of coordinating body to guide and support their development and adoption. If we do conclude that there is a need for such an organization (and we undertake this study with completely open minds about the answer to this question), we will propose a mission statement and set of services that it should provide, and will make suggestions as to how it would be governed and supported.

To achieve the objectives of this study we are conducting interviews with a broad range of constituents, including: developers of open source software in and outside of higher education; end users, such as CTO or CIOs, CFOs, librarians, provosts and other administrators from a diverse set of institutions; commercial companies that are engaged with OSS; and competitors to OSS projects. In total, we expect to visit or communicate with staff from over a dozen colleges and universities across the country. The findings of the study will be broadly distributed and made publicly available.

Team Bios

Paul Courant

Paul N. Courant is Professor of Economics, Professor of Public Policy, and Faculty Associate in the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. From 2002-2005 he served as Provost and Executive Vice-President for Academic Affairs, the chief academic officer and the chief budget officer of the University. He has also served as the Associate Provost for Academic and Budgetary Affairs, Arthur F. Thurnau Professor, Chair of the Department of Economics and Director of the Institute of Public Policy Studies (which is now the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy). In 1979 and 1980 he was a Senior Staff Economist at the Council of Economic Advisers.

Courant has authored half a dozen books, and over sixty monographs and papers covering a broad range of topics in economics and public policy, including tax policy, local economic development, gender differences in pay, housing, radon and public health, relationships between economic growth and environmental policy, and university budgeting systems. More recently, he is studying the economics of universities, the economics of libraries and archives, and the changes in the system of scholarly communication that derive from new information technologies.

Paul Courant holds a BA in History from Swarthmore College (1968); an MA in Economics from Princeton University (1973); and a PhD in Economics from Princeton University (1974).

Michael Carter

A strategy, design, and development consultant to foundations, universities, corporations, and early-stage technology companies, throughout his career Dr. Carter has focused on the application of information technology to learning. As Chief Learning Architect at Pensare, Inc., he created programs with faculty from the business schools at Harvard, Wharton, Stanford and Duke Universities for delivery to corporate knowledge communities. He defined as well the platform and authoring environment with which knowledge communities are constructed for Fortune 500 customers. As Director of Education Research of Apple Computer's Advanced Technology Group, he was responsible for such programs as Apple Classrooms of Tomorrow, Business Learning Research and Apple's San Francisco Multimedia Lab. Dr. Carter also held the position of Vice President of Digital Pictures, Inc.

Dr. Carter's academic career includes professing European history at Dartmouth College and directing Academic Information Resources Systems Development at Stanford University, where he was responsible for initiating a wide array of research and instructional computing programs, including *Tiro*, the Stanford/IBM Joint Study on Scholarly Communications named for Cicero's amanuensis. He has served as an advisor on technology and learning to Apple, DEC, IBM, NeXT, Sun Microsystems and the Internet Society, as well as foundations and universities internationally.

Kevin M. Guthrie, President

Kevin Guthrie is Ithaca's founding President. He previously served as President of JSTOR from 1995 through 2003, guiding that not-for-profit organization from a grant project of the Mellon Foundation to a self-sustaining not-for-profit enterprise with annual revenues of approximately \$20 million. Prior to joining JSTOR, Kevin conducted research on a variety of not-for-profit organizations on behalf of the Mellon Foundation, work which culminated in the publishing of *The New-York Historical Society: Lessons from One Non-Profit's Long Struggle for Survival*. He has a Master's in Business Administration from Columbia University and an A.B. in Civil Engineering from Princeton University. Between college and business school Kevin pursued a variety of endeavors, including a brief stint in

professional football, broadcasting for ESPN, and the successful creation of a software and video products company that provided products and services to college and professional football teams.

Rebecca J. Griffiths, Strategic Services Manager

As the Strategic Services Manager, Rebecca is responsible for leading the development of Ithaka's Strategic Services function, which provides strategic support in areas such as business planning and governance to incubated entities, Affiliates and external non-profit organizations. Rebecca played a critical role in the initial development of Aluka by researching user needs in U.S. and African universities, helping to manage partner relations and co-authoring Aluka's draft business plan. Prior to joining Aluka, Rebecca worked as a strategic management consultant with Monitor Company in their Hong Kong and London offices, and led projects in areas such as new market entry, organizational development, and corporate strategy. She has also held positions as a product manager with America Online and a business development analyst with a Hong Kong-based media company. Rebecca holds a B.A. degree, *cum laude*, in East Asian Studies from Princeton University and an M.B.A from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, with a concentration on new product and venture development.

Matthew Rascoff, Strategic Services Analyst

Since joining Ithaka as Strategic Services Analyst, Matthew has worked on projects for the Spencer Foundation, on education research portals; the Hewlett Foundation, which involved market research and initial business planning for a new service to distribute music to higher education; and the Mellon Foundation, on an electronic monographs project. He has advised two of Ithaka's incubated entities, Aluka and Portico, on forecasting and pricing issues. Matthew was previously a management consultant with Katzenbach Partners. At KPL, he helped design an annual goal-setting process for the marketing group of a large New York pharmaceutical company; assisted in the restructuring of a Texas electric and gas utility; and developed a channel strategy for a national wireless carrier to reduce the cost of adding customers. Matthew earned a B.A. in Philosophy at Columbia University and spent a post-graduate year at Bogaziçi University in Istanbul, where he held Fulbright and ARIT-Princeton University fellowships.