Project Year

2004

Project Team

Stephen Plank, Associate Professor, Sociology Department, Krieger School of Arts & Sciences; Andrew Liu, Undergraduate Student, Electrical and Computer Engineering, Whiting School of Engineering

Project Title

Database Creation Tool for Newspaper Content Analyses

Audience

Students in the course *Education in the Media*. Eventually, we anticipate that use of the Database Creation Tool will expand to other Sociology courses.

Pedagogical Issue

The pedagogical need this project addresses is the need for a well-designed, user-friendly interface for creating a database of newspaper article contents. In the course *Education in the Media*, it is desirable for students to focus on the sociological substance of the course, and the logic of social science research, rather than struggling with the logistics of creating a database.

Solution

We propose to create a database creation tool that would be useful not just for a course about how newspapers cover schools, but, more generally, for any course or research project that would benefit from a customized web-based application for creating a database. The application will be especially focused on Internet feeds of newspaper articles or other structured presentation of data via RSS.

Technologies Used

MySQL, Graphic Design, HTML/Web Design, JAVA

Project Abstract

We seek support from the Technology Fellowship Program to allow us to develop, utilize, and refine a web-based interface for creating a database of newspaper article contents. Stephen Plank, Assistant Professor of Sociology, teaches a freshman seminar titled *Education in the Media*. Dr. Plank taught this course in Fall 2003, and is scheduled to teach it several times more in the next few years. During Fall 2003, a staff member from the CER helped to create a preliminary version of a web-based tool with which students could respond to prompts on the computer screen, thereby entering information they had distilled after reading a sample of newspaper articles. This web-based tool, in turn, allowed students to download their current data into an Excel spreadsheet so that they could conduct basic quantitative analyses. We now want to take the project several steps further.

Between Summer 2004 and Spring 2005, the team proposes to do all of the following: (1) Explore the possibility of directly linking a stream from LexisNexis (our main source for archived newspaper articles) to our web-based tool; (2) improve the aesthetics and performance of the data-entry environment; (3)

improve the interface with Excel, and possibly expand to other environments such as Microsoft Access or SPSS; (4) get the application installed on a Sociology Department server and teach Plank how to edit or adapt it in the future; and (5) get feedback from students who will use the web-based tools during Fall 2004, so that final improvements can be made during Spring 2005.

The student applying to work on this project is Andrew Liu, an electrical engineering major who took Plank's freshman seminar in Fall 2003. Andrew will be a great asset in that he understands the pedagogical and social science goals of the course, and also is equipped to do the programming and multimedia work necessary for the project. Andrew and Dr. Plank will have weekly or bi-weekly meetings throughout the summer, and continue to meet every two or three weeks throughout the fall and spring semesters. The first half of the summer will be dedicated to Andrew's becoming more familiar with Cold Fusion and exploring the possibility of integrating an RSS feature. The second half of the summer will be dedicated to preparing a well-functioning (and pre-tested) version of the application ready for course use during Fall 2004. The fall and spring semesters will be dedicated to observing the application in actual use by students, learning from those students' experiences about further improvements that could be made, and creating a final version (to be used multiple times in the coming years) during Spring 2005.

Benchmarks to assess whether the project has been successful, and by which we can measure its impact, will include: (1) having a well-functioning version ready for Fall 2004, (2) having an improved version installed on the Sociology Department server by Spring 2005 with Dr. Plank equipped to edit it and adapt it in the future, and (3) Dr. Plank's confirming that he can dedicate more class time to the discussion of sociological substance and social science research logic during Fall 2004 than he was able to do during Fall 2003.