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Creating Blended Environments That Connect Classroom to Community

Objective: To outline a blended environment model linking multiple systems, departments, and people together, that can be easily integrated into the culture of how we already live, work, and learn. Further, this model seeks to highlight mechanisms within said blended environment that would support students who might feel isolated or disconnected when they first get to URI.

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Class Structure

See end of the document for proposed model.

Class: The class could function as both a traditional face-to-face lecture or as an online class.

Instructor: This individual should be familiar with technology and have experience utilizing online research. The Instructor will have placed their initial course materials in The Community, Equity, & Diversity Collections (CEDC) or identified materials to use in the CEDC. The Instructor will work with Joseph Santiago if they would like to get their Students Practicums uploaded into the CEDC and add additional course content to the CEDC. The Instructor will have the responsibility of guiding their students through the different types of knowledge (Primary, Secondary, etc.) and discuss the best practices in responding to different social contexts, communication mediums (chat room, face-to-face, email, forum, report, etc.) in such a way that respects people from different perspectives, cultures, and opinions.

Sakai: Sakai is a digital web space for students to work with their instructors to practice skills learned and gain deeper understanding of the material before putting their skills and knowledge into practice.

Guest Speakers: Guest Speakers can be brought in by the Instructor or a Speaker may have a past program that may be viewed by students through the CEDC.

Chat Room/Forum: A chat room or forum (accessible through Sakai or otherwise) could be utilized to put into practice knowledge and skills from the course and students could engage guest speakers, community members, and other faculty and staff here.

Course Content (CC): Course content stored in the CEDC is public; it automatically generates citations for patrons so they can use materials in a scholarly way and a view count can be tracked for the content retrieved. As a result, course content can be designed that allows knowledge to be sent back to the Instructor and the CEDC about which information was most relevant to individuals accessing it. The course content can be used to connect individuals in variety of communication mediums (streamed audio/video, public comments and questions in a blog or editorial format, multimedia reports, white papers) to learning opportunities and discussions on campus, across disciplines, in specific industries, or in specific locations (Cultural Center, classrooms, residence hall common rooms, departmental websites) to get feedback and responses in real time.

The Community, Equity, & Diversity Collections (CEDC): The CEDC is part of the University's institutional repository (IR) and can be used as a unifying platform that connects people across multiple platforms and devices (smartphone, Tablets, computer, MP3 player) as a vehicle for community scholarship, creativity, outreach, feedback, and discussion. The CEDC tracks the number of times pieces are accessed and cited, offering flexibility to the instructor(s) to have multiple points of access to the community, or a more limited basis of use. Having the CEDC generate data on how often information is accessed will allow us to see what issues, trends, and topics, the community is interested in. Utilizing the CEDC's potential as a searchable database that is accessible from any search engine, community reports, programs, and works, can be more easily located by anyone seeking information in our community. The works shared in the CEDC informs people and directs them back into the University to work with the knowledge and skills that are present in our community. In the diagram below the thick blue arrows represent the direct flow of information and where the moderation controls would be present when dialoguing or when a request comes through to upload a project, program, or report to the CEDC. An Instructor may also work with Joseph Santiago (Digital Community Developer & Information Architect) (DCD/IA) to get their course content and student practicums into the CEDC.

Community Structure

Digital Community Developer & Information Architect (DCD/IA): The DCD/IA identifies, develops, and integrates, multiple points in the community and works with the Instructor if needed for support in relation to course content and digital/geographical interaction. The DCD/IA point of contact for this course model is Joseph Santiago.

Overall Campus Community: This category would include residence halls, academic buildings, dining halls, outside community spaces, and specific locations such as the Commuter Lounge.

Cultural Centers: The Cultural Centers at URI include, but are not limited to the GLBT Center, Multicultural Center, the Women's Center, and the Center for Nonviolence & Peace Studies. Almost every subject has content that overlaps into these areas. Programing can be done live and later be shared with the CEDC, or past programing can be shared (webinars etc.) and retrieved again for later use.

Living Learning Communities (LLC) & Common Rooms: LLCs can connect to the themes and questions of the cultural centers on campus, as well as connecting to classes in relation to community questions,

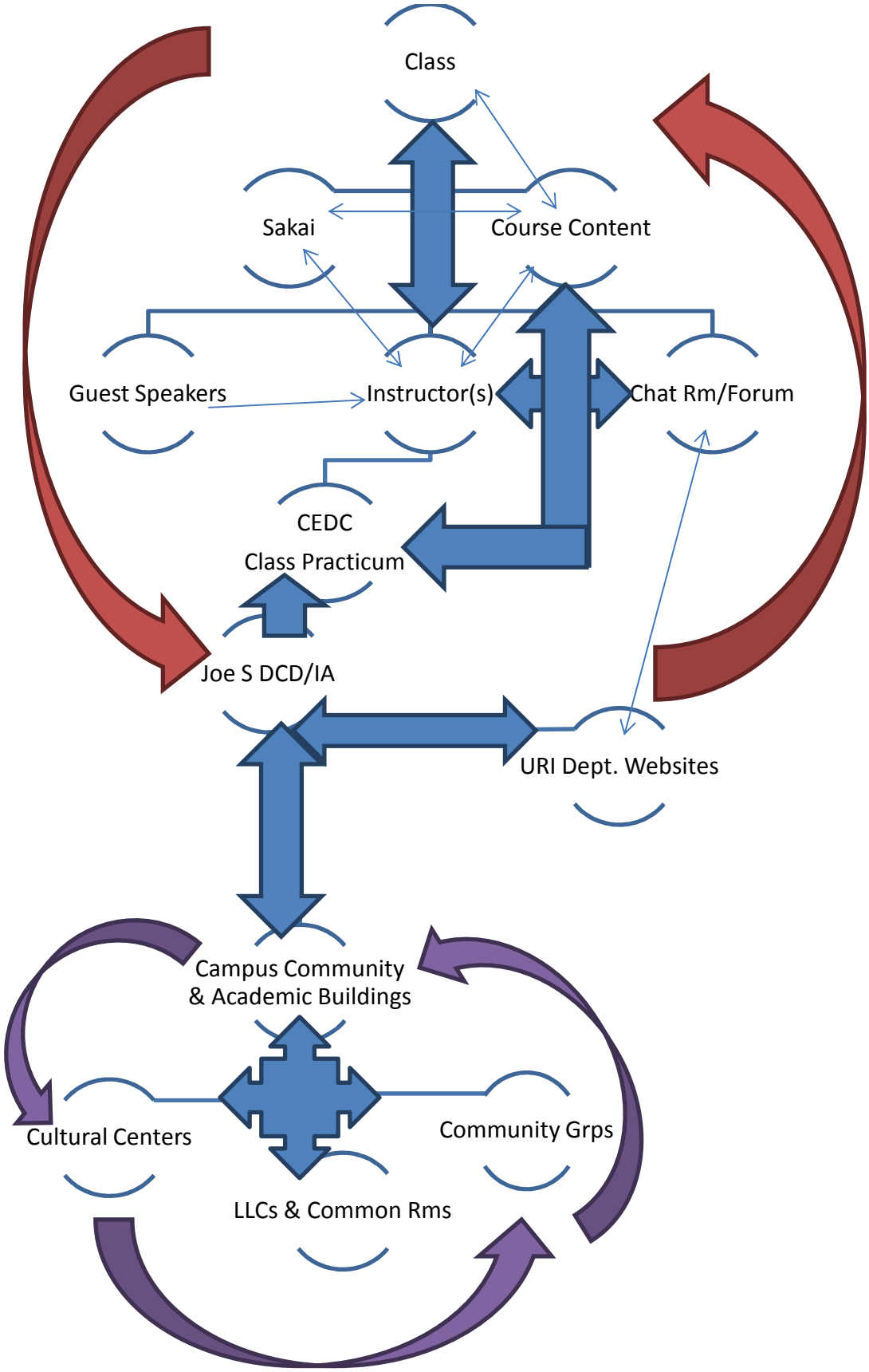
projects, speakers, and ongoing dialogues. Establishing formally recognized portals (chat, forums, live comments on websites, RSS feeds) allows others to connect to key points at the University without spending any additional funds. Departments, classes or groups can adopt common rooms simply by offering an online option such as a chat room that may begin with a question or theme to get people in said location and begin a dialogue with others linked to that physical space. Even if faculty and staff cannot be physically present in a specific location they can have a social presence by interacting with individuals in that physical space. Having a way that at risk students can reach out to someone can support at risk students and direct them to additional support if need be.

Introducing this concept into a physical space could be done simply with printing out an intriguing question or a request and asking for feedback in the message. After posting this piece of paper physically in the space, the chat room should be created on the appropriate website repeating the question on the page, and answers could be public by utilizing the URI calendar for events or kept private. A public debate could simply be live comments posted on topics such as Diversity Week programing. This format would also allow us to get a head count from those who participate, and we will know approximately how many people fully utilize Common Room spaces. Creating multiple ways to access community here at URI ensures every student has the ability to take part in the URI community regardless of socioeconomic class (SEC), work schedule, or living status (on campus, commuters etc.). This will extend the reach of LLCs to the whole University and removes geography, resources, or scheduling as obstacles for community development. When the University is seen as more active and prominent in community development and student experiences by students, the University increases its ability to retain and recruit a greater number of students. The majority of the work is already being done, this format just makes it more visible.

Community Groups: There are various community groups here at URI that could connect with this model and expand their ability to reach others with their message. In the classroom, students schedule their lives around learning course content; in the community we utilize innovative themes and content to schedule learning around our students' lives.

Departmental Websites: Every Department seeks to showcase diversity in their department as well as engage the community. This is the perfect vehicle to do that and demonstrate the innovation that we are all part of. The Library at URI offers multiple ways to interact with them and utilize services (email, phone, chat or IM, and web forms, and presently they now have more journal articles being utilized through the web then in person. Departmental websites have the ability to pose problems and questions to the community creating Think Tank Talks and attaching to the URI Master Events calendar will increase the traffic further to our social networking connections.

Suggestions to implement this model would be attaching it to adding GPS tracking for the Ripta Buses as they move along campus, updates for parking lots, adopt a Common Room with online presence program, attaching it to URI mobile apps, and Think Tank Talks would be a great way to get many people utilizing these connected systems. If Departments want great social network interactions they must think of programing for them in similar ways as they do for face-to-face programs. The diagram for this model is at the end of the document.


Class
Sakai
Course Content
Guest Speakers
Instructor(s)
Chat Rm/Forum
CEDC
Class Practicum
Joe S DCD/IA
URI Dept. Websites
Campus Community
& Academic Buildings
Cultural Centers
Community Grps
LLCs & Common Rms

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