

2001/2002 Front Door Project Final Report

Govind Davis
Project Coordinator

Summary

Based on feedback from our final survey, personal testimonials and Front Door site usage patterns, it seems that this project has been a success. Weatherhead students now have a single location with the ability to access all of the resources they need for their academic and extracurricular experience.

Most importantly, the Front Door site allows for easy content management and dynamic control of site elements to suit students needs as they shift through the academic calendar. While the management and coordination of content requires time and effort it also provides an opportunity for future Weatherhead students to participate actively in providing a valuable service to fellow students while learning about the value of technology in organizations.

Included in this report are summarized feedback from the individual reports of project members, a comprehensive statistical report on changes in site usage and perception, an overview of current usage trends, a detailed report regarding possibilities for an integrated calendar, and suggestions for the continuation and management of the project in following years.

Individual reports

Site Design (Charles Cicora)

Overview of duties

- ◆ The site design manager had various duties. Included in these duties were duties not normally associated with a design manager. The cross-functional design of the Front Door team allowed everyone to take on additional duties outside of their realm to experience all aspects of getting the Front Door site up and running. Duties included:
- ◆ Overseeing the general look and feel of the website
- ◆ Designing template for the website
- ◆ Meeting with Megan Wu from the Dorney group on a weekly basis
- ◆ Approving all design changes
- ◆ Ensuring the site is functional and ergonomically sound
- ◆ Designing 1st Front Door survey
- ◆ Promoting Front Door at various functions
- ◆ With other members, planning future and direction for the Front Door project
- ◆ Ongoing monitoring of content and functionality of Front Door

Selected recommendations

- ◆ Be aware of political situations affecting the design and be prepared to handle them
- ◆ Make people aware that the project will take time and effort in order to produce a good website
- ◆ Interactive parts of the site seem to be the biggest hit, and should be emphasized in the future
- ◆ Systems analyst procedures such as soft systems methodology could improve the initial design
- ◆ Technical aptitude is not necessary

Marketing (Anirudh Kejriwal)

Activities

- ◆ Researched student interests with regard to site ours
- ◆ Formulated a survey (pre-site development) to understand the demands of the students.
- ◆ Organized the re-launching and Chew-the-Phat on 7th March
- ◆ Developed memorabilia (screen-sweep) for the site for added publicity and marketing.
- ◆ Controlled the marketing budget.

Quality Assurance (Richard Marshall)

The Q/A Manager held responsibility for testing the site for link and technical errors on the front and back end, for reporting errors to the development team and for making general recommendations about site functionality.

Recommendations

- ◆ Improve site loading speed

- ◆ Rearrange the order of the headings in the top navigation bar-
- ◆ The email heading, which is one of the most popular, is at the end of the navigation bar. As such, users have to wait until all the other sections load before being able to access the “e-mail” link. Also, most students use blackboard, then email so it would make sense to put them next to each other on the top navigation bar.
- ◆ Encourage more use of the message boards by students. Using the message boards as an on-line marketplace for text books is a good start, but more needs to be done. Marketing with the incoming first year class is key here.
- ◆ Ensure that all the lab machines have Front Door as their home page.

Site Administration (Diana Cardenas)

The site administrator role was involved in every stage of the project, and its participation should last after the initial development phase.

Initially, the site administrator worked with the Front Door project team to site designer and with the Dorney group in the following tasks:

- ◆ Layout ideas
- ◆ Main menus – Location and contents
- ◆ Approval of functional design
- ◆ Approval of graphical design
- ◆ Backend system:
- ◆ Specification of requirements
- ◆ Revision of functionality

The site administrator also met with the various stakeholders of the project to determine their needs in reference to publication of information and links. The main links were determined and approved by these entities through communication with the site administrator. This information was then passed to the Dorney team for development and the site administrator was in charge of revising the links and assuring their accuracy. Simultaneously to the development of the portal, the site administrator contacted various club’s webmasters who developed new versions of the WSOM clubs websites to be in accordance with the new Front Door look and feel. This project was differentiated from the Front Door; however, constant communication was maintained among the WSOM clubs and the Front Door site administrator.

Once the final design of the portal was defined, the site administrator revised the functionality of the entire system. During multiple meetings with the Dorney team, the backend system was designed and approved. The requirements were specific in order to fulfill the needs of the administration. The development of the backend system required numerous meetings with the Dorney team, the Front Door group and the future users of the system.

Towards the end of the project, the site administrator was responsible for assuring the correct functionality of the system. All the links were revised, updated and modified according to tests and the requirements of the users of the system. Also, in conjunction with the Q/A responsible, the entire functionality of the system was tested and assured. The site administrator not only conducted some of the tests, but also communicated the needs to the Dorney team and assured corrections and updates were timely completed.

The most important role of the site administrator is the maintenance of the relationships with the stakeholders of the system, providers of information as well as final users. These relationships were created during the project and must be nurtured and maintained in order to assure the continuity and success of the site.

The site administrator is responsible for weekly updating the site, making sure a new banner is published and relevant links are placed in the upcoming events and announcements sections. The updating of information has been done in agreement with the project coordinator; however, it is the site administrator's responsibility to revise the site weekly and assure the pertinence of the information. The site administrator contacted WSOM clubs leaders and included the weekly articles for the club corner.

The site administrator position should continue assuring the functionality of all the links of the system and coordinating the weekly updates. The site administrator is required to maintain the created relationships with the CSLC, admissions, PDPAO, WSOM clubs and other stakeholders in order to continue attending their needs of publication of information and system functionality. The site administrator is currently responsible for monitoring weekly updates of the system and publication of information. The current site administrator will train and initially supervise the new person that will take over her shoes with the Front Door site. This one-to-one transition will assure transference of information and relationships to the new responsible. During the summer months, the site administrator will veil for the functionality of the site and will continue to include current and relevant links for the student body.

The administration of the site requires a person fully responsible and able to utilize the backend system continuously. This person also should have a basic understanding of web systems and minimum skills in HTML and image processing. The position requires time availability to revise and update the system almost on a daily basis while searching for new content, current events and relevant information.

The Front Door Marketing Surveys

Two surveys were carried out among the first year MBA students at the Weatherhead School of management to bring forth their response to the Front Door portal in terms of four critical criteria.

- ◆ The frequency of usage of the portal – whether students used the portal often.
- ◆ The willingness to set the portal as the Homepage on their browser.
- ◆ The student's rating of the usefulness of the portal.
- ◆ The scope for improvement of the Front Door portal.

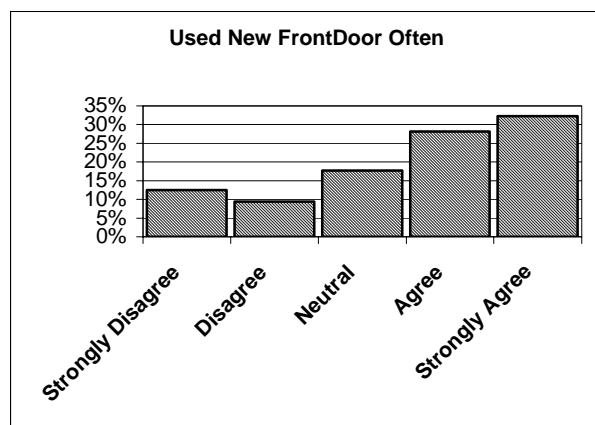
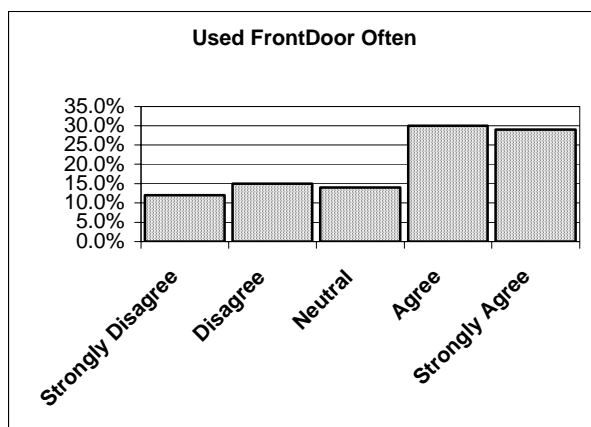
The first survey was carried out in November 2001 with the former Front Door in place and the second survey was carried out during the last week of April 2002 after the launch of the New Front Door.

The response levels for both the surveys were similar with about two-thirds of the first year class responding to the questionnaire. The number of responses to the first survey was 100 and for the second survey were 96. The shift in the student's response to the New Front Door 2002 is examined below against the benchmark established by the first survey.

Frequency of Usage

In response to the question on usage of the Front Door site we observed in the initial survey that a majority of the students were using Front Door often, about 59% of the sampled students expressed agreement, 30% agreed and 29% agreed strongly. About 14% were neutral in their opinion. However, there was a relatively large proportion (27%) of students with 15% disagreeing and 12% disagreeing strongly with the need to use Front Door often.

The distribution of student opinion was broadly similar after the launch of the New Front Door 2002. Thirty-two percent of the students agreed strongly and 27% agreed that they had used Front Door often. About 18% were neutral and there was no change in the percentage that disagreed strongly. However, the significant change at 95% confidence level based on the t-test was the decrease from 15% to 9% in the students disagreeing that they had used Front Door often. The histograms of the distribution of student opinion regarding Front Door usage is shown below:



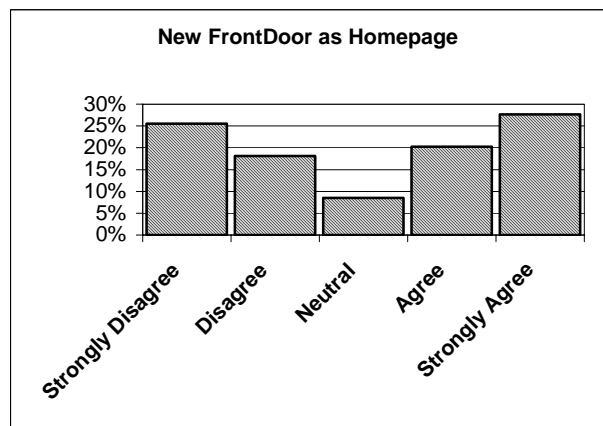
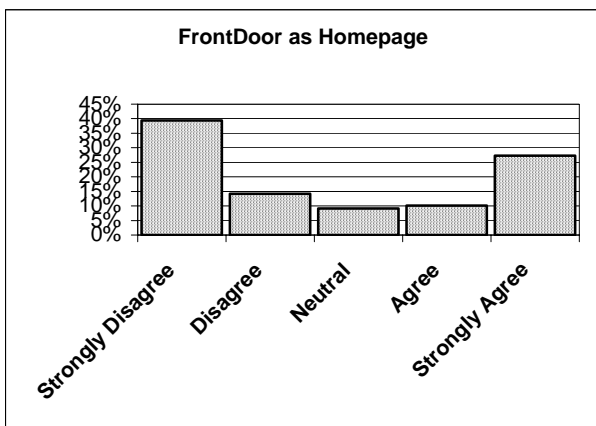
Front Door as Homepage

The distribution of student opinion in relation to setting the Front Door portal as the homepage on browsers also follows a more or less similar pattern in the two surveys. A small percentage of students 9% in both the surveys are neutral on this question, most have an opinion either for or against setting Front Door as their homepage.

During the survey before the launch of the New Front Door 2002, 39% of the students had strongly disagreed and 14% disagreed to set Front Door as their homepage. While 27% were strongly in favor and 10% were in favor of setting Front Door as their homepage.

Two significant changes at 95% confidence level are noticed in the survey conducted after launch of the New Front Door 2002. Firstly, the percentage of students expressing strong disagreement against setting Front Door as their home page reduced from 39% to 26% after the launch of the New Front Door. Secondly, the proportion of students agreeing to set Front Door as their home page increased from 10% to 20% after launch of the New Front Door 2002.

There were minor changes in the proportion of students disagreeing (increase from 14% to 18%) and those agreeing strongly (increase from 27% to 28%). However, these changes are not significant at a 95% confidence level based on the results of the student's t-test. The histograms of the distribution of student opinion on choosing Front Door as their homepage is shown below:



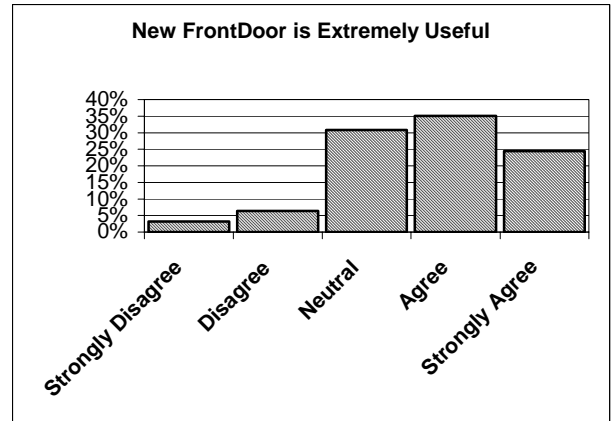
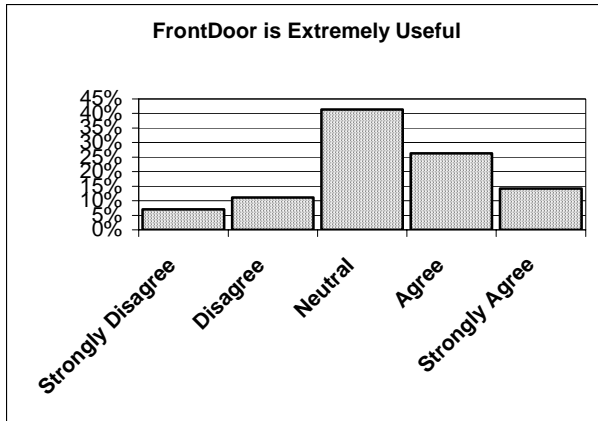
Usefulness of Front Door

There was a marked change in student opinion with respect to the usefulness of the Front Door portal after the launch of the New Front Door. All the changes were found to be significant at a 95% confidence level.

The proportion of students that disagreed strongly with the usefulness of the Front Door portal decreased from 7% to 3%, the proportion those that disagreed decreased from 11% to 6% and the proportion of those who were neutral decreased from 41% to 31% after the launch of the New Front Door. There was an increase from 26% to 35% in the proportion of students that agreed and from 14% to 24% in the proportion of students that agreed strongly to the usefulness of the New Front Door. The histograms of the distribution of student opinion about the usefulness of the Front Door portal are shown below:

Improvements to Front Door

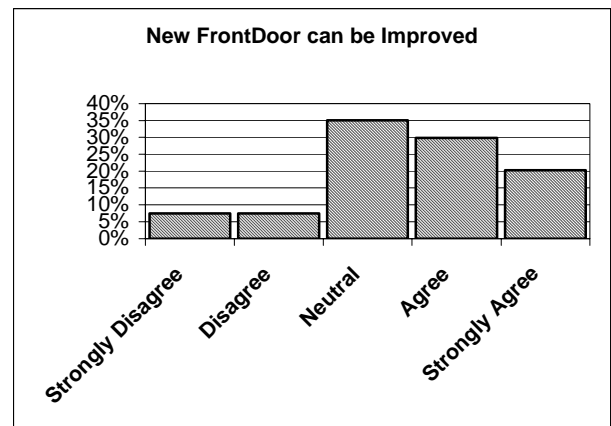
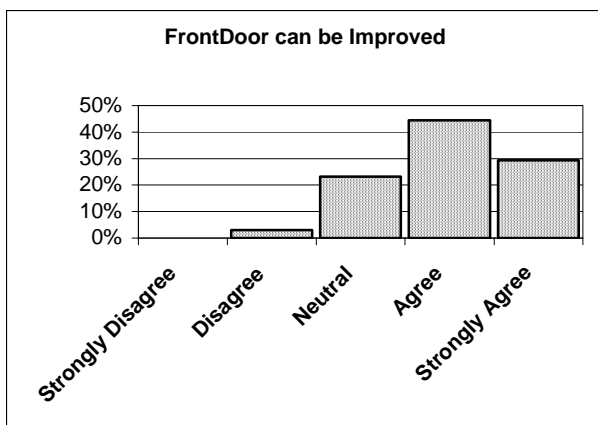
The pattern of the students' response to the possibility of improvements to the Front Door portal



also went through a marked change. All the changes in the proportions were found significant at a 95% confidence level.

The proportion of students who disagree strongly that Front Door needs improvement went up from 0% to 7% and the proportion of students that disagree went up from 3% to 7%. The proportion that was neutral to further improvements went up from 23% to 35%. The proportion of students that agreed that improvements are required went down from 44% to 30% and the proportion of students that strongly agreed that improvements to Front Door are required went down from 29% to 20%.

The histograms of the distribution of students' opinion with respect to further improvements to the Front Door portal are shown below.



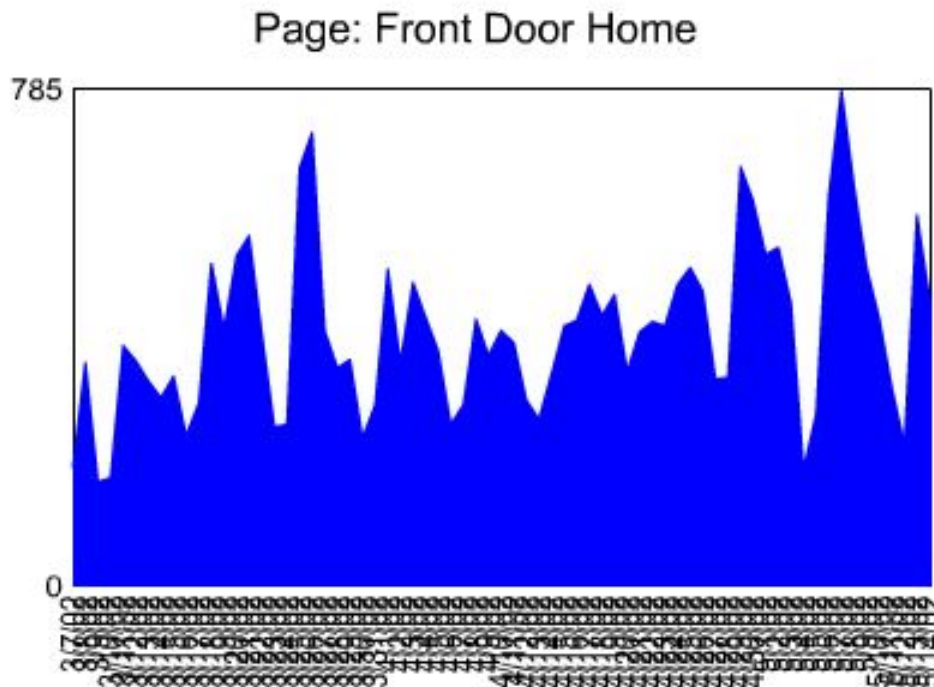
Conclusion

Based on the comparative study of the students' responses to the two surveys we can conclude that the quality/improvement of the Front Door portal is not the only criteria that decides how often students use the site. Information is also available through other channels like email using Outlook, notice boards, classroom announcements, word of mouth from friends, etc., and students may prefer to use these channels. The choice of the homepage is also decided by other factors like personal preference of content and style – utility of the Front Door portal is not perhaps the only criteria. The unequivocal shift in student opinion about the usefulness of the New Front Door site provides a clear indication that the efforts in designing the new site as been to the liking of the student body at large.

With respect to the scope for further improvements to the Front Door site it is heartening to note that we have already developed a satisfied customer base of about 14% of the student body that consider further improvements unnecessary. However, the majority opinion is still in favor of further improvements to the Front Door portal and this indicates an unmet demand in terms of the student's needs that we should attempt to satisfy in future projects.

Analysis of Usage from site reports

Since the re-launch of the Front Door site on March 7, 2002, the home page of the site has received over 27,000 hits. Usage increased steadily after the launch reaching a peak during registration at over 700 hits the first day of registration. You'll also notice that usage fluctuates throughout the week fairly consistently, with dips on the weekends. Surprisingly usage has not dropped off as much as expected since the end of classes. A large spike occurred relating to people checking grades, and it seems also that prospective students are beginning to use the site while current students still find value in the resources.



One of the most important virtues of the reporting feature of the site is that it allows administrators to observe usage patterns and adjust the site dynamically to meet the needs of students more effectively. The table below reflects usage of the Hot Links section of the site. Hot Links have been updated weekly based on intuitions about upcoming needs and from information gathered about the most frequently used links. Administrators can monitor usage of Hot Links and make adjustments by removing links that are not utilized.

Report information can also be valuable for marketing or strategic information. For example, I was able to estimate the number of attendees at the Year End Celebration by looking at the number of times the directions in the Club Corner section were accessed.

528	Check your grades
175	Buy & Sell Textbooks Here
165	People Search
136	Weatherhead in the News

99	Looking for a place to live?
88	Report Internship Offer
69	Strategic Planning
60	Registration
45	Moving Forward Fund
27	2002/2003 Student Handbook
17	Weatherhead Stats
16	CSLC Home
12	Club & Leadership Info
7	Visit University Circle
6	WSOM Technology

CALENDAR PROJECT FOR FULL TIME MBA STUDENTS

INTRODUCTION

This report is the result of a carefully research developed along the Spring 2002 Semester to determine the current situation of the information related with academic, recruiting and social activities for full time MBA students in Weatherhead School of Management.

The research is based in the information obtained from meetings with the people in charge of the areas that manage student information. The people interviewed for this work were: Fran Cort and Marian Hogue from PDPAO, Melissa Amos-Landgraf from CSLC, Linda Karaffa from Weatherhead ITG group and Jeff Gumpf from CWRU ITG group.

The present work also include a brief evaluations of the characteristics and functionalities of Corporate Time, a new computer program acquired by CWRU to provide the community a modern tool to manage its meetings and schedules. In this case the evaluation is based in the information provided by the manufacturer through its web page.

Finally, the report proposes some suggestions that could help to develop a reliable product to the Weatherhead School of Management community. It is important to mention that even though the study emphasized in the information for MBA full time students, most part of the analysis and recommendations could be applied also to other programs in the School.

The document has been structured in four parts. The first part of the document presents the current situation of the information and analyzes its main characteristics. In the second part, we describe the problems associated with the present situation of the information. In the third part we describe briefly the Corporate Time characteristics, the scheduling tool recently acquired by the CWRU ITG. Finally we present our recommendations based in the information provided in the previous part of the document.

SITUATION OF THE INFORMATION

Useful information for students can be classified in four groups: academic activities, recruiting activities, social activities and special activities. In the following lines we will explain the main concepts associated with each of them and the way in which the information is produced, recorded and showed to the students

1. Academic Activities

Definition: in academic activities we have included basically class schedule information, which is generated some months before the beginning of each semester, around 1 month before the registration date for next semester. (See Exhibit 1).

Update Pattern: this information can be modified in some way during the first days of classes, as consequence that some courses are cancelled because of the lack of registered students. However, after the first two weeks of class, that information is rarely modified and remains the same until the end of the semester. Slight changes in specific dates (basically cancellations) could occur during the semester but they are not planned and are known for the students within the class time. Generally, students and professors accord moving some dates or canceling classes for any reason.

Ways of Diffusion: Information about academic activities are posted or publicized according the graduation date of students. It means that first year students use different tools from second year student to know or consult their academic calendar.

Considering that most of the MBA core courses have an extension of 10 weeks and not all of them have a similar date to start and finish, the School try to help the first year students preparing a class schedule for the semester. This class schedule is prepared in Microsoft Word by Fran Cort and is sent to the student at the beginning of the semester. There is a slight difference between the first and second semester calendars. The first semester schedule includes only the first semester. The calendar for the second semester includes the second semester core courses and additionally, the elective courses that the first year student can take (not all the electives). Updated versions of these calendars are distributed no later than the second week of class.

Another tool used to promote the first year students academic activities is the SOLAR registration system. Given that all the courses of Weatherhead are included there, first year students also could use this tool. This system updates the information just until the second week of classes. The SOLAR system is feed by the information that is sent from Weatherhead's PDPAO. The person in charge to fill the system and send the information is Pamela Chamar.

The last source consulted by students is the Blackboard. This system downloads the classes schedule from the SOLAR system according to the registration of each student.

2. Recruiting Activities

Definition: It includes all the activities generated with potential employers: informative sessions, interviews and deadlines for applications.

Update Pattern: This information can be generated at any time during the semester and is always centralized by CSLC. Changes in the information can occur also at anytime. The update pattern in this case will depend from the update pattern of the ways of diffusion.

Ways of Diffusion: Information is posted in different sources, according the kind of activity. Interviews and deadlines for application are always showed in Wers system. The information is entered to this system by Mimi Filsinger as soon as it is available. We should mention that Wers is an external system to the school and it does not exist way to transfer or download the information from Wers. The user of this system just can enter or delete information from a computer.

Employers informative sessions are posted in the following places: Weatherhead web page, Front Door, Weathervane and e-mails. The first two places are updated in the same way that Wers. Weathervane and e-mails are issued once in a week and they include the updated information to the date of issue. One important characteristic of all these systems is that there is no way to communicate among them, they have not compatible platforms. As consequence, it is necessary to enter the information manually 5 times, once for each system.

3. Social Activities

Definition: This concept includes GBSA and Clubs Activities

Update pattern: Some of the social activities organized by the student clubs and GBSA are planned long time before the date of the event. The Casino night, the International Festival and the Maytrium Madness are examples of these kinds of events. But many other activities as conferences about specific topics can be set, just with a few weeks or days of anticipation. As consequence, even though

some information can be available much time before, the characteristics of the other activities require a continuous process to update this information.

Ways of Diffusion: These activities are posted in most of the sources used to announce the recruiting events. These sources are: Weatherhead web page, Front Door, Weathervane and weekly e-mail. Additionally this information is publicized by flyers that are posted in the building.

4. Special Activities

Definition: Under this umbrella, we have included all the other activities that do not fit the characteristics of the previous concepts. Special activities can be generated by any of the School Departments. For instance, the European Institute Conference is organized by the PDPAO and the MBA Corp is organized by CSLC. According with the kind of information provided by the meeting, some of the administrative departments assume the organization of the event.

Update pattern:

Given the characteristics of these events, the information about those are generally available many weeks before.

Ways of Diffusion:

The main sources to publicize these events are flyers, emails and the other ways previously described to publicize the social activities.

DETECTED PROBLEMS

Lack of a unique source of information

As consequence of the multiple ways of diffusion, and being most of them complementary, School members need to examine many sources before finding the information. It does not exist an official source from which, the School members can obtain reliable information.

Duplication of work and efforts

As we described in the previous part, information that is publicized by many sources have to be entered in the systems as many times as sources exist. It would be recommendable, to develop a platform that allow to communicate with the sources that are being used at this time, in order to avoid this waste of efforts. Also, it would be recommendable to centralize the information in one Department which would the administrator of this platform.

PROPOSED SOLUTION BY CWRU

Case Western Reserve University has recently acquired a tool that will allow the University community to calendar and schedule its meetings, appointment and classes. Corporate Time® produced by Steltor® is flexible software, compatible with most of the platforms and operative systems currently used, that permit to create meetings, daily notes, events and tasks. The most important characteristics of this software are!:

- Users can create activities that will be shared with community users that they decided
- Users can delegate access to their calendars in order a third part can enter necessary information.

¹ www.steltor.com

- Users can control who can view event that they create
- Users can update the information at any time at those updates are immediately transmitted to other users that they assigned.

Moreover, the tool has wireless capability and allows to receive messages at any time. Finally, Corporate Time is also compatible with most of the IT architecture Time Manager tools as Outlook, PDAs, etc.

The CWRU Information System Department expects to install the software by stages. They have scheduled to start with professors and administrative staff in next August and continue with the students once they conclude with first group.

The major implication of the acquisition of this new tool is that, being an institutional purchase, any attempt to reorder the information and provide it to the Weatherhead community should use the Corporate Time software. In our understanding, Corporate Time fills the Weatherhead requirements in terms of providing a reliable mechanism to offer official information to the community members.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based in the current situation of the information we suggest the following actions:

To develop a unique source of information

It is necessary to develop an official source of information. Students have to be aware that they can consult this source at any time from any place, finding in that source the right information. Given that this would be a new element within the School system it would necessary to sell properly the project to the community. It is necessary to explain Weatherhead School the importance of this source and promote its use.

It is also important to understand the difference between publicize and event and include it in the official calendar. While publicize events imply to remind the community about the event as many time as possible, using all the different way available, to show an event in the official calendar implies that the community can obtain that right information about the event in just one place from anywhere and at anytime.

To centralize the collection of the data

In order to supply the unique source of the information with the right data, it is necessary to gather all the information in one source. This activity will avoid redundancy of efforts and work duplication. This task implies to coordinate with all the stockholders or information generator sources and coordinate some technical aspects about the characteristics of the information that is recorded.

To promote and train the use of Corporate Time

Given that Corporate Time is a personal tool to administer the time, it would be necessary to train the Weatherhead community in the use of this tool. We think that community members will need to set up adequately the software to show the information related with Academic, Social, Recruiting and Special activities described in the point "Situation of the Information". Also, they will need to learn how to use the tool to include personal information. As consequence, training seminars will be necessary to promote and show the benefits and main functionalities of this software.

Conclusion & Recommendations

I believe this project has provided substantial value to the student body and the student team involved in coordinating the effort. A Graduate Assistant will be hired for the fall of 2002 to coordinate a new Front Door Team in the management of the project. The BTA will assist in recruiting students for the new team and will offer strategic advice to the GA and new team members. The following recommendations are drawn from my experience as the 2001/2002 Front Door Project Coordinator:

- ◆ The main focus of the new team should be on assisting departments to understand the capabilities of the site and to focus on content generation and organization.
- ◆ Clubs and other groups need to be actively solicited for site content
- ◆ Banners, hot links, events and announcements should be updated weekly at a minimum with attention paid to the look of the site with each update
- ◆ At least two or three and no more than about five events or announcements should be loaded at any one time
- ◆ An integrated Calendar should be linked to from the Calendar section
- ◆ The bulletin board should be actively managed
- ◆ Compensation from the Dorney project should be based on a base plus a bonus not a lump sum. For example, if a project is estimated at 50 hours, the base should be paid for 25 hours, the remaining 25 being bonus and any funds remaining from underperformers should be allocated to top performers as additional bonus.
- ◆ Club websites should be coordinated with the Front Door look and feel