

A Community Information Problem

An ongoing challenge for engagement projects of community groups in partnership with university classes has been effective communication among and between people, particularly across time. The academic calendar and one-semester student involvement is an especially significant challenge for long-term partnerships.

A Possible Solution

Recent experiments using blog-based websites are showing promise to ameliorate the gaps in information **about** projects that span several years and different University departments and programs. We began a pilot project, hosted on Prairienet.org, that creates a project blog for each community partner site. These Prairienet blog sites are not meant to replace the main websites of the different partner organizations.

Prairienet in Action

Instead, building on the legacy of Prairienet (1993–2009), this site is intended to help capture and preserve the dynamic communications and knowledge-sharing about specific collaborative projects by University and community partners. For example, students in my Fall 2010 Introduction to Networking class documented their work in East St. Louis and Champaign using a blog site created for each of five partner sites. For two of these partner sites, the project was greater than could be accomplished in a single semester. By documenting the work on the blog space, students in the Spring 2011 offering of the course will be informed by what previous students did and why.

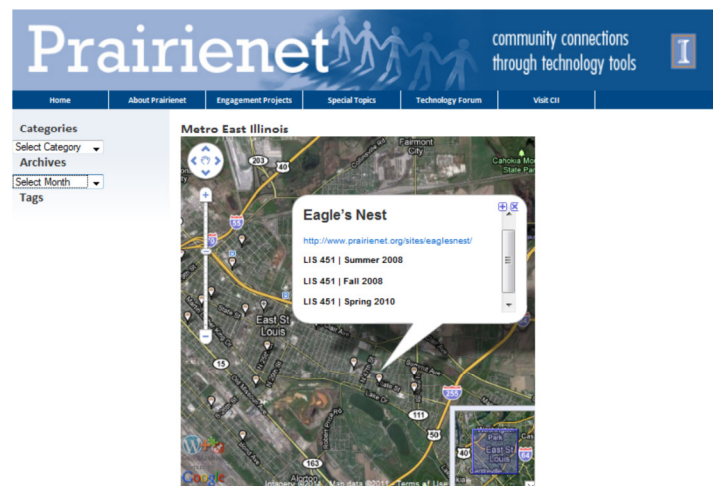


A Link Between Projects and Departments

Knowledge sharing can transcend a single course, as many of the same partners are working with other University programs, such as UC2B, eBlackCU, and CU-CitizenAccess.org. Because this technology is relatively easy to learn, we hope that there will be ready and frequent participation by both students and project partners.

An Evolving Collaborative Tool

Controlled vocabularies, geotagging, and mapping are being developed to ease information display and retrieval. A set of templates allow people to fill in the needed information easily. Prairienet will continue to grow and change as a tool for facilitating and documenting community engagement work in the University context.



Questions?

My colleagues and I at the Community Informatics Initiative are seeking feedback and additional participants.

Visit: <http://www.prairienet.org>

Email: mwolske@illinois.edu