

Chapter 14

Prototyping a University– Wide Co–Curricular Record: Technology, Relationships, and Policies

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors will discuss a multi-year initiative at Michigan State University aimed at designing and implementing a university wide co-curricular record. The authors contend that prototypes are a good mechanism to advance, and possibly accelerate projects. The chapter will focus on the many prototypes developed throughout the project, organized in three categories: 1) the technical aspects of the software, interface, and connections to campus IT; 2) policies and guidelines for interacting with, creating, and validating co-curricular learning experiences and outcomes; and 3) prototypes of new hierarchical relationships and social/cultural processes which made the new project legible to all stakeholders in the institution. Ultimately, prototypes helped create familiar policy and practices to go with useful technology that allowed campus users to easily and enthusiastically engage with a new technology, recognize student learning, and create sustainable practices in the co-curricular space.

INTRODUCTION

Like passengers on the London Underground, students only sometimes distinguish the educational, administrative, and political structures underlying integrated learning that they encounter in a combina-

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tion of coursework, experiential learning, and in co-curricular programs such as undergraduate research, internships, and student activities boards. Student affairs educators likewise do not always grasp the many ways that integrated learning is available to students on their educational journey because of a variety of pathways and destinations. In this chapter, we will discuss a multi-year initiative at Michigan State University (MSU) aimed at designing and implementing a university wide co-curricular record, the grand plan for our Underground metaphor. Specifically, we will focus on the many prototypes developed throughout the project, starting with the design of the platform used to collect and monitor data, proceeding through the policy and political realities of new projects, and ending with learning outcomes and recognition on the student facing record.

In comparison to co-curricular records, the academic transcript is limited in scope of what it captures and displays yet enjoys widespread recognition and understanding. Shared understanding makes the transcript an important artifact for campuses and students alike. With a similar outcome in mind, this project largely focused on recording existing co-curricular learning on a new, shareable co-curricular record. The journey from having no such record to creating a record people would actually use required us to create new tunnels, routes, and directions that students and staff could follow. These routes needed excavation; we did not know where to dig; the prototypes we will detail in this chapter served as our probe, shovel, and excavator.

In the same way a map visualizes unseen routes in the Underground, prototyping helped us make visible the underlying assumptions and divergent operations in use in co-curricular learning. All of the stakeholders valued co-curricular learning. And once our early prototypes showed that different stakeholders thought about co-curricular differently, we could see the potential tension in the idea and pathway of a new record. Prototyping made visible the existing ideas and structures about co-curricular learning which resulted in the creation of a new set of institutional policies, social networks, and technical processes necessary for changing patterns of practice. The promise of better data and reports, employer buy-in, and curricular and co-curricular integration for our students instantly became a motivating possibility. Stakeholders, such as campus activity coordinators and career services advisors, along with data analysts and senior leaders, engaged with our prototypes to understand the terms and layout of the new map. Prototyping, as an extension of a larger design process (Plattner, 2010), helped us create the map together with our stakeholders while identifying and responding to concerns, anticipating challenges, and eventually delivering a functional product and relatable processes for use across the entire campus.

While each of the phases of the design process would produce outputs in our project, the prototyping phases we describe in this chapter accelerated the project by making key experiences of the record tangible prior to testing with end users. Prototyping is not about completion or perfection, rather it is an example of a minimum viable product, and a signal of progress to stakeholders (Bogers & Horst, 2014). By iterating within the prototype phase, multiple versions of the product were available for feedback. This not only informed outcomes but amounted to a delivery schedule to campus sponsors and leaders that was needed in order to maintain support and advance the project (Heifetz, 1994). Each prototype offered an opportunity for the designers and stakeholders to think about the outcome and work more closely and efficiently toward a solution.

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