Digital-campus: A single unified self-sustaining and rewarding interactive platform by students, for students.
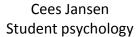
Cees Jansen
Student psychology

"The goal of education is the advancement of knowledge and the dissemination of truth."
John F. Kennedy

When I was trying to research which courses I should take in my second and third year I encountered a problem. The solution to this problem could not be found on Blackboard, Osiris or UU.nl. I then

tried to find a general UU forum for these kinds of questions, to my surprise there was no such thing. The issue is the lack of a single unified interactive platform (e.g. database/wiki/forum) in which students from the Utrecht University can interact and discover anything they desire to know regarding student related topics. Such information includes course content (contextual), student trajectories, social aspects, or a place for graduates and institutions to easily and actively connect to their best matches. The system will encourage students to help themselves by helping others. It will be an information distributing and networking place (i.e. interactive F.A.Q.) for students currently enrolled in a course at the Utrecht University and faculty members involved in those courses. It will be divided in to 4 sectors:

-Theoretical discussion board: topics regarding course content. Also allowing students the opportunity for multi-disciplinary research, this means that every student has the clearance to view and participate in any of the courses/forums sections in contrary to the presently used system.

-Study trajectory discussion board: topics regarding student trajectory and other curriculum at the university. All the questions normally answered by student counselors' will be archived here, eventually every unique situation will be attended to. This will relieve student counselors' of unnecessary repetitive humongous workloads and allow students to easily search for answers to their specific problem. Also adding course enrollment data usually found on Studielink.

-Social discussion board with room for social, cultural and general wellbeing topics directed at students in Utrecht. This will cover any extracurricular activities Utrecht has to offer students.

-Alumni discussion board. This will help students looking for future job opportunities. Alumni will be able to reach a broader audience and promote their own institution/company simultaneously.

This will be a self-sustaining database, with users being rewarded for their participation and contribution. As they participate and contribute more they will appear higher in search results. This will be encouraged by giving each user its own home screen. This will display topics that are in his/her interest, or topics that have been unanswered for a period of time. These unanswered questions will provide a chance to allow the student to increase his/her user helpfulness rating. The questions answered can be rated to ensure the quality of the answers. By rating the answers the users won't publish their answers without trying to formulate it to their best extent. People who do participate frequently by answering many questions, but give answers that aren't on topic or are lacking a certain amount of quality will not appear higher in the search results due to the lower ratings they will receive. As a security measure appointed individuals will be made moderators.

Although this idea is essentially a nonprofit educational tool, it can be made cost effective. The main resource for gaining cost effectiveness would be the lowering of costs made by the UU. Think of costs from student counsellors answering the same questions year after year. The other source would be from student organizations as they will be able to purchase a certain amount of publicity (e.g. personalized banners or top search results). Another source of revenue would be from companies that could purchase higher ranking search results/listings for their available intern/employee openings. This job recruitment function could also be set so that the institution looking for an employee could view the students' participation and overall acquired quality score. This would give potentially interested companies a better first glance at important student traits such as motivation, perseverance and proactive behavior, thus giving hard working students a better chance and simultaneously relieving companies from some of the workload created by the first selection procedure. This function would lessen the institutions workload and costs related to selection procedure and thus enabling them to invest money in this system which is beneficial to both parties.

This product is unique in that it allows students to fully engage in every significant part of their student time. It not only allows them to quickly search any problem they might encounter but also encourage them to discover that which had otherwise probably be left unseen due to the lack of a complete overview of all that is available to them. Another factor that makes this product differ from a database system such as Blackboard is the latter is limited and restricted in several aspects (e.g. learning environments that are restricted to courses and do not archive the input of previous

classes). This could potentially obstruct the advancement of knowledge and disallow students to broaden their horizon to the fullest of their capabilities.

Concluding, this product offers a critical lacking component of today's information system available to students; a complete transparent overview of every aspect important to students at Utrecht University. Combining contextual, (extra) curricular and job economy data in a single easy to use platform which will enhance over the years due to user generated content.

Note:

I did qualitative research among students, the results were very positive. Students not only said that they liked the idea very much, but every single student asked said that they would definitely use the service as they would greatly benefit themselves. Throughout this qualitative research, students gave me some very helpful ideas about fine tuning this product, and thus the core of this idea is already working: a product by students, for students.