Appendix V

CULCON Digital Culture Oversight Committee Report

Background

Crosscurrents is a bilingual multimedia educational website that contains extensive content about the United States, Japan, and their mutual interactions over the past half-century. The materials are designed for use by students from junior high school through college in social studies and language classes. The project was conceptualized by the Digital Culture Working Group formed after CULCON XIX. After CULCON XX the project was implemented at the University of Hawaii by a bi-national team under the direction of a reconstituted Digital Culture Working Group. The initial implementation of the website was presented at CULCON XXI in Sendai, Japan. The Digital Culture Working Group was then disbanded, but work on the project has continued at the University of Hawaii. The project has been supported by an initial grant from The Japan Foundation and a series of grants from the Japan-US Friendship Commission, but efforts to obtain other sources of funding have not been successful. However, the implementation has been accomplished at far less than the original cost estimates presented at CULCON XX.

The Crosscurrents Website

The content on the site is currently organized into six themes: Work and Workplaces, Cultural Calendars, Family Life, Education and School Life, Food and Agriculture, and Citizens in Action. The themes have evolved over time as the content has developed. Each theme has several subthemes that contain roughly parallel material on the United States, Japan, and their mutual interactions, or crosscurrents. We plan to complete these six themes but will not begin any additional themes at this time. The number of content units per subtheme for each of the three components (Japan, US, and Crosscurrents) ranges from three to thirty or more, but we are trying to redistribute the largest sections into additional subthemes for greater balance and accessibility. Since we are actively adding material to the development site, it is difficult to provide precise numbers at this time. We estimate that there are two to three hundred content units currently available or in development, each with text and a main photograph, plus fifty to a hundred multimedia "extras" of various types. Much of this material is still in development and is not yet available for public viewing.

The project currently maintains two websites on a server in the University of Hawaii College of Social Sciences, both of which draw data from a database on the College's SQL server. The live site at www.crosscurrents.hawaii.edu was opened to the

public on November 14, 2004. It contains the material that has been completed and approved. The second site is a development website where new material is posted and edited, and new functions are developed and tested. Both sites now draw from the same database, which has a control to limit what can be viewed on the live site. As text material is approved and translated, and copyright permission is obtained for images, those materials are released for display on the live site.

The live website is available for browsing by any user of the World Wide Web. Everything on the site is available in both English and Japanese. In addition to presenting all text in both English and Japanese, the main text segments are also recorded in both languages. Users can switch both text and sound freely between languages. The text is supported by photographs, maps, graphs, documents, film clips with subtitles and scripts in both languages, and several virtual reality clips.

The Oversight Committee

The Digital Culture Oversight Committee was created following CULCON XXI, to provide guidance to Crosscurrents until CULCON XXII and to preserve its binational, bicultural nature. Members of the Oversight Committee are Professor Patricia Steinhoff of the University of Hawaii, Professor Masako Notoji of the University of Tokyo, Professor Linda Kerber of the University of Iowa, and Mr. Hideya Taida of The Japan Foundation.

The Oversight Committee met once in Honolulu on November 15-16, 2004. Mr. Taida was unable to attend, but the other three members of the committee were present along with Pamela Fields from the US-CULCON staff. Several members of the UH project team also attended the meetings, including Professor Linda Menton of the University of Hawaii Curriculum Research and Development Group (CRDG), Professor Colin Macdonald of the School of Communications, our programmer Anthony Ipkin Wong, Noren Lush and Suzanne Acord of CRDG and the University Lab School, and graduate student assistants Christopher Bondy, Sebastian Blanco, and Michael Dziesinski.

In addition to discussion of the state of the project, the meeting featured a public demonstration of the Crosscurrents website for the University of Hawaii and East-West Center community, sponsored by the University of Hawaii Center for Japanese Studies. The Oversight Committee also observed a class at the University Lab School using the website for a class assignment. Discussions covered funding, content, testing in Japan and the United States, and a streamlined approval mechanism for content. No meetings of the Oversight Committee have been held since 2004, but the project has moved forward and the project team plans to complete it by December, 2006.

The Crosscurrents Scrapbook

The original design for the project envisioned a "scrapbook" function that would make it possible for teachers to make assignments that students could complete by selecting material from the Crosscurrents website, adding their own commentaries, and making a class presentation. Because of copyright considerations, all of the material for these presentations would remain on the Crosscurrents server. We therefore had to develop the Scrapbook as an internal component of the website. The website programming was upgrading to the .net framework in order to facilitate this development.

Implementing the Scrapbook function has proven to be quite difficult, but we have finally succeeded. In addition to allowing users to select content from the Crosscurrents website and add comments, the Scrapbook also allows students or teachers to upload their own multimedia materials and create commentary for them as part of their presentations. Teachers have been quite enthusiastic about the Scrapbook at the various presentations we have made about the project, because it encourages students to engage actively with the material. We believe it will be a unique feature distinguishing this bilingual educational website.

The Crosscurrents website (the live site) is completely open to any user of the Internet, but the Scrapbook function is intended explicitly for classroom use. To prevent inappropriate use and to control the load on the server, in order to use the Scrapbook a teacher must register a class and then the individual students must register to obtain their personal scrapbook space. This procedure not only controls access to the Scrapbook, but enables us to collect data about the users, none of which is personally identifiable. This aspect of the project has been approved by the Human Studies Committee of the University of Hawaii so that the resulting data may be used for research purposes. Although users can post material to it, the Crosscurrents Scrapbook is completely different from public sites for young people such as Myspace and Mixi. Only the teacher and the student who creates a Scrapbook may view it or display it to a class. The Scrapbook is not accessible to the general public, either to post material or to view what has been put into the Scrapbook by others.

We are presently polishing the user interface of the Scrapbook, adding materials to the website, and developing additional support materials for teachers that will be posted online. The support materials for teachers will include some suggested lesson plans for using Crosscurrents and the Scrapbook in the classroom, as well as additional tutorials on the site to help teachers feel comfortable with using Crosscurrents. The basic website has been tested in both high school and college classes over the past two years, and we have held teacher workshops and public presentations to introduce the site to teachers. We will begin testing the Scrapbook in classrooms this summer in Hawaii and hope to test it in Japan in the fall.

Future Plans and Recommendation

After the development phase of the website ends in December 2006, the major concern will be how to host and maintain it in the future. This matter will be discussed by the Oversight Committee at CULCON XXII, and by the US CULCON delegation at its fall meeting. We anticipate that there will be some modest continuing cost to host and maintain the site, which must remain in a non-commercial environment to preserve the terms under which we have obtained permission to display copyrighted materials.

We recommend that the Oversight Committee be disbanded as of January 1, 2007, at which time the development phase of the project will be completed and appropriate arrangements will have been made to host and maintain it.