

Memorandum

Re: Conceptualization of Content Specialist for Global Learning Portal

The following memorandum will outline the initial and current job functions of the Content Specialist (CS) for the Global Learning Portal (GLP). It will then discuss how the position of Content Specialist could be re-conceptualized based on distinct GLP goals. I interviewed with xxxx for two hours on Wednesday, July 30 and a conducted a follow-up phone interview on Friday, September 1. I also had brief (less than one hour) discussions during the same week with xxxxx and xxxx, which provided additional information about the Content Specialist position and its current place within GLP. These discussions and my exploration of www.glp.net form the basis for this memo.

Content Specialist: Initial Job Functions

Initially the CS was focused the following functions (often in collaboration with the technical development team):

- Creating a metadata schema, based on the Dublin Core standard developed by OCLC.
- Developing additional requirements for other GLP components, such as 'My GLP.'
- Developing a thematic taxonomy focusing on education. Thesauri produced from organizations such as USAID, UNESCO and World Bank were consulted as the GLP taxonomy was constructed. Input was also solicited from GLP stakeholders and selected subject matter experts.
- Soliciting content (documents, etc.) for the portal.

Content Specialist: Current Job Functions

- Oversee use of taxonomy within GLP.
- Update taxonomy as needed.
- Working with partners and education communities in adding content to GLP.
- Uploading large number of documents into GLP. Approve and upload external content that arrives via e-mail.
- Maintain content statistics and analyze what types of content are added to GLP.
- Conduct research on an as-needed basis (federated search engines, etc.)

Lessons Learned

There are several issues that relate to project and role of the CS position. They should be considered when creating a new CS position.

- There was insufficient communication between technical development team and taxonomy developer. The technical team would often make changes that affected taxonomy creation, without notifying the CS. This created a sense of isolation for the previous CS.
- Project strategy and overall workflow were not clearly defined.
- The taxonomy was created based on the premise that GLP would be a series of social networks/communities focusing on education. As GLP evolves, that taxonomy is no longer appropriate.
- The current information architecture of GLP does not seem to consider any long-term vision.
- New partners require specialized taxonomies. Certain new partners not entirely focused on education, so current taxonomy is not useful (i.e. Labor Transitions Group).
- Documents currently in GLP are 'high-level', policy documents which pull GLP from its' perceived focus.
- While there are a large number of documents in GLP, they may not be of sufficient quality or appropriate for GLP users.

Content Specialist: Rethinking the Role

Staff associated with GLP have different ideas about what GLP is and what it should be. The focus of GLP must be clearly defined. Who is GLP for? What goods or services will GLP provide? What are GLP priorities in supplying these goods or services? Answers to these questions will help define requirements for a new CS. Particular issues important to the CS role include:

Function: Is GLP to be a clearinghouse for documents or place to network and create communities? A related question: is GLP about tools or content?

Audience: Is the primary audience for GLP partner organizations or practitioners? What will the partner organization or practitioner get from GLP? What do they need? If the focus is on partners, how will GLP be customized for each group?

While it may be argued that GLP should serve all functions and audiences noted above, at the very least they must be prioritized. Preferably, there should one specific audience and one overall function.

Recommendations

Depending on the focus of GLP, the skill sets required of a new CS will vary. Overall, a taxonomy expert with interest in education would be most appropriate for GLP's needs. An advisory panel of subject matter experts should be created to advise GLP on taxonomy and content. As needed, consultants with subject matter expertise can be hired to perform specific functions, as well as advise the taxonomy expert.

It is difficult to recommend one specific set of skills needed, as the function/audience of GLP needs to be more clearly defined. However, listed below are general functions that would be required, regardless of scenario:

- Develop taxonomy suited to the functional needs and audience for GLP. Work with subject matter experts to define taxonomy needs.
- Create multi-lingual taxonomy based on GLP's functional needs and audience. Advise GLP team on localization issues as related to content and taxonomy.
- Analyze use of taxonomy and test usability of terms.
- Advise GLP team on GLP search functions.
- Advise GLP team on federated search engines and search engine implementation.
- Advise GLP on information architecture development.

As mentioned previously, some functions of the CS will vary based on GLP's focus. Below are general recommendations:

Audience:

Partners: Create a new, overarching taxonomy structure. Work with individual partners to create specialized taxonomies that will fit within this structure.

Practitioners: Create a more extensive metadata scheme to create better access to key documents. Expand the taxonomy to ensure that practitioners get most appropriate documents. Create a 'best practice' library with input from subject matter expert.

Function:

Clearinghouse: Focus on quality control of content with input from subject matter expert. Create a more extensive metadata scheme to create better access to key documents. Create policies for quality control, document retention and document removal. Ensure that copyright law is being followed.

Community: Examine current taxonomy to make sure it is working as expected. Work with communities to improve thematic taxonomy.