

City University of Seattle Improves Research Efficiency More Than 60% after Switching to WebNotes

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About City University of Seattle

City University of Seattle is one of the Northwest's largest, private, not-for-profit universities with over 45,000 graduates worldwide. Founded in 1973, "CityU" states that its mission "is to change lives for good by offering high quality and relevant lifelong education to anyone with the desire to learn." CityU of Seattle offers instruction in nearly twenty locations throughout the States of Washington and Hawaii, the Canadian Provinces of British Columbia and Alberta, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Romania, Slovakia, Switzerland, Australia, China, and Mexico.

As such, CityU regularly engages in 4 different research tasks in order to further its various educational aims.

1. Grant Research
2. Bibliography Generation for Academic Papers
3. Electronic Resource Compilation for Required Class Reading Assignments
4. Student Research for Paper Writing

How CityU Engages in Research

City University of Seattle engages in an extremely rigorous and time consuming effort to accumulate and organize their various research resources. In order of above mention:

1. CityU takes great pride in providing disadvantaged youth with an education in technology and computers. A specific branch of government funding called STEM grants affords CityU the opportunity to provide such an education. Prior to WebNotes, researchers would simply copy and paste various links and grant summaries from the hard-to-navigate website, *www.grants.gov*, into a Word document which they would send to their grant writer to evaluate. **All told, this process requires 4 days of research.**
2. In order to generate bibliographies, CityU researchers traditionally relied upon a Word document in which to copy and paste the URLs of potential resources. After navigating to each journal or website, researchers would copy and paste the URL into a word processor along with a brief summary. **Bibliography generation takes on average 14 hours to complete depending on the paper.**
3. CS/IS Program Director, Dan Morrill, runs three different “book-less” classes which must be provided with adequate, up-to-date, readings of high quality. Mr. Morrill previously scoured the internet, discovered acceptable learning materials, collected all appropriate links via a word processor and distributed these readings quarterly to the CityU library system, which would then disseminate the readings to their students.
4. CityU’s classes organize their students into groups in order to complete papers and assignments. It is the group’s job to collect research and compile it, the compilation of which is typically done by a single student, effectively acting as the group’s secretary. After this, the group will write a paper to turn in.

Relying on Word Processors Leads to Problems

For years, CityU has lacked an effective method for organizing and disseminating all of the research that gets accumulated through their various efforts. The university has relied upon Word Documents for a majority of their information organization, which is clumsy, difficult to maintain, and doesn’t seamlessly integrate into their workflow. To get any one of their online resources into Word it takes multiple steps across multiple programs. Lastly, these documents are easily lost amongst clutter on local hard drives.

Implementing WebNotes Saves Time, Improves Quality of Research

In January of 2009, CityU implemented WebNotes on a trial basis and distributed the solution to 100 students and faculty. Since then, WebNotes has easily and efficiently changed their workflow and helped them save valuable time and resources.

By preceding order:

1. In order to research grants, Mr. Morrill and his assistant will scour www.grants.gov, using WebNotes to mark appropriate grants for consideration. After they compile a satisfactory number of resources, Mr. Morrill will create an aggregated PDF of the links and content using

WebNotes' Reporting feature, which they will email to their grant writer. This grant writer can then use the report to quickly and easily return to each of the original grant descriptions, making a determination of how easily each of them could be obtained and optimizing which grants to write.

Mr. Morrill estimates that using WebNotes has saved him 3 out of the original 4 days it took him to complete this research, a 75% savings.

2. Researchers at CityU have begun creating their bibliographies more efficiently since using WebNotes. Faculty will now complete their online research using WebNotes and organize their findings in folders by research topic. When it is time create a bibliography, the researcher will use WebNotes stored bookmarks to return to the original document, take down the appropriate information and generate the required bibliography.

Mr. Morrill estimates that WebNotes has saved 8 hours out of every 14 hours used to research and create bibliographies, nearly a 60% savings.

3. Mr. Morrill has also been able to more efficiently collect required readings for the 3 classes he runs by using WebNotes. While researching, he will highlight and note various important resources, and organize them into folders by class and academic quarter. At the end of each quarter, Mr. Morrill will publish a report with all of the important readings, then forward the report to his librarians who will distribute the list accordingly. Mr. Morrill notes that the WebNotes Organizer is able to greatly improve the efficiency with which he can complete this task, since he no longer has to fumble through a word processor.
4. Many students at CityU now use WebNotes to collaborate on resources within their groups. Each student will annotate a series of web pages, send a WebNotes aggregated report of their resources to the group's designated secretary who will then compile them, remove any duplicates, and double check the quality of their resources. Because of efficiencies that WebNotes provides and the easy way that students can check the quality of their research, Mr. Morrill has noted that the quality of students' papers as well as their subsequent grades has increased when compared to a control group of students that doesn't use WebNotes.

Mr. Morrill plans to expand their trial of WebNotes across the computer science department over the coming months to allow more students and faculty to begin observing the benefits that it can provide.

To learn more about how WebNotes can improve your organization's workflow, visit www.webnotes.net/product

Background

Dan Morrill is the CS/IS Program Director at City University of Seattle.

WebNotes is a Boston-based technology firm focused on creating online research tools for academics, corporations and individuals. It was founded in 2007 and launched publicly in late 2008 to critical acclaim. More information can be found at <http://www.webnotes.net>.