Bryan Murphy LASM Final Project Reflection Summary

12/18/2016

So here we are at the end of LASM Fall 2016. This class has taught me so much I had no idea about in regards to technology and its continuously growing effects on the legal field. While it was hard to take what we were learning and put it into a final project at first I was introduced to the Suffolk Law Housing Clinic. Once introduced I was shown that they were looking for a way to automate their basic intake and in-office forms. Furthermore, they wanted a way to have basic letters sent to clients at the end of cases. They had these forms and generic letters and it was then up to me to figure out how to fill them without needing over the phone interviews. I had been told about Python and HotDocs but I was introduced in my class to this new method called QnA Markup. This was the first thing I felt really confident in using and with the guidance of my professors, had hope I could use in a way that would truly benefit the clinic.

It took some time certainly to figure out what my exact plan would be, initially thinking multiple QnAs would be the answer. After talking to Prof. Colarusso he convinced me that a QnA that populated a spreadsheet that could be used to mail merge would be the best course of action. I would not be doing this for 3 or more separate QnAs either but for one master QnA to fill out one master form. This form would end up being all of the clinics forms mixed with their letters. This way they would have the intake information completed and any repeated information from that form would fill onto other forms they use, saving time. My only regret is the lack of constant cooperation with the clinic to ensure this is exactly what they want. I’m sure that with a few sit-downs and tweaks here and there that maybe something could be done that they might approve of in the future.

The good news is that aside from working with the clinic more there is only one real glitch that remains and that is that sometimes the QnA has an error sending data to the spreadsheet. The QnA itself works and just needs fine tuning. The document is ready and with the test spreadsheets merges properly when mail merging. The only part that could be smoother is the connection in between them, the spreadsheet. I believe this error to be an easy fix that I do not know how to do, at least not quickly or proficiently. I have tried new spreadsheets and rewriting the code to no avail. However, my professor has seen it work so hopefully he understands how close it is to completion. (Update 12/17/2016, last test by colleague had data sent successfully to spreadsheet!!!)

This project and class as a whole has really expanded my understanding of the legal field and its connection with technology. Having never coded before either it felt really cool to create things that I never thought I would be able to do. It certainly showed me that with some practice I could make things I thought only professionals would be able to make. I hope to expand on this knowledge in the future as my career progresses.