

SYSC4907 Project Proposal

Real-Time Collaboration Messaging Application

Abstract

The students working on this project are Thao-Tran Le-Phuong, Honor Lopes, Riley MacKinnon, and Igor Veselinovic and their student numbers are 100997443, 101008909, 100996542, and 101011081, respectively. The supervisor for this project is Cheryl Schramm. This document will outline the objectives, tasks, and methods of the project, as well as describe the background context for the project itself. The proposal will also provide a projected timeline of the project and the facilities that will be required during the process. The relevance of the project to the degree of each student will be explained as well.

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Objectives

The objective of this project is to develop a messaging platform where conversations start out as a blank document that allows for real-time collaboration between users. Real-time collaboration in the context of a document meaning that when a user edits the document, other users will be able to see that change instantly, and also make their own changes. We aim to build upon current implementations of real-time collaboration and extend those implementations to provide additional features.

Background

Real-time collaboration has been implemented as a feature in word processing software, such as Microsoft Word, Google Docs, and Pages. These applications provide a more professional and formal environment for document writing. Our project aims to provide a similar environment geared towards social interaction. VS Code currently implements an overview of the opened document to show the user which part of the document they are currently viewing. This feature is called a 'mini-map'. Our goal is to implement this feature to show where the other users are in the conversation as well as the user's relative position in the conversation. Current messaging applications follow a more rigid messaging format. Messages in a conversation are often presented in chronological order and are immutable. Our application will strive to break from these conventions to provide a fully editable conversation where the user can type wherever they choose.

Tasks

This messaging application will allow users to create accounts to communicate with each other. The accounts can be created using an email account or with Google or Facebook authentication. When signed in, users can view and modify their conversations with other users.

The base functionality of a conversation should mimic a real-time collaboration word processor. Any changes being made to the conversation will be reflected in real-time to all other users participating in the conversation. Text, images, and gifs will be accepted as valid conversation inputs. The application will support text styling options, such as bold, italics, underlines, etc. Conversation content can also be locked by users so that a specific group of content cannot be modified.

In addition to the word processing capabilities, there will be features to supplement the messaging platform. Users will be notified immediately when other users modify a conversation in the same vein as text message notifications. Upon re-entering a conversation, the user will be presented with the changes made since the last time they were active. Users can manually view the history of any excerpt to determine which user contributed each change to the excerpt. An overview of the conversation that displays the positions of other active users in the conversation, which we have named the mini-map, will be placed in the corner of every conversation.

Search functionality will also be provided in the application. Users will be able to search through conversations for specific keywords and filter certain parameters.

Methods

We will research and use many different software development methodologies, tools, and technologies in the process of building this system. Software development is an inherently volatile branch of engineering, so we will need a workflow that is flexible enough to accommodate for any sudden shifts in design. The Agile methodology would allow us to quickly write code, test it, and have it running in our "production" environment. In addition to our weekly meetings with our supervisor, we will have team meetings once a week to update each other on individual progress and share any discoveries. Also, we will consider pair programming, where two programmers write code together at one computer, as a potential technique for working collaboratively. When not working together in person, we will communicate over Slack.

We plan to use an online Kanban board on GitHub to help organize our Agile workflow. The board will be a space for us to put tasks and organize them into columns according to each task's progress. GitHub will also be where we host our remote repositories for all of our source code and documentation. GitHub features like organizations, pull requests, and issue tracking will help keep our project organized.

Prior to the design process, requirements must be clearly specified. UML diagrams will be a useful tool during this process as it will allow us to visualize the relationships within our system. Visualization would aid in preparing the system designs and clarifying requirements. Use cases for testing are also directly based off of the requirements so it is important that they are clear enough that the tests will validate the correct behaviour.

Once code for a feature or bug fix is written by one team member (or two in the case of pair programming), it will need to go through code review by at least one other team member. Testing will also be an important step for validating new changes to any code base we have. Continuous Integration/Continuous Deployment (CI/CD) pipelines will help in automating this process. Before any pull request can get merged to our master branch in Git, it must be approved by at least one reviewer and a pipeline must be run that will run a suite of tests to validate that there are no breaking changes.

Since we are developing a complex software system, we will need to research technologies for each component of the system. We need a scalable platform to run the server-side code, so cloud vendors like Amazon Web Services or Google Cloud could be useful options for us. The concurrency and memory management features of Go make it suitable for our server-side needs, along with a relational database management system using SQL. There are many framework options for the front-end of our web application, including React, Angular, and Vue. WebAssembly is another front-end technology that we are interested in incorporating into our web application.

Timetable

					Sep 2019	Oct 2019	Nov 2019	Dec 2019	Jan 2020	Feb 2020	Mar 2020	Apr 2020
ID	Task Name	Start	Finish	Duration (days)	16 23 30	7 14 21 28	4 11 18 25	2 9 16 23 30	6 13 20 27	3 10 17 24	2 9 16 23 30	6 13 20 27
1	Requirements Analysis	2019-09-18	2019-09-29	11								
2	Research	2019-09-18	2019-10-13	25								
3	Experimentation	2019-09-18	2019-10-27	39								
4	System Design	2019-09-23	2019-10-20	27								
5	Test Design	2019-09-30	2019-10-20	20								
6	Infrastructure Impl.	2019-10-14	2019-11-10	27								
7	Back-end Impl.	2019-10-14	2020-01-26	104								
8	Front-end Impl.	2019-11-11	2020-02-09	90								
9	Verification	2019-10-14	2020-02-23	132								
10	Draft of Progress Report	2019-11-15	2019-11-29	14								
11	Progress Report	2019-11-30	2019-12-06	6								
12	Oral Presentation	2020-01-06	2020-01-27	21								
13	Draft of Final Report	2020-02-17	2020-03-09	21								
14	Final Report	2020-03-16	2020-04-07	22								
15	Poster Fair	2020-02-24	2020-03-20	25								

Facilities

We will be running server-side code on a cloud hosting service. Hosts such as Amazon Web Services offer free trials for the first year, which would cover the length of this project. If these services are unavailable for free, we would expect our hosting costs to be less than \$100. This project would benefit from having a workplace available for us to work in. It would help to have an on-campus space to develop in.

Degree Relevance

Thao-Tran Le-Phuong

This project is an application of many topics learned and developed in the Computer Systems Engineering degree. This project will involve the entire software development process, including requirements, planning, development, testing, verification, and maintenance. This degree requires multiple programming courses to be taken and the knowledge learned in these courses will be applied when implementing this software. This project is real-time and responds to unpredictable inputs from multiple users as discussed in courses taken. This project will involve the use of cloud hosting and processing services, which is a current industry topic.

Honor Lopes

This project is an application of many topics learned and developed in the Computer Systems Engineering degree. This project will involve the entire software development process, including requirements, planning, development, testing, verification, and maintenance. This degree requires multiple programming courses to be taken and the knowledge learned in these courses will be applied when implementing this software. This project is real-time and responds to unpredictable inputs from multiple users as discussed in courses taken. This project will involve the use of cloud hosting and processing services, which is a current industry topic.

Riley MacKinnon

This project is an application of many topics learned and developed in the Software Engineering degree. This project will involve the entire software development process, including requirements, planning, development, testing, verification, and maintenance. This degree requires multiple programming courses to be taken and the knowledge learned in these courses will be applied when implementing this software. This project is real-time and responds to unpredictable inputs from multiple users as discussed in courses taken. This project will involve the use of cloud hosting and processing services, which is a current industry topic. The database for this software will be written in SQL with the design and methods learned from database management courses.

Igor Veselinovic

This project is an application of many topics learned and developed in the Computer Systems Engineering degree. This project will involve the entire software development process, including requirements, planning, development, testing, verification, and maintenance. This degree requires multiple programming courses to be taken and the knowledge learned in these courses will be applied when implementing this software. This project is real-time and responds to unpredictable inputs from multiple users as discussed in courses taken. This project will involve the use of cloud hosting and processing services, which is a current industry topic.