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Project Proposal
Team 8030B

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Project Proposal

OGC Knowledgebase

Team 8030B

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I. Problem Statement

Issue Identification

The UMBC Office of the General Counsel (OGC) produces and receives a large volume of material every year. Documents are produced with relative autonomy by each professional, with frequent, repetitive drafting by each knowledge worker. Often the office professionals work in information silos, with little information sharing. A more automated information sharing system, enhanced with a simple but functional search capability is needed. An information system with such functionality would likely

increase the efficiency, preparedness, professionalism of the OGC staff, and better serve the OGC client population.

Context of the Problem

Detailed Scenario

In general, the UMBC Office of the General Counsel (OGC) consists of three relatively independently functioning sub-units: Legal Affairs, Human Relations, and Legislative Affairs and Community Relations. The three sub-units are staffed by professional knowledge workers, and assisted by paraprofessional and administrative support staff. An OGC organization chart is provided at Appendix 1 to indicate the distribution of the seven OGC staff. The professional staff members are called upon to draft many types of documents. Often similar types of documents must be drafted or amended, with much inherent repetition. Similarly, professional conferences are attended by staff, but not by all staff. Presentations attended or authored are rarely shared, and presentation materials are difficult or time consuming to comb through during time limited by research efforts.

Specifically, the two lawyers within the Legal Affairs office maintain generally separate clientele, yet they often face similar issues in researching legal issues and drafting legal documents. They are asked to develop and give presentations on different legal topics to audiences on and off campus. The results of research, drafting, and presentation efforts typically go unshared within the office, as the files are stored within each individual's network or local drive.

The OGC also contains a Human Relations office wherein personnel disputes, discrimination complaints, and other grievances are handled. Federal and state discrimination investigators first interact with HR. HR also provides training to the campus community. The Human Relations Director could therefore also benefit from better shared presentation materials, research tools, and document generation assistance.

The Legislative Affairs office is also under the supervision of the OGC. This office maintains liaison with the State Legislature and also performs community relations functions. Annually this unit is tasked with compiling the President's Budget Briefing Book for the President's briefing of state legislators prior to annual appropriations. This book provides a comprehensive review of University functions, statistics, costs, and benefits.

In addition, all professionals generally attend at least one professional conference each year. Often the all presentations given are provided by the conference sponsors in both hardcopy binders and CD-ROMs for reference later. Yet, it is too cumbersome to review binder by binder or CD by CD looking for a presentation on point for a particular issue.

Finally, there are three paraprofessional and administrative support staff within the OGC who are often called upon for prompt file retrieval or document generation based upon recollections by the professional staff of past cases, with little factual detail given to assist in finding the base documents.

Project Authority, Constraints, and Expectations

Authority and Budget Constraints

The General Counsel, as senior manager within the OGC has authority to sponsor any system project within the office, provided the project is within the constraints of the office resources and budget. Due to recent State budget cuts, and expected future cuts, the OGC budget has been severely constrained. New initiatives that impact the existing budget are generally being shelved for consideration in another year. Therefore, any new system with a more than a nominal cost greater than \$1,000 will likely not be considered. The lack of funding eliminates any potential to purchase a commercial-off-the-shelf management document application.

Since only nominal funds are available, a more flexible budgetary alternative, and a greater source of leverage, is the reallocation of present staffing resources. Resource constraints therefore will more generally involve professional and administrative staff time.

Technological Knowledge Constraints and Expectations

Aside from fiscal restrictions, practical considerations of the limited technological savvy of the OGC, staff must also be considered among the project constraints and in developing a system that meets staff expectations in usability. The issue of limited technical knowledge of the staff is further addressed with User Constraints under Section III.

Legal Constraints of Privilege and Confidentiality

The system must not violate attorney-client privilege. Since the knowledgebase will be open to all persons within the OGC, not all Legal Affairs files can be summarily transferred into the new system with OGC-wide access. To provide open access to all files to the non-lawyers within the greater OGC domain would vitiate the legal privilege that attaches to many documents within Legal Affairs. To a lesser extent, but still an important factor, is the element of confidentiality for persons utilizing the services of the Human Relations Office. Therefore, selectivity of content will also be a factor for the Human Relations contributions to the knowledgebase. This will restrict the number of documents that can be entered into the knowledge data base.

II. Project Mission Statement

Top Level Project Description

The Project team will create and implement a knowledge data base that will store important documents and build a corporate knowledgebase. The database will be designed and implemented using current OGC hardware and software. The knowledgebase will have a retrieval system that will allow users to quickly search and find information based on the user's query. The knowledgebase will be made available to the entire OGC. Access to the data base will strictly be limited to OGC employees. Once the system is working the responsibility will lie within the OGC to fully populate the system and follow set guidelines for document access.

Project Time Summary

The knowledgebase project is expected to begin on or about mid-June 2003 and conclude with implementation and close-out by August 14, 2003.

III. Analysis of Customer Needs

Customer and Users Defined

The customer for this project is the Office of the General Counsel. The users of the new system would be the General Counsel and all the other professional and paraprofessional knowledge workers within the three offices. The Project Point of Contact for the Customer is the University Counsel.

Customer Needs

Based on informal interviews with various staff members from the three OGC offices, it was determined that the collective OGC knowledgebase could be greatly enhanced if there were increased sharing of documents and information between offices and employees. OGC staff members requested a means to which documents, presentations, and training aids could be shared among the OGC.

The technological savvy of the OGC staff must also be considered. Because the professionals are

trained in law, employment relations, or legislative relations, information technology is not the dominant knowledgebase of the staff. The support staff provides general office support functions, mainly involving word processing, spreadsheet, or minor database applications. Consequently, OGC staff would expect any new system to be user friendly in initiation, fairly intuitive in implementation, and plainly documented for future use and adaptation.

Analysis of User Needs

User needs in relation to knowledgebase content, functionality, and interface design, are being assessed through personal interviews with staff and group research in knowledgebase construction principles. These principals can be found at knowledgebase consulting web sites such as OvitzTaylorGates.com or ITagAlliance.com, and through academic sites such as Indiana University-Perdue University at <http://www.ipfw.edu/as/training/ACCESS/knowledges-b-s.htm> and the Journal of Information, Law and Technology at Warwick University at <http://elj.warwick.ac.uk/jilt/00-2/allen.html>.

IV. Project Strategy

General Strategy

The knowledge database will be achieved by following a project life cycle approach which includes the following phases; concept, development, implementation, and close-out. The four project team members will oversee the project during its various phases, and each member will be assigned tasks that will ensure that various phases are being completed on-time, on-budget and satisfying the customers requirements. In addition the team will utilize a Computer Science graduate student, who is assigned to the OGC for the summer for additional technical expertise such as database design and the development of the data base key word search capability. When needed, the team may utilize one Office of Instructional Technology (OIT) staff member, to provide expertise in interface issues with the campus network.

In addition, the project team will utilize system analysis to further define the scope of the project and divide the work required to complete the project into component parts, which will identify problems, risks, constraints, opportunities and the customer needs.

Tools and Techniques Utilization Strategy

Using Microsoft Project 2000, the team will set a timeline for each stage of the project and develop a work break down structure to assist in dividing the project into discrete manageable tasks. Utilizing MS Access, current files, and security measures already in place, the project team will construct a working model of a MS Access Knowledgebase that meets the needs of its users. To facilitate work within the short timeline allotted for this semester, the rapid application development model will be followed to streamline the efforts and expedite product completion. User needs and usability will be refined through ongoing interviews and repeated user testing of the product. Improvements can be built on the suggestions of the end users.

SWOT Analysis

Internal Factors	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
External Factors		
OPPORTUNITIES	Manpower and resources available now to implement knowledgebase inexpensively	Information can be shared with minimal effort and expense

THREATS	Legal expertise and experience can be pooled for greater efficiency	Sharing information can avoid future long legal battles
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V. Project Objectives

The overall objective of the OGC knowledge database is to consolidate corporate information in a central location whereby OGC employees can easily search and retrieve relevant data from the data base.

Specifically, the project will:

- Provide a central sharable repository for documents of UMBC Office of the General Counsel (OGC) by developing a knowledgebase utilizing an MS-Access database stored on a shared network drive accessible only to the OGC staff. The type of documents to be stored in this database will be defined and agreed by all offices involved.
- Increase operational effectiveness for documents storage and retrieval by defining and adhering to standards and procedures for the management of documents within the database.
- Build a stronger relationship between the different offices within the OGC by sharing knowledge, which will in turn provide common benefits and a way to leverage total the knowledge of the enterprise to the advantage of each individual user.

VI. Scope

“To ensure that we are a campus known for our excellence in administrative and student services and our responsible use of public resources, just as we are known for our academic excellence: by upgrading our information technology infrastructure; by ensuring that a UMBC education remains affordable and accessible to Maryland citizens through reasonable tuition and fee increases and adequate levels of financial aid; by addressing staff development needs; by pursuing administrative efficiencies and, as appropriate, the reallocation of resources in support of the campus mission; and by ensuring that our campus infrastructure supports, enhances, and reflects our educational priorities and research agenda.” Taken from University of Maryland Mission Statement, Institutional Outcomes and Objectives section, part 6 (emphasis added).

By upgrading the technology infrastructure of the OGC and leveraging the combined knowledge of the entire staff, the knowledgebase provides administrative efficiencies, expands the professional development and competencies of the staff, and leads to a new level of excellence in administrative services. Although limited to the Office of the General Counsel, the scope of this project is likely to expand well beyond the borders of the OGC. So many other campus operations are touched upon by elements of the OGC, the university as a whole may experience an increase in quantitative and qualitative services.

Appendix 1

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