CS221 Group Project

Final Report

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Version	0.3
Status	Release
Date Published	February 15, 2015
Reference	SE_O2_FP_01
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1 Management Summary

Our group were able to deliver all three sections of the project, the android app, the database and the web site.

For the functional requirements we met FR1, FR2, FR3, FR4, FR6, FR7, FR8 and FR9. We do not meet FR5 fully do to the feature of being able to delete a whole visit. The other 2 features have been completed as species can be deleted as well as edited. For the External Interface Requirement I believe both are intuitive to the average computer user. Both platforms will reflect user input within a second as well as the systems running on the appropriate platforms the android app was tested on multiple android devices and the site optimized for multiple browsers, meeting requirement PR1 and PR2. For DC1 we used java for the application building the application using android studio. The website uses PHP and connects to a MYSQL database. DC2 has been completed for the site with data being implemented in to the database.

Extra functionality was added on the site such as the ability to add a specimen sighting on the website and being able to edit and delete. We use AJAX to search results by Latin name.

With all the work now completed I am happy to say that we delivered a good product, if there was more time there is defiantly room for improvement in certain areas and usability of the different areas but I believe these are small fixes that could be fixed with an extra day of programming. The project plan is a good description of what the team did and I believe we kept to it pretty closely as well as the project design which was a very useful document when it came to linking all the different sections together.

2 Project History

2.0.1 Week One

This was the first time the group had met. Everyone introduced themselves and what degree they were taken, where we got a taste of what strengths each of us have and also each of or weaknesses in relation to the project. GitHub accounts need to be created as well as a new repo to be made. We spoke about the different roles and the work that needed to be done by the next week was what roles each individual wanted to do and to read the project requirements and QA documents.

2.0.2 Week Two

Everyone stood for their positions giving a small speech why they were suited to that role and then it was voted on the position that were picked were, project leader, deputy project leader, QA Manager and deputy QA manager. We also sorted out when people were available to meet up and work on the project.

2.0.3 Week three

We decided to vote in a head architect as well as having an architect for web, databases and android development. This was decided because it allowed the most efficient use of the team so more people have control of management. We then started the project plan everyone was tasked jobs for the document as it had one week to be completed. The group were split into the different teams of technology depending on where peoples strengths were. A day before the deadline we met up and did a review fixing any problems that arose there and them.

2.0.4 Week four

We went through the project plan with our project manager, and set tasks to fix the problems found such as requirements not matching up and traceability.

2.0.5 Week five

Design spec was set to the team and the QA team got set the testing document.

2.0.6 Week six

Week six was used to tidy up the documents that had been made with reviews so they were all fit for hand in.

2.0.7 Week seven

Not much was tasked due to deadline.

2.0.8 Week eight

Analysing feedback for project plan and fix the changes.

2.1 Christmas period

Eeveryone was set prototyping and research tasks for their specific area.

2.2 Coding Week

During coding week we worked in 4 separate sections. Web, android, server side and testing. We did this split due to the lack of time to implement this project it allowed us to move resources over to different teams which needed it. I would off liked a little bit more time to fix the small things like layout in certain areas.

3 End of Project Report

3.1 Android

The Android app conformed largely with the required specifications; it can be used by an individual who provides the required details: name, phone number and email address. The user will also be prompted for a site name, which must have been created before hand. Once the aforementioned details have been provided, the user can then pass to the specimen adder page, here they are prompted for a Latin specimen name, which may or may not be auto completed for them after four characters. There is also a DAFOR slider, which can be adjusted as required. There is the option for a specimen or scene photo, however neither are required for a specimen. The user can the either add a new record with the "Add New" button, or proceed to the upload screen with the "Finish" button. Upon clicking the "Finish" button, the user is presented with a list of specimens and can "Longpress" to get a menu to edit or delete the entry. The edit button will proceed to the specimen adder screen with the specimens details filled out. When the user presses the "Upload" button, the specimens will be uploaded to the server.

The app has several missing feature that cause it to not meet the full range of specifications set forth in the original document. They are as follows:

- Latin names will not be updated unless the database does not already exist i.e. An uninstallation and reinstallatrion is required to update.
- No free text/comment is available for a specimen.
- If GPS is not available for a specimen, the location -1,-1 will be used (This can be altered on the website).
- The "hint image" for specimen and scene photos are both referencing the same image and do not make the requirement obvious.

The app also has several missing features or shortcomings which may be useful but were not included due to time restraints.

- Username is only validated for length, it can contain any amount of whitespace, special characters, numbers or letters within the limits.
- Email is only validated on length and contents of a user domain and "TLD". It also does not check that it exists.
- Phone is only validated on length, however user is only presented with a numeric keyboard.
- Latin names that do not appear in the database will not be added.
- The user will not be alerted to the acquisition of GPS, however they will be informed if GPS is not available.
- The user will not be informed of successful or failed attempts at upload of specimens, however if the app is closed and reopened, successful upload will result in all specimens being removed from the device.

- The user will not be informed of successful or failed attempts to download the sites list or the Latin names file.
- The app possesses no settings or preferences menu, as such the API and Latin names file resourced locations are hard coded into the app and will require recompiling from source if changed.

3.2 Web/Server

4 Team Performance

4.1 Alexander (Xander) Barnes

Xander filled the role of project leader, he was well organized and motivated and drove the team through both internal and external deadlines on time. He is also a good supervisor/leader and was involved in all the major decision and helped teams reach consensus and compromise where conflict arose.

Xander is a competent programmer who worked on Android development and the SQLite databases, as well as assisting elsewhere on the web and server applications. He largely organized coding week for the group, including timings, rooms and meetings between the teams to discuss implementation problems. The group feels he was fair to those who worked to deadlines, and gave fair warning to those who fell behind.
Not approved by team member

4.2 Nicholas Dart

Nic Dart would take the award for the top coder of the group. Nic was voted in as the android manager to control the development of the app. Nic was also voted in as deputy project leader after our fist had to leave the group. This was very important as Nic picked up what I missed or could not control like running sessions when I could not make it. Our Q.A manager also stepped down and Nic took over the job of looking after documentation on github making them all fix the template for LATEX.

His main area was the android development, he did the major part of this development building the interface and data classes. He also built the methods which allowed uploading data and pictures to the database. He worked well in the group and got involved in discussions and was definitely made a huge positive difference to this group.
Approved by team member

4.3 William Aldridge

William Aldridge has not turned up to 50% of the project. I believe William did not interact with the team and was not involved in much of the product. He was given task to and did not complete them or did not complete them in time and meet quality standards leaving the rest of the group to do extra work to redo these parts. After a few months we stopped tasking him tasks as he didn't show up to meetings or complete the previous tasks. During coding week he was tasked at testing and reporting bugs to GitHub he did complete this very well. He did not get involved at all on the final document.
Approved by team member

4.4 Max Atkins

Max Atkins was voted in to the role of architecture. In this role he was put in charge of the communication of all the different technology groups, like making sure that the web would connect to the Server without any problems. He was in charge of checking documents to make sure the final project plan would work and was do able in the amount of time we had. During coding week he worked on the server side API scripts and the SQL database. Max took charge of design document coordinating the different teams, I believed this could have been improved due to a small miss communication between the server side team and the web team this was fixed in a meeting other than this problem, the teams communicated well and the architecture design worked well.

Max contributed a lot to all the documentation and kept to deadlines well, he enjoyed getting into discussion at review meetings to make the best product. I think Max needs to step down a little bit sometimes as he does not listen to others once he has got something in his head. Max made a difference to this team and was a key member off the team.
Approved by team member

4.5 Max Harizanov

Max Harizanov took the role of head of the server team. Max had obviously had a lot of experience in the past with databases and building projects. Max built an API for the web and the android app. This API was built in PHP taking in JSON objects and storing them in our SQL database and also doing the reverse returning a JSON object to use. This was implemented over coding week. Max also implemented AJAX to allow the website to do asynchronous searching and pagination on the site.

He has interacted well with the team, but sometimes wasn't a great team player. As Max is very experienced he knows specific ways and doesn't always listen to other ideas of approaching a problem. He built a over complex database system which went well over thee spec needed for this project. Max contributed a lot to all the documentation about the API and SQL Database and kept to deadline well, he was a key member off the team.
Approved by team member

4.6 James OHare

James OHare was voted in for the role of head of the web team. James therefore took control of the web team's documentation. These were done very well splitting the tasks up between his team. During coding week he ran his team well making sure they were up to date on there work. He built the inputting page for a specimen as well as other pages.

James could of improved his time management as was a few times late on deadlines but was good at organising others. He has interacted well in the team and have had a lot of input during review meetings, he was a key member off the team.
Approved by team member

4.7 Michael Pocock

I am unable to review Michael performance due to a lack of any work. He originally turned up to meetings and was not very interactive and did not put himself forward to tasks. His work hours would not reach over 5 hours. He did not turn up during coding week or made

any communication with the team over the week.
Not approved by team member

4.8 Sabastian Tuff

Sabastian Tuff has been a hard working member of the web team. He always put 100% into the work. He was voted in as deputy QA manager and helped write the testing document. During coding week he worked in the web team working very close to Dan. Together they built most of the site and its functionally including the CSS work. Sabastian came to all the reviews and contributed ideas to the team. He was a great team players always happy to listen to others ideas and act upon them, I would always be happy to have him on my team, he was a key member of the team.
Not approved by team member

4.9 Daniel Wilcock

Daniel Wilcock is for sure one of the hardest working members of the team. Daniel was in charge of the design of the site as well as all the form coding with the web team. Daniel took a lot of work of James when he was not as busy. Daniel spent a lot of time prototyping the website making sure it was ready to have the functionality added to it before coding week so coding week could be less about the design this made a great deal difference to the team as it allowed the web team to keep on top of there tasks and not worry about CSS problems. Daniel came to all the review meetings and was involved in discussions on how the documents could be improved. He also was always looking for more work to do and was a real good team player. Easy to work with and a key member to the team.
Not approved by team member

4.10 Andrew Wilmot

Andrew Wilmot has not turned up to 50% of the project. I believe Andrew did interact with the team well on the few occasions he turned up but was not involved in much of the product due to a lack of attendance. He was submitted task and did not complete them or did not complete them to time and quality leaving the rest of the group to do extra work. He was voted in as Q.A manager but when being set the test document to run he did not allocate task and ended up doing a rushed job on his own that was not up to scratch. He then stepped down from Q.A manager where the job was left vacant due to no one waning to fill it. During coding week he was tasked at improving our documentation he did do this but not much was done for 5 days work he also did not get involved at all in the final document.
Not approved by team member

5 Test Report

foobar

6 Maintenance Manual

6.1 Android

6.1.1 Brief Description of Final Product

The Android app first required user details including name, phone and email. It then also requires a (pre-made on the web site) site name which is downloaded from the API on app start up. The data is then validated and on successful validation will proceed on to a specimen entry screen.

The specimen entry screen takes a Latin plant name and a DAFOR scale represented by a slider. There is also an option for a scene and a specimen photo, which can be retaken as needed. Multiple Specimens can be added and reviewed in the specimen upload screen.

In the specimen upload screen, specimens can be edited or deleted by long pressing on the list. They can then be uploaded to the server.

6.1.2 Program Structure

The Android app is structured into several key areas:

Activities
Activity classes are bundled together and contain event listeners, "AsyncTasks" and location listeners. They also contain all the validation for input fields as well as adding lists to "AutoCompleteTextBoxes".

Utilities
The "Utils" package contains SQLite database utilities and classes for adding, searching, finding and deleting data from the databases. The following databases were implemented in the app:

1. Plants - Contains the Latin names
2. Specimens - Contains specimens the user has take for upload
3. Users - The information the user has entered for auto-completion
4. Sites - The sites that can be used, pulled from the API

There also exists a "OSGridReferHelper" class which is a third party class originally to be used to convert from GPS coordinates to a os grid reference for the specimen adder. It was decided that this feature was not required and so was not used.

Data Classes
These describe users, visits specimens and species and are used when reading/searching from and inserting into the database. The specimen class was not used as heavily as expected.

Layout
The layout of the Android activities are described in xml files, whose names follow the "activity_<activityName>" naming convention and are located in "src/main/res/layouts".

6.1.3 Significant Algorithms

The following details significant algorithms that may require alterations in the future.

When the app starts, there is an initial "Async Task" thread spun off to download the sites list and update the database and to download the specimen list. This thread is located in the "LauncherActivity" class. This thread will check, upon download of the sites list, will add non-existent sites to the database. If the site list cannot be found, no viable error will be shown to the user, however the user may continue to use sites that already exist. The thread then proceeds to check if the latin names database is present and populated. If it contains entries, it will not download the Latin names list (as it is very large and slow to process, and so should be avoided). If it is not present, it will be downloaded and processed in a batch insertion to the database.

There is a location listener in the "SpecimenAdder" activity which gets the users location via gps when adding specimens. It does not however use course (network based) location to get this. This listener implements the standard Android interface "LocationListener".

The databases are manipulated by Database Classes in the utilities package. These classes use the "DatabaseUtilities" class which inherit the standard "SQLiteOpenHelper" class. Tables are accessed via a class by their name eg "SiteDataSource" to access the sites table. These classes require a reference to the data class.

Upload of the final list of reserves is done in another "Async Task" in the "ReviewActivity" where a connection to the API is established and the data from the databases serialised to JSON and uploaded. At present the JSON is constructed manually. The list of specimens is then cleared (however the UI is not updated).

6.1.4 The Main Data Areas

The app makes extensive use of an SQLite database to store reserves, specimens, users and species. These are manipulated by classes for each table under the "Utils" package, which contain methods for selecting, inserting and deleting data from the databases, via the use of data classes related to the table's content.

The "DataClasses" package contains classes primarily used for storing data to be entered into or read from the database. These classes contain getters and setters for the data. They also contain an "id" property which is only set when the data is read from the database, this is to allow for deletion of data via it's unique id in the database.

Finally, we use "Adapters" in the android API to allow "AdapterViews" in the activity to access data. adapters

6.1.5 Files Accessed

The App accesses images located on the device which were taken in the specimen selection screen. These images are located on the root of the internal storage device.

The App also downloads the Latin names file from the remote location "http://nic-dart.co.uk/~ nic/res/plantlist.json", these are then processed into the SQLite database. This is done only in the init thread.

6.1.6 Interfaces

The app required a gps device to acquire location during the specimen addition process, as well as a camera if an image is desired.

6.1.7 Suggestions for Improvements

- Specimen and Scene images could be silhouetted and represent a scene and an specimen. ie. not the same image.
- Deleting of multiple specimens
- Upload completion dialogue/confirmation
- Users and sites are specific to specimen, not read at upload time
- Auto complete lists not overlapped by keyboard
- Settings/Preferences menu or activity
- Custom GPS coordinates for specimen

6.1.8 Future Improvement Concerns

Future Activities that are made should inherit the class "BaseActivity", this contains methods (albeit not currently used) that will allow for consistent menu items and menu icons.

If significant future improvements are desired, it may be desirable to structure the app more coherently, foremost a settings or preference menu.

6.1.9 Limitations of the Program

- Deleting images before upload will most likely cause crash
- The "current user" details at the time of upload will be used.

6.1.10 Building from source

The source contains an "Android Studio" project file, this contains all the links to the files needed. It will require JDK (or OpenJDK 8) and the Android API and may need to be told where they reside. Building requires either a physical Android device of version 4.0.3 (API 15) or above, or alternatively a virtual Android device, created in the AVD.

6.2 Web

6.2.1 Program Description of Final Product

The website is used for viewing a list of site names and being able to view a list of plants that have been found within that site. It communicates with the server using an API. A user will be able to view individual specimens as well as being able to delete and edit them.

Upon a visit to the website the user will be taken to the Home page of the website. This page contains a brief description of how the website is to be used. The first page also contains a simple search bar which can be used to search for specimens by their name. There will also

be an option to enter a password in which an admin user can log into the site to get special privileges for the website.

The user can then go to the reserves page where a user will be able to see a list of site names with a OS grid reference and a description. The user will then be able to have the option to view all the specimens under that reserve. When logged in then the user will see option to delete and edit the reserve as well. There will also be an option to add a reserve on this page however you can only use the add reserve functionality if you are logged into the website. The add reserve page requires the user to enter a Location name, OS grid reference and Description using a from to allow the user to enter the information.

The user also has the option of viewing the all the species rather then just the reserves. On this page the species are ordered by Specimen Name by default. There are also options for searching and ordering on this page. For the ordering the it can be done through Species Name, Location Name, User, Date and Abundance by ascending or descending order. This page also uses pagination displaying and maximum of 20 specimens per page.

If the user wanted to view details about a species then they would would be able to see details about; the name of the user who entered it into the database, the location where it was found, it's unique specimenID, it's name, where it was found using an OS grid reference, it's abundance, the date it was submitted, the time and any comments about the species. They will also be able to view two photos one of the species and one of the scene. Users will be able edit and delete specimens as well. It is also possible to view the location of the plant on a Google map pop up.

6.2.2 Program Structure

To see a detailed component diagram for the website look at SE-02-DS-00: Design Specification section 3.2, fig 2 Web Component Diagram. This shows the function scripts, web interface and the web pages used in the website.

Within the function scripts are; logout, authentication, the POST requests, the config. Which communicate to the Web API through JSON For a detailed list of these function scripts and how they work look at SE-02-DS-00: Design Specification, section 3.2.18, 3.2.11 and 3.2.10

Within the Web interface are sub-pages of Header, Footer and Filter. For a detailed list of these sub-pages and how they work look at SE-02-DS-00: Design Specification, section 3.2.16, 3.2.14 and 3.2.24

The Web Pages are Index and About these two are not dependent on the API ones pages a that are API dependent are; Reserves, Edit Reserve, Add Reserve, Plant Database, Add Specimen, Specimen and Edit Specimen. For a detailed list of these pages and how they work look at SE-02-DS-00: Design Specification, section 3.2.1, 3.2.2, 3.2.3, 3.2.4, 3.2.5, 3.2.6, 3.2.7, 3.2.8 and 3.2.9

6.2.3 Significant Algorithms

Once a JSON object has been created it is sent to the server using a curl method. The web avoids using any "SQL" queries by using the API.

The web server also uses AJAX to dynamically search and update specimen details. It also uses pagination to display a maximum number of 20 specimens and allow paging through them.

6.2.4 The Main Data Areas

The website stores data locally and also within sessions. In add_specimen.php and edit_specimen.php two arrays to create a new record; the first array is to create a new specimen and the second is to create a new record (including reserve and user details and the specimen array), this second array is then used to create the JSON object which is sent to the server via a curl method. add_reserve.php and edit_reserve.php also need to have the data encoded in to a JSON object in order to be sent to the server. These pages also contain an array which collects the data from a html form, the arrays then encoded into a JSON object and is sent to the server.

6.2.5 Significant Files

The website uses html and php to gather and present data to and from the server, the site does not access any external files or directories except for '/includes/config.php' which connects the user to the server to allow for editing and deletion.

6.2.6 Interfaces

The site has been written to php version 5.5.20 and HTML5 standards and as such is able to be run on most browsers without issue. Data in the form of JSON objects are sent in the form of POST requests to the server. For further detail of the post requests to the server please check the web interface which can be found in document SE_02_DS_00 section 3.1.

6.2.7 Suggestions For Improvements

When entering the password in the header to login it can be viewed. To fix this the input type of the for needs to be changed from 'text' to 'password'. Tidying up the code to make it easier to read and change. CSS improvements over the whole site for example, having the scene and specimen pictures the same size, button layout for buttons such as add reserve and improving the looking of the website on smaller screens. It may also be desirable to make the site responsive to suit mobile devices and small screens.

6.2.8 Future Improvement Problems

When adding a new page to the site that needs to be part of the session it is important to remember to put the session save path at the top of every page. As the header and footer are included on every page, changes to them will effect the entire website.

6.2.9 Limitations of the program

As the site has been written to php version 5.5.20 and HTML5 standards it may have difficulty being used in some older browsers; however, the HTML and css have been kept simple as to avoid causing issues for users of these older browsers. The site is capable of expanding if extra functionality is needed at a later date.

6.2.10 Building and Testing

In the occurrence that the website will be rebuilt and improved, the developers who are undertaking this will need to know specific information. There are two main places that the

website files are located, the first being on daw54's public html directory on the Aberystwyth University server and a copy of this website on the projects GitHub repo.

The website does not require total rebuilding, as it meets the functional requirements, however, in the event that drastic improvements are made, then analysis of the current website structure and how the website communication with the Web API must be undertaken, as this is how the website functions and will continue to do so. The developer that will be improving/rebuilding must keep to these standards.

If the website were to be rebuilt, the new website build would need to ensure that it is tested. The test specification is available and should be used to make sure that the website meets the functional requirements and the needs of the client. The testers will be able to see if the test passes as there is a pass criteria that if met, then the test is passed. In the occurrence there are changes to the programming which has created a problem with the functionality, then additional tests must be added to the website test specification. This is very easily done, as the test specification was created using Latex. The user can simply see how previous test rows were created where they will be able to then understand how to implement a new test into the Latex document.

6.3 Server

6.3.1 Brief Description of Final Product

The server is a combination of a Database and an application programming interface. It acts as the bridge between the Android device and the website to the Database, further protecting the database from direct access. This allows code, sensitive information and data to be stored in a non-accessible place. The server contains a relational database which holds all the data important for the system: specimens, reserves, records and users. To access this data, the website and the android application must use the API PHP script commands which run validation, sanitisation and SQL queries using JSON data structures.

6.3.2 Program Structure

The server API is a list of commands that are to be run by the android application and the website to access and manipulate data in the Database. The Design Specification document contains all the information about the program structure.

For a list of the commands in use in the system and what they do, please see the document SE_O2DS_00: Design Specification, section 1.5: Significant Server Components. For a detailed list of how the commands work including their required POST requests, their return status codes and required headers, please see the document SE_O2_DS_00: Design Specification, section 4.1.3: Server Interface. For an example sequence diagram of the most complex command (addRecord.php), please see document SE-02-DS-00: Design Specification, section 4.1.13. All other commands follow a simplified sequence to this. For the Component Diagram of the server, please see document SE_02_DS_00: Design Specification, section 4.2.1: Detailed Design: Diagrams.

6.3.3 Significant Algorithms

Validation and Sanitisation:

To validate data inputs we ensure strings are not empty and we ensure latitude and longitudes are valid as true values. Ensuring strings are not empty:

```
if(empty($locationName) || empty($locationOS))
{
    die();
    return status code 400;
}

```

Ensuring latitude and longitude values are true:

```
if($Latitude > 90 || $Latitude < -90 || $Longitude > 180 || $Longitude < -180)
{
    die();
    return status code 400;
}
```

To sanitise all the data inputs, the command real_escape_string() was used on all POST data received from the website:

```
$SpeciesName = $conn->real_escape_string($specimen->SpeciesName);
```

This prevents any malicious data from touching the database.

SQL Queries were used to retrieve/manipulate data in the database:

Add:

```
"INSERT INTO botany_users (user_name, user_phone, user_email) VALUES ('
    $UserName', '$UserPhone', '$UserEmail')"
```

Update:

```
"UPDATE botany_reserves SET location_name='$LocationName', location_os='
    $LocationOS', description='$Description' WHERE reserve_id = $ReserveID"
```

Get:

```
"SELECT * FROM botany_reserves WHERE reserve_id=$reserveID"
```

Remove:

```
"DELETE FROM botany_reserves WHERE reserve_id = $reserveID"
```

We manually manipulate the committing for the SQL queries to ensure no invalid data gets added. All checking is done, and then we tell it to commit. This allows to reverse any affected data if it proves to be wrong.

We provided the ability to authenticate a password input to ensure the user was authorised to use commands:

```
if(!strcmp($password, $CONFIG['adminPassword']))
{
    echo "true";
}
else
{
    echo "false";
}
```

We wrote SQL queries to create the database tables, e.g:

```
create table botany_records (
record_id INT AUTO_INCREMENT ,
user_id INT NOT NULL,
time_stamp INT,
reserve_id INT,
PRIMARY KEY (record_id));

alter table botany_records
add foreign key (user_id)
references botany_users(user_id)
on delete cascade on update cascade;
```

6.3.4 The Main Data Areas

To transfer data from the android application and the website to the database, the data had to be structured in a JSON file format. JSON was a nice, flexible and easy to use language, allowing us to quickly and easily create data structures to be decoded by the API. To do this, the commands json_encode() and json_decode() are used. For example, if a new specimen was being added by the website, the website will json_encode(specimen array), and the server will json_decode the POST data. If a specimen is being sent to the website, the server will json_encode(specimen array) and the website will json_decode(POST data). To see each specific JSON data structure, please see document SE-02-DS-00: Design Specification, section 4.2.2: Significant Data Structures. This section also details the config file for use when changing resource locations and passwords.

6.3.5 Files Accessed

The API accesses the resources directory defined in '/includes/config.php' heavily. One should refrain from manually accessing the contents of that directory, and altering the directory structure. The PHP scripts should be allowed read/write access to said directory. The API does not access files outside of the resources directory.

6.3.6 Interfaces

The server's PHP scripts that implement the web API functionality use the JSON standard to receive structured data from and transmit structured data to its clients. JSON is used in conjunction with the widely accepted HTTP protocol, the JSON being carried in either the POST headers (in client requests), or the HTTP response body (in server responses).

All web API commands need to be called via the HTTP protocol using the POST method, and need to be supplied the required parameters (either plain text, or JSON format, described in detail in SE-02-DS-00: Design Specification).

A common settings interface is used for storing environmental variables such as database credentials, administrator password, and server root. Those are all stored in /includes/config.php inside the API directory.

6.3.7 Suggestions for Improvements

A number of improvements could be made, although the basic functionality of the API is complete up to the specification standard.

The choice of platform and programming language for the API was limited to the available technologies on Central. This does not represent a real-life situation, where the developers would likely have administrative control over the server the API is hosted on, allowing them a more flexible choice of technology and platform. Discarding PHP in favour of a more modern language:

- Would reduce future maintenance issues.
- Would have sped up the development of the product, and will speed up the development of any future improvements.
- Make quality assurance easier and more efficient.
- Could potentially reduce the hardware requirements of the API, depending on the selected replacement technology stack (Java EE/ASP.NET).

Therefore, a transition from PHP to Ruby on Rails, Python+Django, or even Node.js would bring long-term benefits to the project, with Java EE and ASP.NET bringing immediate savings from hardware and electricity costs.

Another, more specific improvement, is the inclusion of 'pretty URLs'. An example of that would be the current '/getResouce.php' web method, which could be rewritten as '/resource/id' followed by the desired resource ID. This requires relaxation of the requirement to use POST requests exclusively, as in many cases GET requests make more sense (a RESTful approach would suit the use-case perfectly, in fact). Another example: '/reserve/remove/id' replacing '/removeReserve.php'.

6.3.8 Future Improvement Concerns

Individual web methods in the web API are reasonably separated. A change in one method should not induce undesired changes in others. However, all methods share a single point of communication, the database, and therefore a single point of failure . The database structure is rigidly defined, and as of now, the code base does not allow one to easily change table and column names. This means that any changes to the database schema, even trivial ones such as renames, need to be carefully accounted for in the API source code, and thoroughly tested before being released into production.

While separate web methods are independent of each other, the same can not be said of the separate routines that constitute the methods. The code was produced in a rush, and little to no time was left for refactoring. Many parts of the source code are therefore in the form of long, function-less scripts, with no modularity whatsoever. Therefore, extra caution should be practised when editing: a change in one variable, or a slight rearrangement of the statement order could generate unexpected behaviour in seemingly unrelated sections of code in the same file.

6.3.9 Limitations of the Program

As an interpreted language, PHP is fairly slow compared to compiled and JIT-compiled languages. For low-to-moderate size use cases, it's performance is perfectly reasonable, but it lacks the high scalability offered by some competing technologies.

The technical limitations are, therefore, modest: a mainstream 2006-era CPU such as a Core 2 Duo, and 1GB of RAM, would have little issue running the API provided it is not heavily used. As the incoming requests rise, though, hardware will begin to fail to meet the demand, requiring higher-performance hardware. Eventually, one would not be able to obtain a faster computer, and load balancing across several machines becomes necessary, which the API architecture does not allow at the moment (as it uses local file storage to save resources). At this point, resource storage would need to be moved to a separate server, and the API source code would require change.

Regarding the database: MySQL is a good database engine for all but the highest-performance scenarios. Switching the database engine to InnoDB will bring further performance benefits, but that would remove the support for referential integrity, currently built into the DB schema, and support for transactions, used by the API. Workarounds can be implemented, however. Considering the project lacks the ability to provide a revenue stream of any sort, purchasing expensive licences for more capable databases such as Oracle Database or Microsoft SQL Server is inconceivable, and according to projections, unlikely to ever become necessary.

6.3.10 Building from source

The web API requires no rebuilding. Copying the API files inside the Apache 'public_html' directory, with PHP installed of course, should suffice.

The database can be set up by executing the table creation scripts (found at 'table_queries.txt) on a blank MySQL database.

Once the database is set up, one should edit the '/includes/config.php' file and configure it with the database address, name, username and password, the path to the server root, and

the path to the resources storage. An admin password should also be picked at this point. Ensure all PHP scripts have write access to the resources directory.

7 Document History

Version	Edit	Date	Persons
0.1	Initial Version	Febuary 12 2015	nid21
0.2	Document Reviewed	Febuary 13 2015	nid21
0.3	Included personal reports, project history, management study	Febuary 15 2015	nid21