Over the past few weeks, we have been working on the SNHU travel agency’s new feature for there website. While working on it, we had to go through a number of different steps, the work had to go through the hands off different members of the team with different roles, and we had to be very flexible with the project. This is a prime example of how we are trying to convert to a more agile methodology. Originally, just about everyone start off with waterfall, where we would plan from the beginning, and stick to that plan as much as possible. If there was a huge occurrence of an error, we would mark it up as an exception, otherwise, we would not go back to previous phases. The approach we took this time was very much different. We had to stay flexible and had little planning from the beginning.

About half way through the course of 7 weeks, we actually had received an update from the product owner that there had to be a change within the product; the only issue was all they sent was a slide show. This made it hard, from a developers point of view, because all we have is a slideshow presentation of 5 slides, a next button, and a previous button with pictures and minimal words. After which, we had to reach out to the product owner and ask that they be more detail oriented about the points that there are making, rather than be very vague with the information. This communication between the product owner and I, the scrum master, had helped a lot moving forward. The instructions that the client had in mind were later told to me, which then I was able to inform the developers and testers so that we could proceed forward.

From the standpoint of developers, the project was fairly straight forward; create a function/software that would allow for cycling through vacation spots that might interest the user. As stated previously, the product owner at once point sent update changes that weren’t the clearest, but we were able to navigate around that by reaching out, and asking for clearer instructions moving forward. During the 7 weeks that we have been working on this function, the developers had to work a handful of different tasks in order to produce the product that we currently have. This involved changing the vacation spots within the Java program, and then giving each vacation spot their own description. As with all the other roles, we ended up taking an agile approach with this, and the developers were not different. There was no set plan from the beginning; they had to be very flexible with their work, and plan for some sort of change as the deadline approached. This was shown during towards the end of the 7 week period; the user stories that were given during the scrum meetings aided in revealing the reason why they felt the way they did about certain features of other travel site agencies, and with that information, we were able to develop a product that was more geared towards the reasons we were given.

From the point of a tester, it was a good thing that we adopting an agile methodology for our work; it allowed the tester to stay closer to the developers and stopped them from not having much work to do in the early stages. See, with waterfall, the testing phase doesn’t actually start until towards the end, but with an agile approach, we can immediately enter the testing phase, so that we can change perspectives at any point. During week 5, we actually had to look into user stories, to better understand the ideas of the clients, and why they feel the way they do about certain features in other agencies. With this, the testers were able to look at the product we had, and judge it based on the criteria of the user stories that they heard. Now, it was a little difficult with some of the user stories, as some were pretty vague and lacked detail that could, otherwise, help in improving the current program that we were working on. Other than that, the agile approach allowed the testers to develop their own ideas and then allowed them to hear other ideas and CHANGE their opinions on certain functions due to what they heard. This is the flexibility that an agile approach allows for the team.

As a scrum master, my biggest job was to aid in the communication of information, and help any team member who may need it. This includes helping with certain steps of the development stages, help the product owner with listening to the user stories, or conveying information that was brought up by a client/product owner and deliver it to the rest of the team. During week 6 of the SNHU travel agency function, we actually had to talk among ourselves in a scrum event ( the discussion post) and talk about certain aspects that we would like to imply. During this event, I was the scrum master and read over everyone’s comments and posts in order to get as much feedback as possible about different agile tools and strategies that we would like to implement, moving forward. The biggest request that I came to saw was that the developers and testers work much closer with each other, and to remove the “testing phase”, as this infers that there should be a given time that the testers should be active. This, as stated previously, should not be the case; the “testing phase” should be from start to finish on the project, and have more interaction and communication between the testers and developers allowing for quick changes to be implemented, with higher precision of those changes. After reading through the feedback, we all were able to give feedback back to one another, to either agree or disagree with reasoning as to why we felt that way. As it stood out, a lot of requests were very similar, which allowed for an easy implantation of agile strategies to be place in affect.

There are many positive effects of switching over to an agile approach to project lifestyles, but there are still some things that may be hard to accept. As stated before, an agile approach allows for more flexibility, due to the lack of a planning phase. This isn’t to say that there is absolutely no plan or idea going into the project; all it means is that the amount of time and effort that is put into estimating completion dates/times, creating milestones, and micromanaging this restraints are either lower dramatically, or just removed in general. As a scrum master, you should not have to micro manage anyone, as that defeats the whole purpose of a scrum master AND agile approach. Really, the scrum master is better to be seen, not heard from, unless there is important information that has to be brought the everyone’s attention, feedback is being given, or during scrum events like scrum meetings. Now, the negative aspect of an agile approach is the lack of ways to estimate a projects completion date. This is only because there is no initial big planning phase, and therefore harder to do. There are ways to estimate the completion date, however, with different strategies; one is the burn down strategy. This creates a graph with the amount of tasks compared to time incriminates, and eventually will start to form a linear line which can aid in estimating time. For the most part, however, the completion date for different milestones can be estimated by comparing the current task to other stories and sprints. Overall, the agile method is still better than a waterfall method, as the agile allows for more flexibility, more interaction between the team, and overall moral of the team.