To: Michael Green
From: Mike Fry
Re: Sabbatical Spring 2009
Date: October 5, 2009

Mike,

Here is a report of my activities during sabbatical in the spring.

One of the projects I planned for the sabbatical was an active map of the Union Canal Tunnel. The sabbatical began with explorations of Google's software library, and tools in Google Earth and Google maps for organizing geographical data, along with some exploration of other map data systems. After returning from the January ELI meeting (which included a workshop on Google Maps) Dale Erskine, Marie Bongiovanni, and I had a little seminar on Google Earth and Google Maps, and Marie shared some historical data with me related to the tunnel. Instability with directorship of the Lebanon County Historical Society, and their switchover to new web site administration, led me to believe I had lost my main audience for the project, but I intended to try to create something useful anyway.

Meantime, I also refurbished the web site for an organization called PECAN (Progressive Education of Children in the Arts Network) Inc.   I researched other organizations linked to from the PECAN web site (at www.pecaninc.org) updated links, added information about upcoming events, and added maps to locations of some events (using tools I learned about in the Union Canal project).

However, early on in the sabbatical I decided I wanted to write some software for IDEA administration (not part of my plan). I wanted to know how to use AJAX (Asynchronous Javascript and XML), which has become an important part of programming for the Web, and an important part of Google's map library. I also wanted to develop as a programmer of dynamic web pages (something I teach to Digital Communcations students) and as a database programmer. My eventual successors and I who coordinate IDEA could use some tools that allow faculty and chairs to specify which multi-section courses should be combined, which courses / sections should be using Diagnostic Form, and which courses should be excluded from IDEA. [The tool also became a way to manage profile information about courses that could be used to define groups of courses for useful group reports, like Gen Ed liberal studies areas, Writing Process, etc.]

We went on a 2-week trip to China in the second half of February, and when we returned, the other projects (including one I had planned to do for the Lebanon County Commission on Drug and Alcohol Abuse) got put on hold while I attacked this IDEA administration software. I will be unveiling the project within about a week (between now and October 13) for faculty to use. Completion of the project actually required the rest of the spring semester and the summer. You can see the project by navigating to http://dcom.lvc.edu/ideaprep/ . Use your regular LVC username and password to log in. I will present it at the IDEA Users Group meeting at the AAC&U meeting in Washington in January. I will also offer training sessions for faculty and for chairs on its use.

It does use Microsoft's newest AJAX support for its dynamic web page system (ASP.NET with a SQL Server database) to create an especially responsive user interface. The user (a faculty member, chair, department secretary, or IDEA coordinator) can make changes on a page as quickly as they like, and the browser and server will catch up with the changes in the background. The system is audited (changes are logged on the database server). Users are authenticated through the campus authorization system (and this project helped me configure our lab computers so that Linux login can use campus usernames and passwords). The course CSC 245 – Networks and Database (taken by junior-level Digital Communucations majors) has already benefited by my additional experience with the tools used in that class.

This project should help with another problem I discovered after spring evaluations: Some people who were mandated to use the Diagnostic Form because of pre-tenure or tenure evaluations coming up this year used the Short Form by mistake. That mishap should be rare from now on.

And with this preparation completed, I still hope to someday create an on-line tour of the canal. And for the time being, I will continue to 'manually' assemble the charts needed by the Lebanon County Commission on Drug and Alcohol Abuse.