Best Practices = Efficient Government
A Drupal Career Online Case Study

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IOWA PUBLIC EMPLOYEES' RETIREMENT SYSTEM

When it comes to serving their constituents with effective online access, the Iowa Public Employees' Retirement System keeps getting it right.

From the time IPERS was first deciding to shed their Dreamweaver framework a few years ago for something more robust, to ensuring that they have well-trained internal Drupal talent; the IPERS Application Programming Services and Communication teams rocked the process and aced the outcome by sticking with best practices.

The IPERS APS and Communication teams chose Drupal through an extremely efficient process, focused on what other agencies had already put in place, how the transition went, and how the new framework was working out. The solution would of course have to be cost effective, ensure that the needs of the agency and their 700 daily users were met, be implemented in a timely way, and utilize the ability of their internal team to deliver and maintain high levels of service for years to come..

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Carla Stoner, who has been with IPERS for 19 years, is the APS team member directly responsible for the technical function of the web site and coordination with the Office of the Chief Information Officer. APS and the Communication teams streamlined their selection process, using the experiences and examples of other Iowa agencies that had already upgraded their web sites. Once they narrowed down the field of potential frameworks, a final demo of DotNetNuke by a fellow state agency made Drupal the clear choice. They contracted and worked closely with an outside consulting company to develop the new IPERS site, which went live the summer of 2015.

While the new build was going on, Carla was made aware of DrupalEasy's Drupal Career Online program. "My supervisor was the one who found the DrupalEasy training course for me," she explains, "He wanted a type of training that would have substance and not something that would last only a week and be crammed with spoon-fed work exercises." The DCO is long-form training with integrated instruction, an actively-engaged expert teacher (Mike Anello; ultimike on Drupal.org) focused on student learning, a built-in learning community, and comprehensive learning and resource materials. The program emphasizes Drupal best practices and community participation.

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"My supervisor and I were both impressed with the length of the course, knowing that there would be a lot of material covered. We also liked the idea of all the 'hands on' experience…" she recalls. With this in mind, they decided to wait on formal training for Carla until her schedule allowed her to really engage. After the transition to the new site, she was encouraged to devote the 11+ hours per week to the 12-week session of the DCO that began that September.

"I had zero background in Drupal, but had used Dreamweaver, which gave me exposure to HTML and CSS," she said. Continuing, "…All of the topics covered in the DCO are very relevant to my work. Even though our test and production environments are setup a bit differently from the norm (Drush and Git aren't used as prevalently), learning these basic tools of Drupal have increased my skills for when I do get to use them."

She added, "The DrupalEasy course is laid out in such a way that it keeps building on each segment. You don't just learn it once and forget it. Michael has you continually utilizing what you learned and then reapplying it… I also enjoyed the "community" we developed amongst ourselves, the classmates. We helped each other. Michael fostered an atmosphere that made learning fun… it helped build camaraderie. I still feel that same camaraderie to this day."

Carla's learning also continues. "My DrupalEasy class ended last November (2015) and even now as I come across a request to change our website, I remember back to when Michael taught us how to accomplish that. And if I don't remember, I can always review the very handy screencasts he has done."
She is also among the DCO alumni who take advantage of Mike's open office hours every Thursday afternoon for current students and alumni. "We all try to help each other. Even though I am by no means an expert…there are times that I feel I'm making a helpful suggestion or can see as I'm watching Michael demonstrate how to solve a person's issue…," she concludes.

IPERS transition to their Drupal site, starting with the selection of the framework, into the site development and continuing on with internal staff development demonstrates the effectiveness of using tried and true best practices. They looked at their needs, found the most cost-effective solutions, and committed the time and effort to ensure the best possible outcomes. That's effective government.

If you would like to learn more about Drupal Career Online, you can register at DrupalEasy.com for an upcoming Taste of Drupal informational mini-workshop.