IT for Empowering the Chulalongkorn Community through Website Directory[*]

Chanchai CHAISUKKOSOL
chairainbow@chula.com, chairainbow@yahoo.com
Center for Social Development Studies, Faculty of Political Science,
Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand.

I. Abstract

This article aims at proposing the information technology as a mean to promote the building process of Chulalongkorn community. Chulalongkorn, presently, can be characterized as the institute with *no power, no friends,* and *no direction*. This is party due to an absence of communication both within community and with the public, which results in a lack of shared overall picture of Chulalongkorn. Today the communication channels-seminar forums, internal printed matters and other mass medias-are not enough to encourage mutual understanding because of its limitation to approach people and the public. However, in order to find a better way to communicate, we must bear in mind that the people are not homogeneous. They are different both in terms of attitudes and life styles. Thus, these differences must be taken into consideration.

Dealing with the above situation, I suggest that two concepts must be filled in the communication process: space creation and two-way communication. While the creation of space will open a way to diversity, two-way communication will let message more easily accessible. I then propose "website and webboard" as a tool. I suggest to set up *"the Chulalongkorn Community Website Directory"* as a junction of a variety of websites created by Chulalongkorn's people. The directory will allow us to search for any information and stories related to Chulalongkorn. Rather than a faculty's structure-based directory, it should classified according to issues. Also, spaces for two-way communication, both among the community and with the public, are needed to be available.

Keyword : Chulalongkorn, common, community, communication, space, diversity, website, webboard.

---

[*] This article is neither a research nor thesis. It is a concept idea which I would like to propose for discussion and waiting for some suggestions.

II. Chula 's Communication Problem

Chulalongkorn, according to Surachart Bumrungsuk, is presently characterized as **3-Nos**[1],1) **No Power :** the university can not either be a part of "social power" or be a social development organization; 2) **No Friends :** the relationship between university and social is loosening; **3) No Direction :** no clear direction of the university's status is available.

Let me explain more about the cause of the "3-Nos" situation, which is a result of insufficient communication.

Firstly, because of an absence of effective communication within the community, people in the university, called "community", do not mutually understand Chulalongkorn as a unit and can not coordinate to each other. This situation is called "No Power"

Secondly, because of an absence of effective communication with the public, people in the society, called "the public", do not recognize their capacity and are unaware of the changing context of the society. These, in turn, lead to a widening gap between Chula and the public, a "No Friend" situation.

Thirdly, the confusing direction takes place when the insider can not coordinate themselves and even worse when no feedback from the public. Again, this is called "No Direction".

Thus I feel that it is necessary that the university must dialogue. Promotion of the communication both within Chula community and with the public is extremely required. The communication should reveal Chula 's identity while at the same time it has to learn to listen unbiasedly from the outsider.

III. A proposed way for the problem

Before starting to communicate, we need to ask ourselves who are the participants of the conversations, or in other word, what kind of groups is Chula consisted of? The basic assumption of this article is *"Chula is not a piece of soil"*[2], that is people in Chula are not a homogeneous object. They, in contrast, have different attitudes, life styles, and so on. These differences exist among students, teachers and even university staffs. Consequently, conditions that enable disclosure of Chula's diversity must be enhanced. If so, the community then can recognize how to empower themselves.

However, due to Chula's long development, it nowadays become a huge institute with a complicated structure. Communication between people in each university section is therefore not simple. When considering that the society is changing speedily, the gap between it and the public is even larger.

At the present, the existing communication panels is quiet limited.
1) *Internal printed matters*: they are one-direction communication. The mass (or massage) is selected to consist according to the objective of each matter. So it can not carry all topics arinsing within Chula community.
2) *Seminar forums*: despite theirs two-way communication and plentiful availability, this kind of activities require high level of authority and organization.
3) *Mass media communication*: It is in forms of administrator's statements, grouping of academics or news of some mega activities such as Chula-Thammasart Traditional Football Game.

---

[1] Surachart Bumrungsuk, *"Venue towards crisis: University and Thai Society"*, document provided for the second forum for "the Future of Chulalongkorn University", 11th February 2002, 12 committee room, 3rd building, Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University.

[2] Prof.Dr. Chai-anan Samudavanija, once said in the forum for *"University and Social responsibility"* that *Society is not a piece of soil, we must break and distinguish them to see what is in there"*, 9 September 2000, Kasem-Auttayanin committee room, 3rd building, Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University.

When considering the communication in the university level, these three channels have a common restriction in encouraging an individual to make a dialogue with others. A person can not act as a *"mass source"* through them. They are also not enough to be a solution for the insufficiency of communication.

Thus, to communicate among the community and to the public in this situation, I propose two things to be taken in to accounted: 1) Enhancing the *"open-space" for diversity among the members of Chula to reveal.* 2) Developing the *"space" of two-way communication, which can be easily accessed as a mass source. This space must also allow the communication with both inner and outer people.*

Thanks to the rapid growth of Information Technology (IT) development, it is possible to apply IT to fill the objective. The question here is *"how to use IT to promote the diversity and the communication among the inner and between the publics?"*

Internet, which is popular today and will be much more popular in the future, is proposed in this article. Website is one machanism because of its friendly using and multimedia. Many groups are using websites to declare the selves of groups and address the position in the internet society. The other is webboard. Webboard[3] is developed from website. It is specially constructed for news declaration and dialogue making. While beautiful interface is less focused in webboard, the collective of the information and opinions are outstanding. Today, webboard is highly used and it has created communities on the internet, for example, *pantip.com* – one of the most popular webboard of Thailand; *thaitopic.com* – constructing for the idea exchange and now become an academic community on the internet.

Because website and webboard have opened an area for individual or group to declare the self as well as allow more effective communication, I proposes to establish the **website** and **webboard** called **Chulalongkorn Community Website**, as the detail in the next section.

IV. General Characters of the existing Chula's Website

Among the university's websites*, www.chula.ac.th*, a central one, seems the most well-known. It contains fundamental information, such as history of Chulalongkorn University, administrative structure and administrators, academic and research activities, graduate school, international affairs, students affairs, cultural activities, and not to mention the story of autonomy university preparation and quality assurance website, first located two years ago. The website has web-links to other faculties', institutes', colleges' and administrative offices' websites, that information on those again deals with history, administrative structure, research projects and advertisements. A quick start to the frequently used websites of some organizations—for example, Digital Library, Computing, Map, Book Center, and so on, is moreover available. There is a linking point to webpage containing all personal homepage of student, faculty, and staff. Furthermore, there is a search engine for e-mail, course, and other information.

These websites are "official", that is they are built for the purpose of public relation and introducing Chulalongkorn to visitors. Most are static. Only some of them are periodically updated, for instance, one of the office of academic affair. To sum up, by travelling through this central website, people who want to know more about Chulalongkorn will understand just **the structural view**, but can not understand the whole picture of **Chula in the community view**.

However, there are still other websites which are not revealed on the university 's server (let me call "non-register website"). These include: 1) inofficial faculties' websites

---

[3] **Website** differs from **webboard**. Website is meaning in sense of "place" or "site" that the web pages are located. Webboard is the web page that act as a "board" for whoever (not only webmaster) want to post the message and talk to each other.

constructed by student: the faculty of political science (singhdam.com), the faculty of communication arts (nitadechula.com), the faculty of engineering (intania85.com), Chula 's student webboard (chulaboard.cjb.net) and the faculty of arts webboard (artschula.hypermart.net); 2) student clubs' website—volunteer camp club (geocities.com/sjmcamp), environment preservation club (geocities.com/anurak chula.com); 3) Chula Alumni Community's website (chula.com); 4) other personal homepages that are not located at the university. Most of them use free space or free homepage from homepage service providers, like www.geocities.com, www.hypermart.net. These websites are dynamic and frequently updated since they are developed to serve the needs of particular group and allow conversation for their members.

I believed that there are much more non-register websties but are known only among their groups. So, it is interesting to create some space as a linking junction for these websites. If it can be done, the complex picture of the diversity of Chula community will be seen more clearly. Even if most of the internet users are students, when the linking junction space has been built up and made public relation, it is possible that many group 's websites are created up. That is a very good way to holisticly understand Chula community.

V. Proposal : Chulalongkorn Community Website Directory

This article proposes "Chulalongkorn Community Website Directory" to act as a linking junction of all websites, providing so many topics related to Chula community that the directory's visitors will never be disappointed. The directory will generate "space" for different selves of Chula's diversity and for more dialogues among internal people (and the public).

Five Key Characteristics:
1) **Common space**: this place must be public property, not belong to a particular organization or group.
2) **Participants as stakeholders**: everyone in Chula has an ownership.
3) **Management freedom and transparency**
4) **Dynamic movement**: contains various topics and update issues.
5) **Many Channels** that can access many groups of people.

- Space for diversity

The website should be informal and creat communal feeling. As containing every topic related to Chula, how to categorize is important. Classification should be issue-based, not faculty-based which will make the website too structural and unable to contain all topics under faculty criteria. Detail grouping is also essential. For the university' organized structure, there will be a link for visitors separately.

There are a lot of personal homepages of students and staffs located in Chula 's server[4] but shown to the visitors by name sorting. They should be re-categorized by issues or stories of each homepage. This can be done by allowing the owner to register to "my homepage's issue". It is also possible to employ a technical method by using program "spider" or "bot" to explore the network and find the keyword of each homepage for classification. (This is a general method of the famous web directory or search engine, such as google.com, yahoo.com, and sanook.com). Lastly, other websites of Chula members should be allowed to register.

---

[4] There are 1,300 student homepages (from www.student.chula.ac.th) and 450 faculty and staff homepages (from pioneer.netserv.chula.ac.th), access on Mar 2, 2002.

- Space for two-way communication
    The space created up for communication can be divided by purposes into two types : a) space for internal communication (Chula↔Chula); b) space for public communication {(Chula↔Chula)↔Public)}. Nevertheless, the internal communication though is aimed for Chula community, the public should be permitted to join.

    a) Space for internal communication (Chula↔Chula)
    1. **Direct line to administrator** – Usually, communication between people in different status is top-down. Feedback from the bottom is in fact important. Petition webboard to the president and the chairman of the university might be set up. Or if a person need to do privately, they probably might choose to write an e-mail instead [5].
    2. **Advertisement board** – It is used to announce the community 's activities. This feature, in fact, has been already in the website of the university, but people are unable to post news without permission from a webmaster. I propose to use the webboard to allow people to post any news by themselves. News should be divided into expired and unexpired. For the sake of convenience, the latter should be on the first page of the website directory while the expired news is collected in the newsboard.
    3. **The website diary** – There are a number of people living in different parts of the university with different attitudes and daily life experiences. To understand what people are thinking or how their daily lives be, one way is to allow them to talk. So, there should be a website as a diary for people who want to complain and talk to others. For example, a staff whom be rapped by her/his boss could write a story to exchange some feeling with another staff whom might be in the same situation. This website probably turn to a small webboard, in case people would like to discuss some issues in the diary[6].

    b) Space for public communication {(Chula↔Chula)↔Public)}
    1. **Virtual Public Forum** – There are many hot social issues related directly to Chula—Bor-Nok EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) case, the assembly of the poor protest, and the telecommunication commission translation case for examples. There are also other social issues related indirectly to the society like the autonomization of universities. Obviously, little space or forum on these issues is existed. Even if there were two big forums for public hearing and a few small seminar forums, it is not enough for the large issues. Thus, there absolutely should be a website, an area for the community to discuss tangibly on them. It might be in forms of academic discussion, *virtual public forum*[7] which open a room for any public controversial issues, paralled with the real public forum.
    2. **Chula in trend webboard** – This is used for posing news of Chula in newspapers, or other mass media. Both inner and outer people can follow the movement of Chula related to the society in this place and they can make discussion here. This space differs from the virtual public forum. While the virtual public forum focuses on the hot social issue, it focuses particularly on Chula.
    3. **Person introduction website** – This is used to introduce some interest people who has "no voice" or seem not exist in the community. For example, an interview with a handicapped student who finally graduate from the university.

---

[5] For implementation, it can be study the case of "direct line to president Chuan".

[6] for example website, www.thaidiarist.com, www.storythai.com.

[7] In Thailand internet, there are such website for academic discussion and networking the academic information, such as, www.thaitopic.com. In this website, there are many discussion room, such as "*public policy forum*" discussed about some Act or legality, "karn-pan-karn-muang" discussed about the social and political situation in Thailand.

<u>A little note for consideration</u>

The owner of the directory must truly be Chula community. Freedom and accountability of website management must be valued. To make sure, there should be a special webboard for feedbacks and complaints by users. Every comments and suggestions must be declared for public accessibility (Thus, the appropriated equipment should be webboard rather than e-mail).

Furthermore, because the internet communication is a new thing for Thai society, there are many unclear things, such as rights protection against personal information harassment, responsibility of word posing and so on. Thus, running this project, there should be a "specialist" in internet's community taking part in. And there should be channels of brain-storming forum (both virtual and real) for the "internet highly experienced users".

VI. Conclusion

The article attempts to propose an example in applying IT to empower the community building process. By making both inner and outer people get to know and understand the right picture of Chula, a complicated society, it will encourage the university to serve the society much more better.

However, this article is rather a technical and hardware-oriented one. To implement the concept, some questions are still challanging, for instance, how to make people be willing to listen to the difference opinions and respect the common decision of the community. This two cultures are rarely found in Chulalongkorn and are needed to deal in the future.