Sergio Rossi (Graduate Teaching Assistant - Urban Affairs & Planning)

"I'm excited about and working towards a
great future in my field."

Background

Age: 38
Occupation: Graduate Teaching Assistant
School: College of Architecture & Urban Studies, Virginia Tech
Technology level: Comfortable using technology

Main Points

- Wants to find a tenure-track professorship he can be excited about
- Would like to reuse teaching materials he's prepared in the future
- Likes to keep everything organized chronologically

Goals

- Obtain his PhD
- Write an important dissertation
- Support his family (financially & emotionally)
- Obtain a tenure-track position somewhere with good starting pay
- Have time to get back into the hobbies he's had to mostly forego while getting his PhD

Frustrations & Pain Points

- He wishes there were a way to automatically notify him whenever students posted assignments on Scholar so he didn't need to be checking for them all the time.
- He finds it frustrating to have to take the time to download each assignment in Scholar before he can print it out. He always does his grading on printouts of assignments because it's easier to make comments and collaborate with other TAs if necessary.
- Sergio the biggest problem with Scholar is that it can be **very slow** to load certain pages, which can make it hard to work efficiently. However, he think that the various advantages it offers outweighs this disadvantage finds it a bit easier to set up than a completely unstructured wiki.
- He has had problems accessing PC-specific files on his other computer, as well as difficulties accessing files in "old" formats (like WordPerfect). For this reason, he creates PDFs of most of his files so that he can have "printable access into the future" and across platforms.
- The Calendar tool in Scholar is not very user-friendly and is not itegrated with his personal calendar. He really wishes that Scholar had a good calendar with personal calendars to make it easier to access the course schedule and important dates. Since he doesn't think Scholar's calendar is very good anyway (and in his experience students don't look at it)

Scenarios

- TBD

Sergio is a Ph.D. candidate in the School of Public & International Affairs in his 5th year of study. Sergio and his family live in Graduate Student Housing. He finds it hard to get work done at home, so Sergio usually works in the large office he shares with other graduate students in the College of Architecture & Urban Studies. Their department is large and well-funded, so the office space is quite nice. Though he has his own desk, there is a lot of open space for collaboration or impromptu meetings. If all the meetings and activities in his office become too distracting, or he just needs a change of pace, he will go to a local cafe that has wireless access or the library to work. He has finished all his required courses, but still takes a course here and there to expand his knowledge of the field. When he has to write papers for courses, he usually also uses them as chapters in his
dissertation. He has been writing chapters of his dissertation in HTML and placing it in a semi-private space on his website where he can have peers review it and provide him with feedback.

Personal

- He enjoys cooking, drawing, and spending time doing just about anything outdoors with his wife and 5 year old son. But since work on his dissertation has been taking up a lot of his time lately, he hasn't been able to do as much of these leisure activities as he'd like.

Technology Use

- Sergio has maintained a website for himself and his family for many years, which contains some of his writings and a list of past courses as well as his wife's art. It functions primarily as a way for them to collect, access and share this material with family and friends rather than as a website for the general public.
- Sergio has a PC desktop computer at his desk in the office, but mostly uses his Linux laptop. He also has a Tablet PC which he's pretty much stopped using. He does run into situations when he needs to move files between his different computers.
- Sergio tried to use the Tablet PC for note-taking, but found it too difficult to manage and has returned to taking notes in class and when reading with pen and paper. However, when it comes to working with documents on his computer, he likes to save paper so only occasionally prints out long documents, or those he knows he will read.
- He organizes his files chronologically, with the numeric date as part of the filename, and is careful to track revisions by appending "a,""b," etc. to the filename.
- Sergio is very organized, and has all his events, including those he's pulled in from various 'shared' calendars, arranged in a color-coded Google calendar. He also uses stickies as "to do" lists to remind him of work he needs to do. He puts these on the sketchbook he carries around with him all the time. He uses it often and has filled many previous volumes of similar sketchbooks.
- He is very interested in all the great content he can obtain for the web, and is even a Wikipedia contributor. He regularly reads news sites like Google News, Wired, as well as various special interest blogs. When he did more work on multiple computers, he used Delicious a lot to manage his favorite links, but now he usually just uses his browser's bookmarking function.
- Sergio has a fairly advanced cell phone with which he sometimes sends and receives text messages, but doesn't generally access the web with it. Though he uses IM occasionally, he finds it distracting and usually only turns it on for a couple hours a week.
- Sergio needed to learn about open source software, wikis, and other things as part of his work, and has become somewhat of an explorer and follower of new technology & trends. However, he sees technology primarily as a way of helping him achieve his goals and doesn't usually find it fun for its own sake. Some of his worst days were spent fighting with new software he was trying to figure out.

Teaching

Sergio usually teaches discussion sections of large lecture courses, in which the lectures are given by professors. He usually has 25-30 students in his sections, and shares lecture-related responsibilities (e.g. Sergio handles the audio-visual setup) with up to 8 other GSIs.

The professors he works with usually decide how to manage their course material. Most of them use Scholar, VT's version of the Sakai Learning Management system, sometimes along with a website with other supplementary material. Other professors use wikis, especially if students need to see each other's assignments or do collaborative work. He knows that wikis aren't ideal, however, and that some of his students also use Google Docs when they have to collaborate on an assignment, since it allows multiple people to edit in real time. Some professors will even use both a wiki and Scholar, and try to display the wiki using Scholar's Web Content tool. This doesn't work very well as it is difficult to navigate the wiki when it is **in side** Scholar.

In Scholar, each TA normally has their own course site for their discussion section, which serves as a supplement to the Scholar site for the lecture. Sergio has more of a "guide on the side" teaching philosophy and likes to let his students think through the issues on their own, so and uses Scholar to support this teaching style. When preparing a lecture, he finds it helpful to think back on what it was like to learn the material he's teaching himself. He prefers to "retrace the act of learning" rather than just deliver content.

- Sergio has selected students post discussion questions to the Forum each week, which then all the students answer. For the mid-term he creates a set of questions in the Forum which the students all answer together, and in doing so they create their own study guide. He wishes the Forum supported other ways of organizing topics rather than the strict hierarchical structure it uses now.
- In one of his classes students normally turn in assignments on paper. In another, they turn them in via Scholar.

- Even if they are using a wiki or website as well, in almost all his courses the professors use Scholar's Gradebook to return grades, since they are not allowed to post them in the hallway anymore.
- As he's spent a lot of time designing his course material and would like to reuse it in his future teaching, he wants to make sure that it won't be lost if Scholar ever goes away.

Scenarios

- **Learn students' names:** Sergio finds the pictures in the Roster tool very handy as he's trying to learn student's names at the beginning of the semester. However, he's also has problems getting the right students into his Roster in the past and had to contact technical support.
- **Access academic and personal calendar in Scholar:** See course schedule and important dates quickly and easily.
- **Announce important dates:** Use the Announcements tool to send out emails to students about important dates.
- **Communicate with a subset of the students:** Use the Mail tool to message some of the students. The "Check All" option is helpful rathe than selecting students one by one.
- **Organize course material chronologically:** Like to easily understand what work he needs to do and what the important dates are.