Keeping an on-line record of your department's research activity can raise the faculty's awareness of current research projects. This article reports on the Computer Science department's efforts with CS Think!, a web application using Microsoft SharePoint. Due to our varied schedules, we felt research would most benefit from a water-cooler design, essentially a dynamic forum for ideas within a structured support framework.

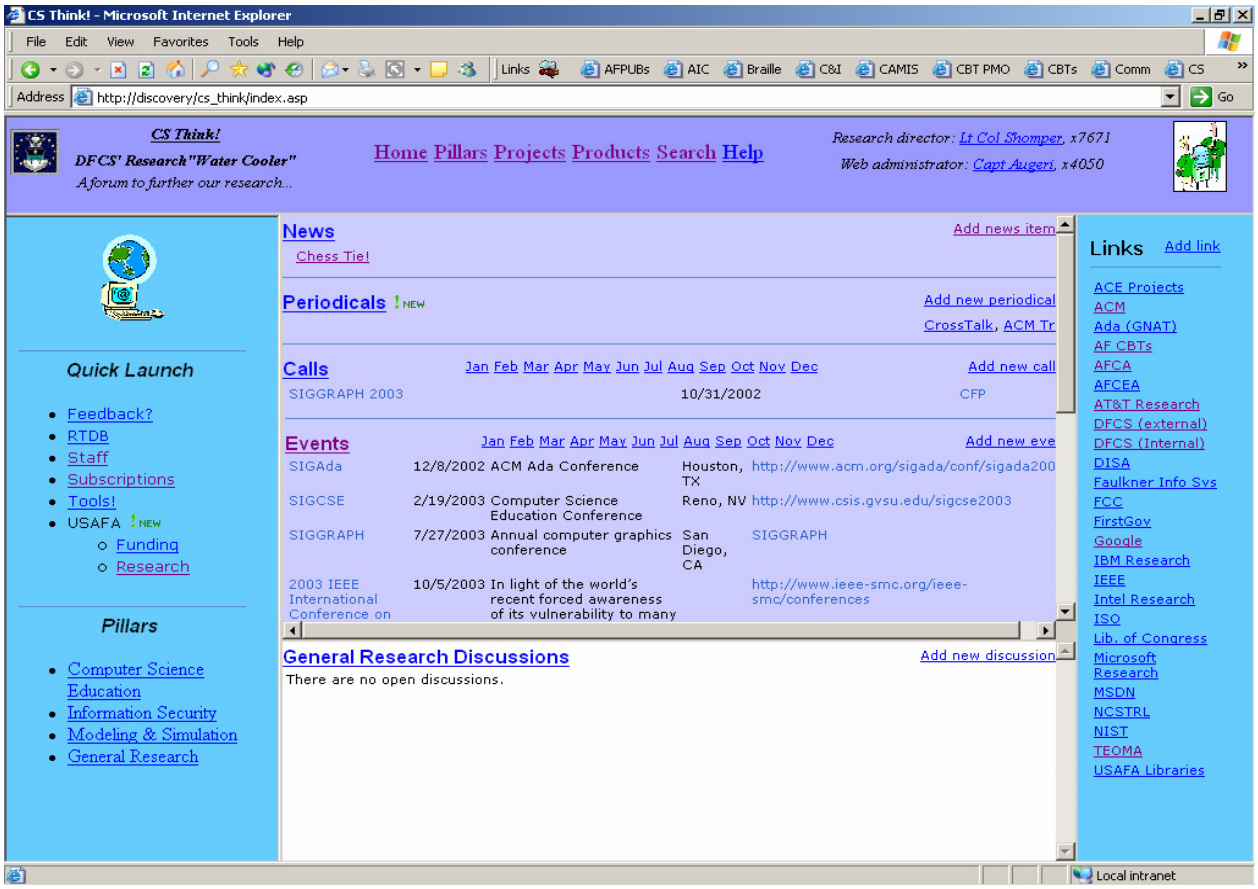
We also wanted to incorporate and support the requirements of how research is conducted at USAFA, specifically the research tracking database (RTDB). However, we did not want to duplicate the content or purpose of the RTDB. While the RTDB is designed to provide the administrative oversight of research, CS Think! is designed to provide the day-to-day progress and "life" of the research.

After discussing what tool would best facilitate the furthering of our department's research efforts, we settled on a knowledge management tool based on Microsoft's SharePoint Server. This software is also used to host USAFA For Sale @ http://heinlein.usafa.af.mil/forsale and the cadet GR archive @ http://discovery/grs. After some internal development, it now serves us well with CS Think! @ http://discovery/cs_think.

CS Think! is organized along the same lines as the RTDB. Research focus areas, or pillars, lead to research projects, which over time, create products. Within each layer, there is specific information pertinent to the success of that layer. Currently, we provide a databank for each of the following areas: news, calls, events, periodicals, links, and a discussion board. These various resources are displayed in a manner which allows an overview of each at first glance, with the ability to drill down as the user's interests drive navigation. In addition, we provide some general research support in the following areas: RTDB, staff members, tools, and funding opportunities.

Additional capabilities also are available. Each project has its own view of the site, along with, as desired, a pre-specified internal and external site. Documents are able to be posted, reviewed, and approved on-line. Each user has the ability to subscribe to a specific area of interest, for instance, news articles. By default, each department member receives a weekly notification of changes in the calls, events, and periodicals listing of the site.

Overall, we are pleased with CS Think! and its usefulness. Users are able to post and edit content, without being dependent on a site administrator. Due to its recent inception, it is too early for a project to have used CS Think! for the full scope of it's work. Feel free to review CS Think! and provide any feedback you have.




CS Think! Home Page