Getting WIKI with it: designing an online knowledge network for post graduate research candidates and supervisors

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Researchers in Australia have yet to develop a visible online community space, despite the high reliance by supervisors and students on the internet as a tool for research and communication. Perhaps this shouldn’t surprise us; before ‘Facebook’ managed to achieve critical mass there were several attempts at creating internet based ‘friendship networks’ that were high profile failures. It is clear that the best ‘Social Software’ tools are those that are carefully designed for their audience.

On the face of it, Research Candidates should be in ideal audience for online social networks. Pursuing a PhD or Masters Degree can be a lonely and alienating experience; candidates often express the desire to find others who share their research interests, but claim there are barriers to achieving meaningful connection. Importantly, the research community is more international then ever, yet the ‘tyranny of distance’ is still a problem for some candidates. An Online research community can provide another forum for research networking activities; one that, while it does not replace face to face activities, extends them in useful ways.

This paper reports on ‘The Research Education WIKI’ which will be built in 2008. This WIKI will provide another kind of ‘space’ for research networking to happen that both extends and complements face to face activities on campus. By combining an online social platform with an interactive knowledge base, the Research Education wiki will allow us to start to explore the possibilities of an online research community for post graduate research candidates and their supervisors.