

## **ABSTRACT**

WESLEY, RAVINAND ISAAC. Expertiza as a Support System for Collaborative Learning.  
(Under the direction of Dr. Edward Gehringer)

The thesis of the Expertiza project is that peer review can be used as a vehicle to produce learning objects but it can be viewed in other ways as well. For students, it can be seen as a workflow associated with the peer review process, and for instructors, it can be seen as a decision support system providing all the info they need to evaluate student contributions and assign grades.

In this thesis, we examine the structure of Expertiza and propose new features for these modes of usage. These new features will make it an efficient support system enabling instructors and students to make the decisions at the right time. The modifications aim to decrease the amount of work by reducing the number of extra actions performed by each user, and to identify situations that require human intervention and present those to appropriate persons.

# Expertiza as a Support System for Collaborative Learning

by  
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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
North Carolina State University  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Science

Computer Science

Raleigh, North Carolina  
2008

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## **Dedication**

*To my family...*

## **Biography**

Ravinand Wesley was born on April 11, 1984 in Hyderabad, India. He obtained his bachelor's degree in Computer Science and Engineering at PRRM Engineering College, an affiliate of the Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University, in July, 2005. Since then, he has been a master's student, majoring in Computer Science, at North Carolina State University, Raleigh, USA.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank Dr. Edward Gehringer under whose guidance the thesis was possible. I am grateful to my family, friends at Providence and at WRRRI who have always been a great support to me. My time at NC State was smooth and pleasurable because I had the company of the people such as the above.

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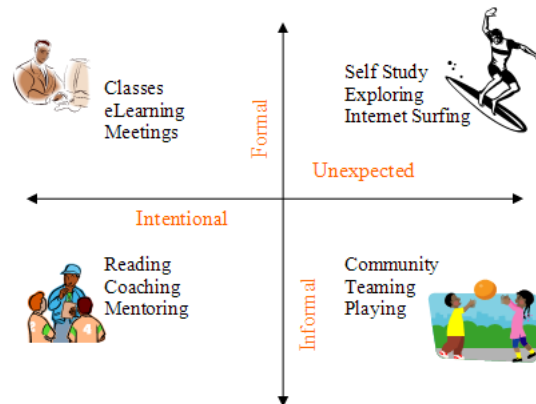


# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Nature of the problem

Students don't usually learn a lot by just studying on a certain topic. Unfortunately, the learning methods normally used aren't effective enough. Most organizations focus on formal learning methods such as classes, meetings and eLearning courses. However, 75% of the learning that takes place in organizations is through informal learning methods. Informal learning methods are ones that are not traditional or follow a structured pattern. This type of learning typically includes learning from the community, performing activities and teaming with others for common work. Marcia Conner in her paper talks about how unexpected learning through informal means is much more effective to formal intentional learning [1].



**Figure 1:** Formal v/s Informal learning

Students need to do some practical work on the subject to gain a better understanding of it. One of the most effective ways to learn is to have students work together in a group assessing and learning from their peers' work. To learn something effectively, students

should work actively in the area in a way such that the work helps them understand the area better. They need to integrate new material with what they already know or reorganize what they thought they knew based on the new material [14]. Active exchange of ideas within small groups increases interest and promotes critical learning. We propose to use collaborative learning software for better teaching and learning. Collaborative learning exercises among small groups have been very successful and have yielded good results [13].

## **1.2 Collaborative Learning**

Collaborative learning is a teaching method wherein students team up in small groups and work toward a common goal helping each other to be successful [2]. In some collaborative learning settings, students are required to create a clearly delineated product; in others the students are required to participate in a process and respond to each other's work [7]. Collaborative learning fosters student analysis skills, critical thinking and originality, and it also helps in idea generation [6]. A few ways in which collaborative learning can be helpful to students are listed below:

- Collaborative learning gives students constructive feedback on their work. Other students try to help their peers rather than competing with them.
- While reviewing a submission, the students learn much about a project.
- A group of users collectively possess more knowledge than an individual.

### **1.3 Role of Computer Science in this project**

The proposed system can be thought of as a content-management system where the goal is to present the right information to the right person. We need to devise workflow strategies to allow each user—submitter, reviewer, instructor, to handle his tasks efficiently. The information entering the system gets processed through various stages and metadata is modified at each stage of the processing. We need to make sure the metadata and also the actual data is managed properly.

A system such as this will require good use of software design principles to make sure all project requirements are met. The system will require extensive web development; thus we need to decide on an architecture that will enable us to extend and modify the system quickly and efficiently. Considerable o-o design knowledge is required to design and develop this system.

### **1.4 Thesis Organization**

In Chapter 2 we discuss related work and also talk about how our system is different from the already existing systems. Chapter 3 talks about the architecture of the system and the various components involved. Chapter 4 describes the new features being added in detail and it also gives the implementation details of these features.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Related work**

The success and advantages of collaborative learning systems have generated significant interest in corporate training environments as well as academia. Much work has been done so far to enable collaborative learning. We look at few such works to detect any possible enhancements to our system. As we proceed, we also explain why we haven't used an existing system for our purpose.

#### **2.1 Current work on collaborative learning**

The work done in the field of collaborative learning can be divided into the following fields:

##### **Groupware**

Groupware is software that allows users who are located remotely to work collectively. The services offered by groupware include sharing of calendars, collective writing, email handling, shared database access, electronic meetings, group contact and task management, threaded discussions, text chat, data conferencing and audio and videoconferencing and other such activities. A fundamental component of groupware is e-mail, because e-mail is used to notify team members, obtain responses and send alerts. E-

mail messages include live links to databases, intranets and the Internet. Instant messaging (IM) is also widely used [3]. Examples of groupware include LotusNotes by IBM, Microsoft Sharepoint, etc.

E-mail is a fundamental component of groupware, because it is used to notify team members, obtain responses and send alerts. E-mail messages include live links to databases, intranets and the Internet. Instant messaging (IM) is also widely used [4]. We have adopted this feature of groupware in our system.

### **Learning management systems**

Learning management software is typically used for planning, implementing and assessing a learning process. It allows an instructor to manage users, roles, courses, instructors, and facilities and generate reports. A learning management system provides services such as course calendar, learner messaging and notifications, assessment/testing capable of handling student pre/post testing, display of scores and transcripts, grading of coursework and roster processing, including waitlisting, web-based or blended course delivery [5].

Notifications are an attractive feature of these systems. We will be implementing this feature in our system

### **Discussion forums**

One of the earliest forms of online communication in courses was threaded discussion forums. Discussion forums are web applications which allow users to hold discussions. They can also be used as common “meeting spaces,” where students are free to introduce themselves and discuss material not related to the course. One can start a new discussion on a forum and others can get involved in the discussion [12].

Users can usually register themselves for a forum. While some discussion forums allow only registered members to post and access information, others have the option for users to post information anonymously. Discussion forums give users a very easy way to share information quickly. However, discussion forums have their limitations. They do not make it easy to organize material; do not offer support for teams; and usually don’t support enforcement of deadlines. Thus we need a better system than this to serve our needs.

### **Peer review**

The basic idea of peer review is to have students review each other’s work and make suggestions on how to improve it. Peer review increases the student's involvement in the subject and helps the student get a holistic idea of a topic. Discussion forums can be used for peer review, but only awkwardly. Usually, students can see all other students’ comments, so they have a lot to read or to sort through. Moreover, there is no anonymity, so students may be reluctant to say what they really mean.

Besides being a great method to educate, a dedicated peer-review system can also reduce the amount of time spent on grading assignments by the instructors and the teaching staff, as students take on some of the work of assessment. The instructor can spend this saved time on teaching and other activities.

According to William Wolfe of California State University-Channel Islands, through peer review: Students learn from their peers, receive more feedback than just one instructor and feel more comfortable in the role of a critical reviewer[5].

However, peer review has its own pitfalls. It is very hard to get the students to do a good job at reviewing. Many problems arise during the peer review phase due to cronyism, inclination toward a particular idea, lack of knowledge on the topic etc.

## **2.2 Our solution to the collaborative learning experience**

Expertiza is a peer review based system which uses active learning exercises to produce reusable learning resources. Students choose an exercise or a problem from a list. Once they finish work on the problem, they submit it for review using an electronic peer review system. The submitted work will be reviewed by other students who will offer feedback on the work.

We found peer review and learning management systems to be very successful in getting students involved in the subject through group activities. We need to add tools which make use of both learning management systems and peer-review systems and also avoid the drawbacks of. Few tools have the following facilities:

### **Author-feedback**

Many times, the author might not be able to express a valid point effectively. This might cause the reviewer to misunderstand the content and in turn give a lower score to the submission. Since the review process is double blinded, the author of the submission has no way to get back to the reviewer and explain his/her point of view.

Good author-feedback functionality will allow the author to communicate with the reviewer and explain anything that is unclear. The reviewer, on the other hand, can now get back to the author with specific suggestions to improve the submission.

### **Deadline enforcement mechanisms**

It is essential to have deadlines to organize the review and resubmission process. In order for the review process to move forward on schedule, some mechanism is needed to set and enforce deadlines. If this is not built into the tool, enforcement will be sporadic, and students will not do their work on time. They may forget to do it at all. . It reduces confusion; both the reviewer and the author can check for a submission update or feedback when the deadline is near.



### **Wiki assessments**

Wikis are very helpful for team work. They have superior editing capabilities and it is very easy for multiple users to make changes to a single object in an organized manner [12]. By integrating wiki support into a peer-review system, we can expand the possibilities for collaboration among students.

### **Team support**

A considerable number of course projects are team projects. Thus to integrate the peer review system into a normal curriculum, we need to incorporate team support into it. The system should behave similarly irrespective of the assignment being a team assignment or an individual assignment. One interesting possibility is for teams to submit, but individuals to review. Then each team profits from more separate reviews than an individual performs. For example, if each student reviews two submissions, and three-member teams submit, each team will receive approximately six reviews.

### **Contests**

One more way to generate more interest in the students is by making the review process competitive. We can give some incentive to the students for being better reviewers. The reward can be in the form of extra points or some other kind. This will benefit both the course and the student. Because of these contests, the system will be producing better

resources. Also, the students will learn more because they will be reviewing the work more carefully.

## **Chapter 3**

### **System Architecture**

This chapter discusses the architecture of the Expertiza system. The chapter describes the design of the system and the different components involved.

#### **3.1 Technology used**

We used Ruby on Rails as the programming platform to develop this system. We selected Ruby on Rails because we wanted a standard web framework so that we can use the system on any type of server. Also, concise coding and dynamic language provided by Ruby on Rails makes it faster to program. Ruby on Rails is strongly based on the model/view/controller (MVC) architecture. The model defines all the domain objects and the relationships between them. The view contains everything relevant to the user interface. It provides a way to interact with the model. The controller binds the model and the view together. It receives and processes requests and makes changes to the model if necessary. Ruby on Rails also provides database persistence through active record. The Active Record approach is used to access data in a database. Active Record connects business objects and database tables to create a persistable domain model where logic and data is presented in one wrapping. Using active record provides us benefits such as the database transactions are faster, we can do away with SQL queries and XML metadata [10].

### **3.2 Content Management in Expertiza**

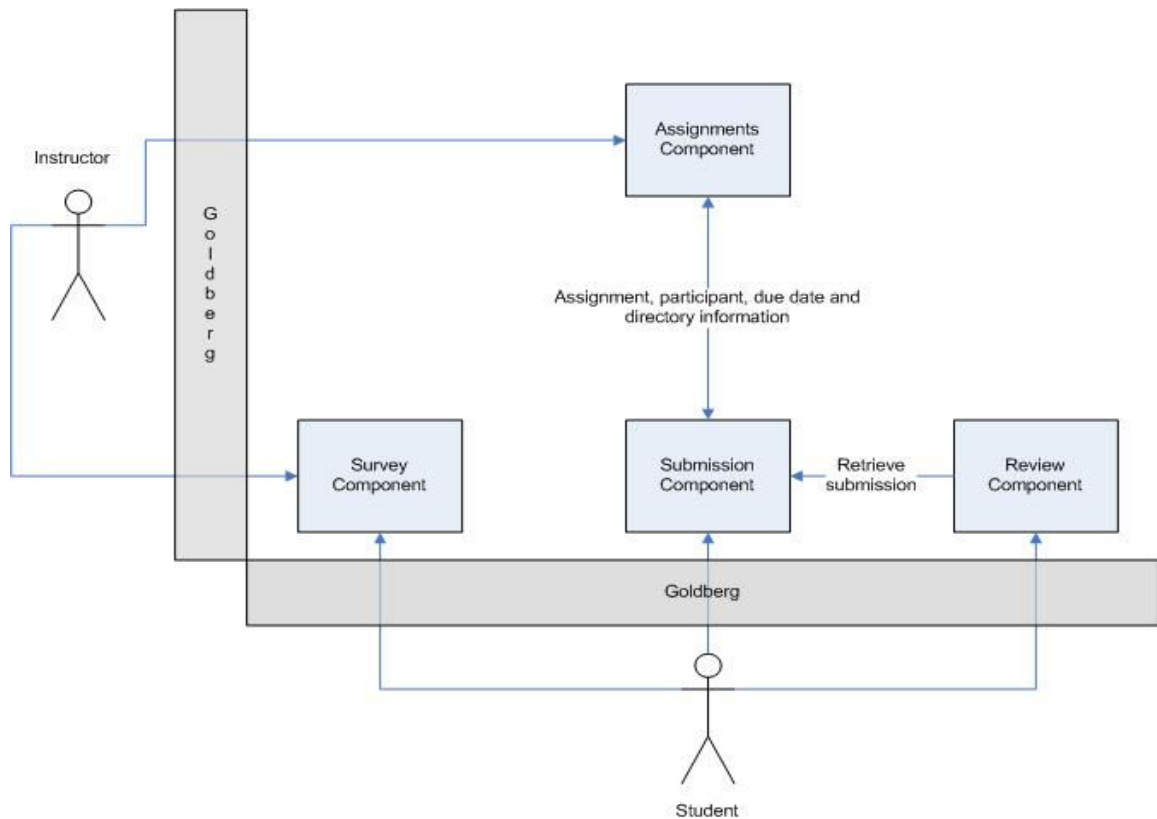
Expertiza can be thought of as a content management system which is used to manage educational material. The system will have to take care of collecting the material of information from different sources, storing the material, refining and improving the material, archiving the material in such a way that it can be retrieved easily at a later stage.

Collection of information is an important step in content management. We have to make sure that we are able to collect information from all possible sources and in all different forms. The different sources that we can think of in our domain are wikis, external web pages and the users themselves. We have to make sure that information from all these sources is collected and is handled similarly. One of the main goals of Expertiza is to generate reusable learning resources. To generate reusable resources, we need to process the information so that it will be useful at a later stage. The review → resubmission → re-review cycle refines and the material and improves the content. The final step will be archiving all the good submissions in the Conoscenza database.

### **2.3 Components of Expertiza**

Expertiza is mainly composed of the assignment component, the review component and the submission component. Besides these main components, the system also has

components to handle surveys and maintain the course hierarchy. The user interface and authentication is managed by an external plugin called Goldberg. We discuss more about the Goldberg plugin later in this chapter.



**Figure 2:** Expertiza components and interaction between them

### **Goldberg Component**

Goldberg is a Ruby on Rails generator that provides solutions for security, site navigation and content management. Generators are machines that produce ruby code. They usually implement just one thing but very efficiently. The Goldberg component provides

authentication and help with menus. We can associate controllers to menu items and associate appropriate actions to those.

### **Assignments Component**

The assignment component deals with management of due dates for assignment and review submission, deadline rights (which define what operations can be performed by a user between two specific deadlines).

The different operations that the assignment component handles are assignment creation and editing, adding participants to a particular assignment, and management of assignments. Management of assignments includes managing due dates for submitting work and reviews on work; late policies, deadline rights, viewing reports, etc.

A late policy basically defines the action to be taken in case of late submission of work or review of work. The policy defines how many points are to be deducted at each stage, the maximum points that can be deducted for a certain assignment etc.

Deadline rights specify if the action to which it is applied can be performed after its deadline has been passed. It can also specify if penalty can be imposed if the action is performed after the deadline has passed.

An instructor can add courses to the system. However, the creation of courses is optional but is useful if you want to have common settings for all assignments of a particular course. The instructor can also add all the students of the course to the system and associate them to a course created on the system. Using this feature, the instructor can avoid adding participants each time a new assignment is created. The courses can be associated with different institutions. This way, two instructors can have courses with same names on the system. This component is helpful to organize assignments and submissions into courses and institutions thus simplifying the work of the instructor.

This component basically provides the instructor features that help him manage an assignment. Other components interact with this component for assignment specific information such as deadlines, directories where the submissions to the assignment are saved.

### **Review Component**

The review component provides the users functionality to review other's work as well as reviews. It enables the instructor to create review mappings which are explained below. It is responsible for the entire review process. The review process includes review of the author's work, viewing reviews of reviews to other's work, viewing feedback on ones own review, editing a review on the reviewers side and viewing a review, giving feedback to a review of one's work, reviewing a review by another user on some other user's work.

### **Submissions component**

The submission component handles the operations concerning the submission of work and other documents to the system. It also connects to other systems such as wikis and forums and presents those to the users of the system. Currently, the system supports three kinds of submissions using files, wikis and URLs. Submitting files is one of the most popular ways to submit to a peer review system. Expertiza allows users to submit their work as files. The user can also create directories and organize files into different directories. Wikis are a fast catching up as an effective way for groups to work together. We have implemented a functionality that will spider a wiki and fetch all entries in the wiki where the user being reviewed has made a contribution. Another way to submit work is via URLs. Users can provide links to their work that has been saved at some other location. This can also be used to provide references and additional materials which will help the reviewer understand the author's work better. However, the user has to compromise on anonymity by using this feature as one can guess the authors identity through the URL.

I was involved in the development of the assignment component and the review component and had a minor role in the submissions component.



## **Chapter 4**

### **New Support Features in Expertiza**

This chapter discusses in detail the new features that have been added or will be added to the system to make it better support collaborative learning. We discuss why a feature is required, and how it will help the system achieve its goal—to support instructors and students perform their roles efficiently so that they produce better material out of their study. It helps the instructor monitor the performance and work of students in his course

As we have discussed earlier, we want the system to produce the best possible products. Users can do so more efficiently if we minimize and simplify the work done by a user and provide a channel of communication between the users. Thus users can put forth their ideas in the best way possible and also be able to clarify their position when required. The new features can be categorized into three categories which are: better communication, ease of use, detection and notification of outliers and inconsistencies.

#### **Better communication**

Using the new communication features, a student can be informed that a review of his or her work has been done as soon as someone reviews his or her submission. An instructor can communicate with a reviewer of a submission and give him or her more instructions on reviewing and can also provide the user/s with more pointers to the given topic. Students

might also want to communicate with each other and try to explain why they made certain decisions thus creating much better submissions.

### **Ease of use**

In the Expertiza system as it exists today, users are responsible for keeping track of work and deadlines. When they log in, they see a list of current assignments, and the next pending deadline for each. But they are not automatically notified when a deadline is approaching. This leads to many students missing deadlines, particularly in later phases of review. Similarly, students (and instructors) need to be told when they have work to do. This could be either a posting of a review of their work, or a resubmission of work that they have reviewed. The Java servlet version of the peer-review software supported this, and it has very recently been added to the Ruby on Rails version.

To streamline the review process through automatic notification, each e-mail informing the user of a pending task would contain a link to the system that, after login, would take the user directly to a page where the task could be performed. The user would no longer have to navigate through the system to get to the right page. Because it would now be easier for users to perform their assigned tasks, we would expect them to do so more quickly and more reliably.

### **Automatic detection of inconsistencies**

Given our experience with the system, we know that certain situations arise again and again, and require manual intervention. One of these is inconsistencies in review scores between reviewers. An *outlier* is basically a score that is inconsistent with other scores assigned to the same submission. While inconsistent reviews can sometimes be justifiable, usually it is the case that the reviewer submitting the outlier has not carefully read the submission. As it now stands, inconsistent scores are entered, and remain in the system until either the student brings them to the attention of the instructor, or a TA notices them when entering grades. Either of these methods of detection is distinctly suboptimal because of the time lag: reviewer and author do not find out about the inaccuracy until it is too late for the reviewer to do anything about it.

Thus, it is a good idea to bring such inconsistencies to the attention of the instructor as soon as they are entered into the database. The instructor can then inform one (or more) of the reviewers to reconsider their review. We will also convert the instructor's View Report page into a monitoring tool where inconsistent reviews can be highlighted in different colors, depending on their deviation from the norm of reviews for this submission.

### **Common terminology**

We use the following terms often in this section. Here we give a brief description of each term.

`review_mapping`: A review mapping is an assignment of a specific user to review a specific submission.

`author_id`: This is the user ID of the author of the concerned submission.

`reviewer_id`: This is the user ID of the reviewer of the submission being reviewed

`assignment_id`: The id of the assignment to which the submissions that are being reviewed belong.

`wiki_helper`: A Ruby helper function that performs all the wiki-related actions.

#### **4.1 Communication between users**

Authors and reviewers often misunderstand each other. If a reviewer misunderstands an author, the author may see the reviewer's feedback as useless, impertinent, or hostile. However, if the author can ask the reviewer what is meant, and the reviewer respond to that query, then a conversation can develop that will clarify the issues for both author and reviewer. Similarly, a reviewer may misunderstand the topic of the assignment, and downgrade a submission for reasons that are impertinent or irrelevant. If given the opportunity for feedback, reviewer and author can arrive at a mutual understanding. Thus, our goal is to permit frequent interactions between author and reviewer.

While reviewing, the review form provides space for comments underneath each review rubric question. The screenshot below shows a page for a new review. The comments are recorded along with the rubric scores in the database. When the author views the review

scores, these comments are displayed as well. After the last rubric question, a textbox is provided for the reviewer to add additional comments.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL [http://expertiza.ncsu.edu/review/new\\_review/3274](http://expertiza.ncsu.edu/review/new_review/3274). The page has a red header with the 'Expertiza' logo and the tagline 'Reusable learning objects through peer review'. A navigation bar includes links for 'Home', 'Assignments', 'Profile', and 'Contact Us'. The main content area is titled 'New Review' and shows the user 'afonsec'. It contains a 'MediaWiki Review Links' section with three links, a series of rubric questions with dropdown score boxes, an 'Additional comments' text area, and 'Create Review' and 'Back' buttons.

**Expertiza**  
Reusable learning objects through peer review

Home Assignments Profile Contact Us

Assignments User: afonsec Logout

### New Review

**MediaWiki Review Links:**

- 22:58, 30 July 2007 (hist) (diff) m CSC 379:Week 4, Group 4
- 22:54, 30 July 2007 (hist) (diff) CSC 379:Week 4, Group 4
- 22:44, 30 July 2007 (hist) (diff) CSC 379:Week 4, Group 4

Do the study guide and the Table of Contents page clearly identify the ethical issues? 0

Do study guide and the Table of Contents treat differing viewpoints fairly? 0

Is the organization of the Table of Contents and the study guide logical? 0

Does the study guide identify several issues that are important in learning about the topic? 0

Do the pages stick to the topic, as described on the topics page? 0

Do they follow the style guidelines? 0

Do they "look" like existing pages on the Web site? 0

Do they have links to the old version of pages, and to the topic description on the topics page? 0

If they are an update, are new articles marked with a "New" icon? 0

Are there an appropriate number of links on the Table of Contents page? If this is an update, are there an appropriate number of new links? 0

Additional comments:

Create Review

Back

Expertiza

**Figure 3:** A screen for new review

The author can give feedback to the reviewer. In the current system, the feedback consists of a single text message. However, in the near future, author feedback will be based on a rubric similar to the rubric used for the review. The instructor will define the rubric for

author feedback, as well as the rubric for review. The reviewer will be able to see the author's feedback on the *Edit Review* page.. The figure below shows the *view scores* screen through which the author of a submission can give feedback to the reviewer.

## Implementation

This feature can be accessed by a link below each review. Once the link is clicked,using Javascript a box is displayed where the link was. This is done using Javascript. These are shown in the figure below.

and important in learning about the topic:  
 Do the pages stick to the topic, as described on the topics page? 5  
 Do they follow the style guidelines? 4 No, capitalization does not follow convention. Only the 1st word & proper nouns are supposed to be capitalized.  
 Total 40 Score: 80%

Additional comment :  
 Give feedback to the reviewer

Review 2:

Question	Score	Comment
Do they "look" like existing pages on the Web site?	5	
Do they have links to the old version of pages, and to the topic description on the topics page?	5	link to topic description, no old version to link to
If they are an update, are new articles marked with a "New" icon?	5	not an update
Are there an appropriate number of links on the Table of Contents page? If this is an update, are there an appropriate number of new links?	5	yes, N/A
Do the study guide and the Table of Contents page clearly identify the ethical issues?	5	
Do study guide and the Table of Contents treat differing viewpoints fairly?	5	Topic: Social Engineering, description of an unscrupulous act, 1 viewpoint

Does the study guide identify several issues that are important in learning about the topic? 5 It does. It gives an overview, countermeasures and ethical issues  
 Do the pages stick to the topic, as described on the topics page? 5 Yes, the pages are very focused  
 Do they follow the style guidelines? 5 yes  
 Total 48 Score: 96%

Additional comment :  
 Give feedback to reviewer:  
 Send feedback

**Figure 4: Screens for feedback**

If a feedback for a particular review already exists, that feedback text is shown in the box that appears when one clicks the link. The text can be edited and re-sent.

The feedback will be sent using AJAX. This way the whole page need not refresh each time some feedback has been sent. Using AJAX, extra data can be requested from the server and loaded in the background without interfering with the display and behavior of the existing page

The feedback is saved in the database table `review_feedback`. The review feedback table also stores references to the review, the user who gave the feedback, the assignment and the time when the feedback was given.

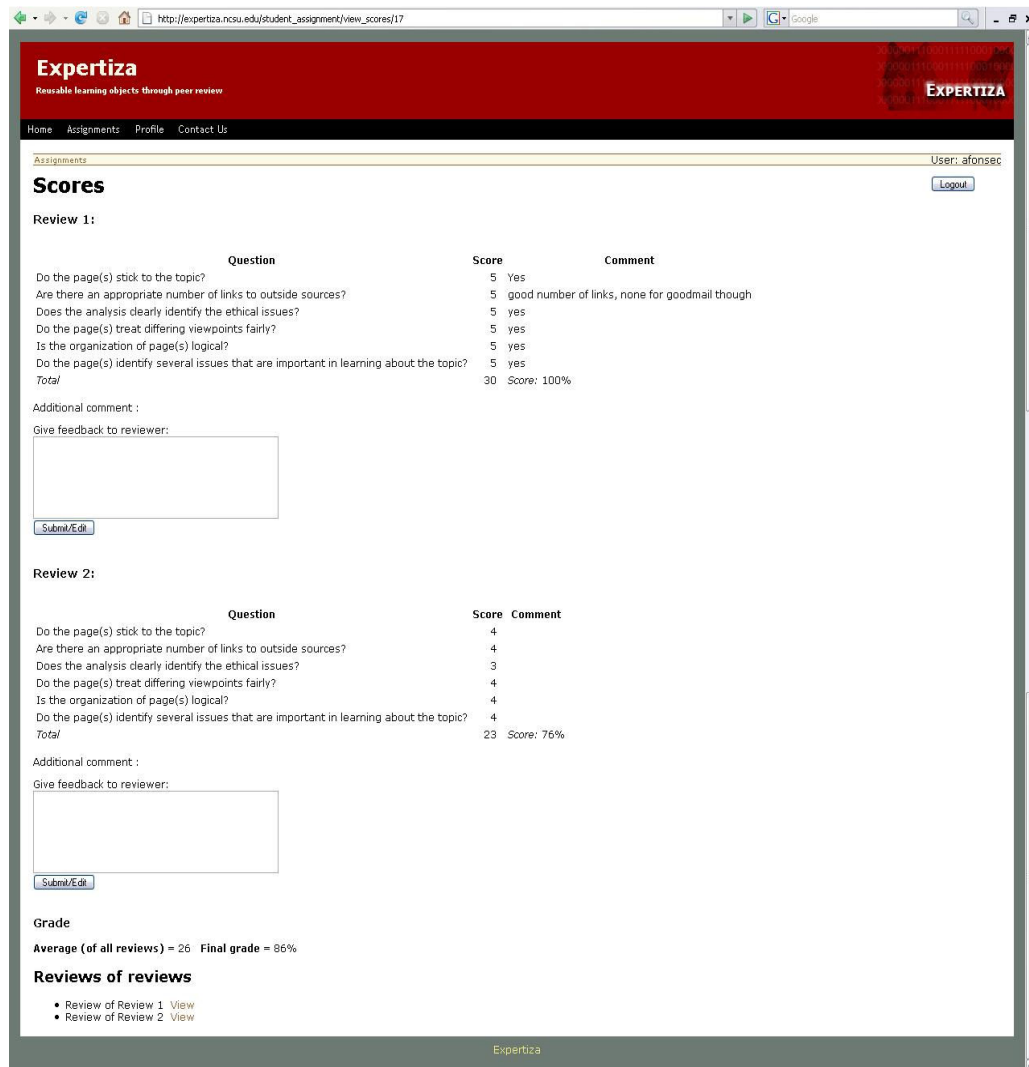
The display for this feature is handled by the views used for review. The requests are processed by the *review\_feedback\_controller*. The `review_feedback` model communicates with the database using rails active record.

**Table 1:** Classes, views and databases involved in feedback

Classes involved	controllers/review_feedback_controller.rb, models/review_feedback.rb
Views involved	views/student_assignment/view_score.rhtml, views/review/edit.rhtml

**Table 1 Continued.**

Database tables involved	review_feedbacks ( used to store the feedback), reviews (used to get the review information), review_mappings (used to get the author and reviewer information)
--------------------------	---



**Figure 5:** Screen to view scores



## **4.2 Ease of use**

### **4.2.1 Accessing the system via links in email**

We will be implementing a feature by which users can access a review or submit their work directly via an email link in an email. The link will contain a unique id that points to a particular review of a particular author (or team) by a particular reviewer. This unique id is almost impossible to guess for the following reasons: i) If not specified by the instructor or the teaching staff, the review mapping is generated automatically and is not based on any of `author_id`, `review_id` or `assignment_id` which can be guessed; (ii) the reviews are double blind. Thus no student should know the reviewer/author correspondence. This allows the reviewer to skip the login step when accessing the system using this link. The user's password can even be encrypted into the link. Since the links will be emailed only to the users who will be accessing the relevant pages and since the links cannot be guessed by other users, it is safe to skip the login step. However, if the user feels more comfortable logging in before performing an activity, (s)he can indicate that in the profile settings and the system will then refrain from sending e-mail allowing access without that user's login.

### **Implementation**

To embed a link inside an email, we need information about which page we want to display, which user is the link being sent to, the id of the entity that is being sent. The entity is the type of page being sent, for example, a review page or a submission page.

The emails are triggered automatically and are sent using Expertiza's *mailer* interface

**Table 2:** Classes, views and databases involved in e-mail review

Classes involved	controllers/assignment_controller.rb, models/assignment.rb
Views involved	views/student_assignment/submit.rhtml, views/review/new.rhtml, views/review/edit.rhtml
Database tables involved	assignments (used to get assignment information), participants (used to get information on the participants in an assignment), users (used to get user information), and reviews (used to store the review information), review_mappings (used to get the author and reviewer information)

#### 4.2.2 Wiki assessments

Wikis are great for team work. They have superior editing capabilities and a wiki is very easy for multiple users to make changes to a single object in an organized manner [14]. We have included support for wikis in our system. Users will be able to submit their work to a wiki and get reviews through Expertiza.

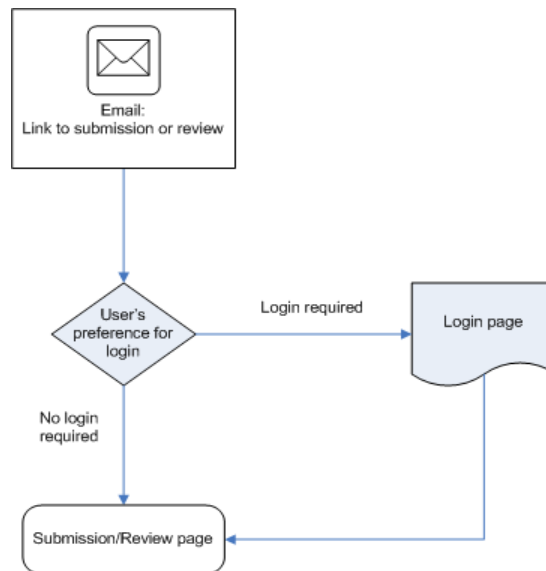
The reviewers see the work done by the team or author they are reviewing in Expertiza and can perform operations similar to any other submission.

## **Implementation**

The functionality to integrate wikis with Expertiza is done with the help of wiki\_helper. Wiki\_helper spiders through a wiki and extracts all entries made by a specified author. These entries are displayed as links in the review page instead of files.

The assignments table has a field which indicates what type an assignment is of. This field can be set through the new or edit screens of assignment. Based on the type of assignment, the system performs tasks related to those types.

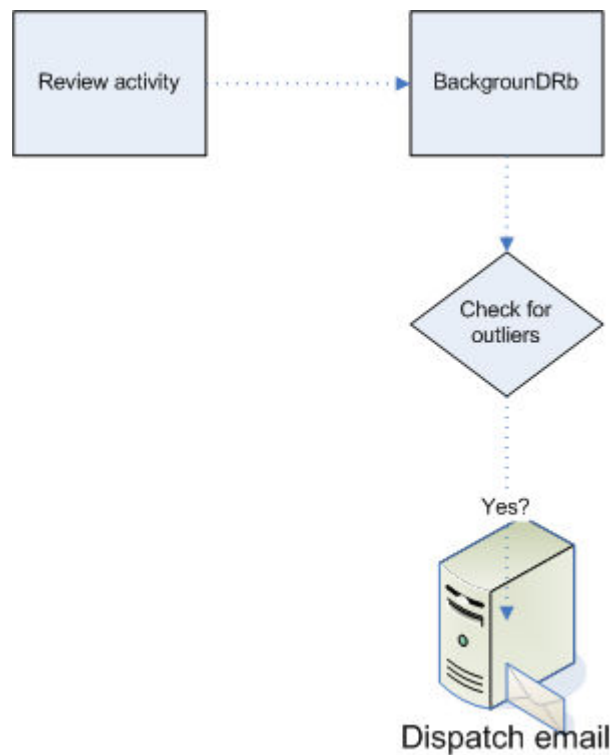
Apart from displaying the links to the wiki, all other functions concerned with reviews are handled by the same controller that handles reviews in other types of assignments.



**Figure 6:** Reviewing and submission via email

### 4.3 Notification

Authors and reviewers can be emailed about activity whenever a submission is made or updated, when a submission is reviewed, or when the author gives feedback to a reviewer. The email will contain a link to the appropriate page: the review page if the email is sent to the reviewer and the View feedback page if the email is sent to the author of the submission.

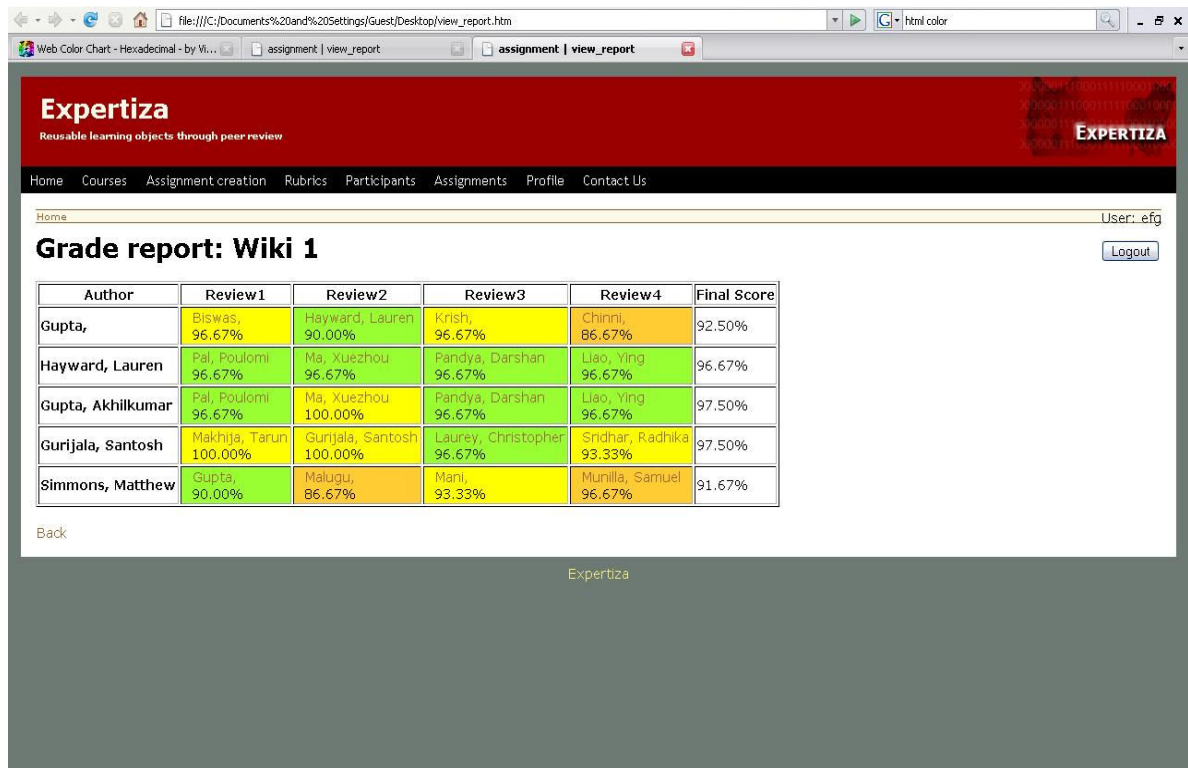


**Figure 6:** Handling outliers

The instructor or TA should be notified of outliers—reviews that appear inconsistent with other reviews.. We need to decide on what triggers the dispatch of these emails. The strategy we propose is to run the algorithm to identify an outlier each time there is any review activity. This process will be done in the background so that the user does not notice

any delay. We intend to use BackgroundDrb to perform this operation. BackgroundDRb is a Ruby job server and scheduler which is typically used for offloading long-running tasks on Ruby on Rails applications [13]. It runs background tasks in a separate process, thus decoupling the background tasks from the request-response cycles. The tasks can either be run periodically or they can be triggered by an event [13].

The next feature we discuss is the tool to monitor reviews. This is basically a modification to the instructor's View report screen. We assign different shades of red, green and yellow to different deviations from the average score. If the color of a cell is closer to green it means that the review represented by that cell is more consistent with the average and it is more likely to be correct. If the color of a cell is closer to red, it means that the review represented by that cell is inconsistent with the remaining reviews. Using this screen, the instructor can easily identify reviews which might be inconsistent and then have a closer look at just those reviews. This feature highlights the reviews that have a higher probability of being outliers.



**Figure 7:** Screen to monitor reviews

## Implementation

The detection is done by an algorithm which runs as a separate thread each time one submits a review. The algorithm is discussed later in this section.

Once the outliers are detected, the emails are sent using the mailer interface. The email to the instructor will have a link to a new screen specially meant for the instructor. This screen will display the reviewer's information, the author's information, the submission and the review. This new screen will be controlled by the *assignment\_controller*. The

*assignment\_controller* is the appropriate place for this because the screen is concerned with that particular assignment.

The other feature we discussed was the report monitoring tool. This tool is integrated into the *view\_report* screen. To implement this, we need to modify the *view\_report* screen to color its cells depending on how consistent each review's score is with the average. The screen already has the functionality to let the instructor edit any review that has been made for an assignment.

**Table 3:** Classes, views and databases involved in notifications

Classes involved	controllers/assignment_controller.rb, models/assignment.rb
Views involved	views/student_assignment/submit.rhtml, views/review/new.rhtml, views/review/edit.rhtml
Database tables involved	assignments (used to get assignment information), participants(used to get information on the participants in an assignment)

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

Electronic peer review systems are often seen as an intrusion by students because they think it takes a lot of their time. Our goal in this work is to change intrusions into work flow and inform the students when there is work to do and take them directly to the appropriate webpage without having to navigate through the website. As it becomes easier for users to do their tasks, they tend to do them more faithfully and better. These new features will go a long way toward making Expertiza an effective support system for collaborative learning.



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