

# Lessons from LAMS: The highs and lows of going open source

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Presentation for OSS Watch “Open Source and Sustainability” Conference,  
April 11<sup>th</sup>, Oxford University, UK

# Overview

- What is LAMS?
- Brief history
  - News announcement for today
- Highs and lows of going open source – interactions with:
  - Commercial vendors
  - Government
  - Business models & sustainability
  - Open source community
  - Licensing and legals
  - Funding
  - User feedback
  - Personal experiences
- Reflections on the future of LAMS

# What is LAMS?

- LAMS (Learning Activity Management System) is a new generation of e-learning software
- Based on the evolving field of “Learning Design”
- LAMS helps teachers/lecturers to create and run “digital lesson plans”
  - Sequences of content and collaborative activities
- LAMS sequences can be shared and improved
  - LAMS Community and “open source teaching”
- Example of innovative OSS (no equiv closed source system)
- Originally developed as commercial software, shifted to an open source business model



New



Open



Save



Copy



Paste



Transition



Optional

## Activity toolkit

Q &amp; A

Q &amp; A



Grouping



Chat



Polling + Notebook



Submission



Q &amp; A



Read noticeboard



Chat &amp; Scribe



Resources &amp; Forum



Polling



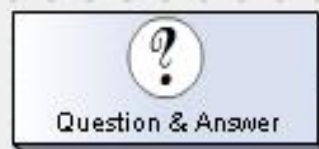
Share resources



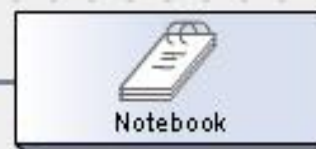
Forum



Notebook



Question &amp; Answer



Notebook



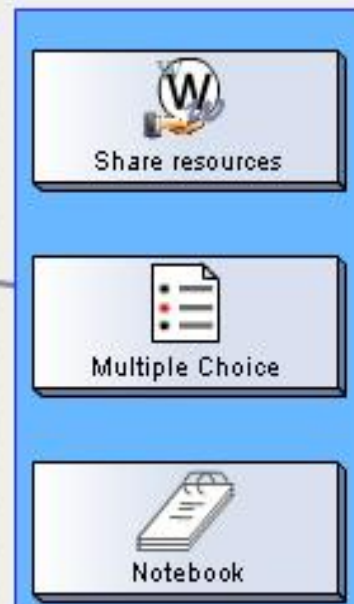
Break into small groups



Small group debate



Group feedback to class



Share resources

Multiple Choice

Notebook

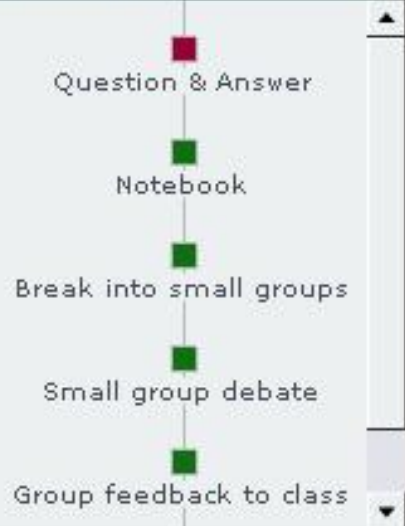




- Resume
- Exit

Available sequences

Progress



Notebook

Title

Question and Answer

# Question and answer

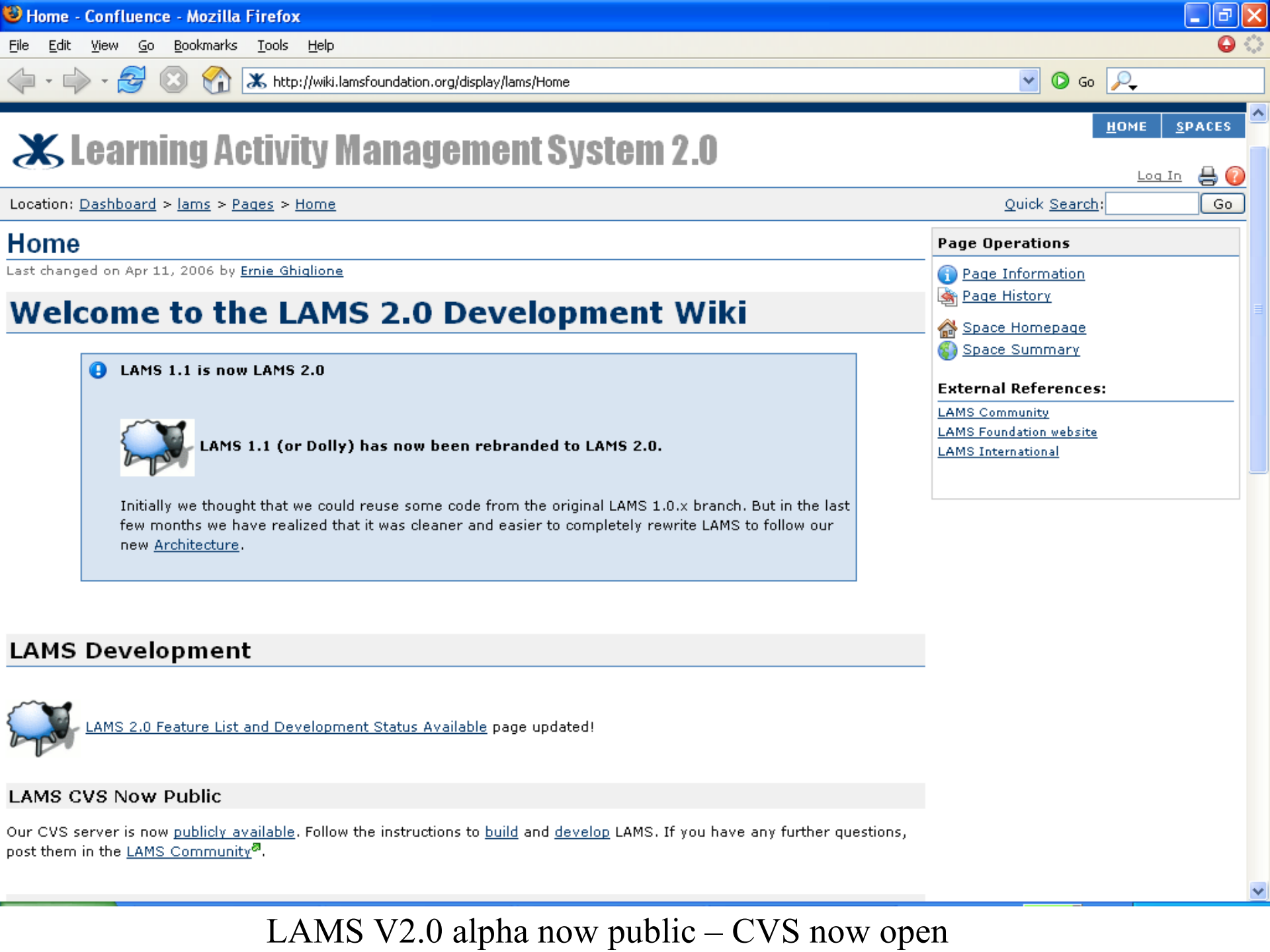
What is greatness (in a human being)?

# Brief History

- 2001-02: LAMS began as a collaboration between WebMCQ Pty Ltd (where I was a Director & shareholder) and Macquarie University (Dr Donna Gibbs) to develop a new kind of e-learning system
  - Core dev team of four at WebMCQ created working prototype by Feb 2003
- Mar 2003: I began half-time at Macquarie (mainly on COLIS) and continued working via WebMCQ with Macquarie on LAMS (other half)
- May 2003: First trial of LAMS (Kemnal – UK school; DfES support)
- Second half of 2003 & early 2004: WebMCQ and Macquarie negotiated a deal to move the LAMS team (including the remaining half of me) to Macquarie, and to create the LAMS Foundation and LAMS International
  - Driven by my desire for LAMS to go open source
- Early 2004: Funding expected, and hoped for, failed to materialise, and I experienced some harsh realities of attitudes to open source
  - Flirted with not going open source, or a partial open source approach

# Brief History

- July 2004: Announced plans to go open source; Beta partner program
- October 2004: Began development of next generation LAMS (V1.1/2.0)
- December 2004: Finished beta program, finalised V1.0 product
- February 2005: Released LAMS V1.0 source under GPL (code snapshot)
- April 2005: Formal launch of open source LAMS, resources, CD, etc
- Rest of 2005: Ongoing V1.0 improvements, integrations with LMSs, V1.0.X code snapshots, and core development for next generation LAMS
- Sept 2005: Launch of LAMS Community
- December 2005: Opening of next generation LAMS development wiki
- Today: Release of next generation LAMS (now called LAMS V2.0) \*alpha\* version, code available via ongoing public CVS
  - <http://wiki.lamsfoundation.org/display/lams/Building+LAMS>
- Second half 2006: Beta then production release of LAMS V2.0
- 2007: LAMS V2.1+ Plans for more branching/conditionality, more activity tools, deeper integration with LMSs, research activities, etc



# Learning Activity Management System 2.0

## Home

Last changed on Apr 11, 2006 by [Ernie Ghiqlione](#)

# Welcome to the LAMS 2.0 Development Wiki

### LAMS 1.1 is now LAMS 2.0



#### LAMS 1.1 (or Dolly) has now been rebranded to LAMS 2.0.

Initially we thought that we could reuse some code from the original LAMS 1.0.x branch. But in the last few months we have realized that it was cleaner and easier to completely rewrite LAMS to follow our new [Architecture](#).

### Page Operations

- [Page Information](#)
- [Page History](#)
- [Space Homepage](#)
- [Space Summary](#)

### External References:

- [LAMS Community](#)
- [LAMS Foundation website](#)
- [LAMS International](#)

## LAMS Development



[LAMS 2.0 Feature List and Development Status Available](#) page updated!

## LAMS CVS Now Public

Our CVS server is now [publicly available](#). Follow the instructions to [build](#) and [develop](#) LAMS. If you have any further questions, post them in the [LAMS Community](#).



# News: LAMS V2 alpha released today!

- After 18 months of internal development, we are pleased to now publicly release LAMS V2.0
- LAMS V2.0 is currently an alpha release
  - Most core infrastructure complete, 5 tools, can compile and run
  - However, not yet for teachers – this release is just for developers
  - Beta release planned for July, Production V2 for October
  - Ready for translations (15 underway already!)
- LAMS V2.0 is the new name for what used to be called V1.1
  - V1.1 started as a partial rebuild, but has become a complete rewrite, hence it's now time to formally acknowledge this in the release number
- LAMS V2.0 is available for download via a public CVS repository (open for good), development is documented on the LAMS V2 wiki, and developer discussion can be found in the LAMS Community
  - No more code snapshots (as for LAMS V1.0.X)

# Highs & Lows: Commercial vendors

- Highs
  - Good support from some big open source friendly vendors
  - Good support from some LMS vendors
    - Matthew Pittinsky's support for LAMS/Blackboard
- Lows
  - More rhetoric than action with some vendors
  - Public (and private) attacks on our licensing (GPL)
  - Some high level government lobbying against LAMS
    - Unsure why us – perhaps because not just R&D?

# Highs & Lows: Government

- Highs
  - Support for Learning Design concept
  - Support for LAMS trials and LAMS evaluations
  - Some investment in OSS development to meet local needs, but with wider relevance (eg NZ MoE: Moodle integration, Internationalisation)
- Lows
  - Failure to receive expected, and hope for, funding
    - Misreading of funding intentions, or promises not delivered?
  - “We can’t be seen to support one particular product”
  - \*\*Watching considerable funding for other dubious projects
  - Being treated with double skepticism by some in government
    - Not only was LAMS yet another vendor product to be viewed with skepticism and/or contempt; but it was saying weird, unintelligible things about being free, which just meant more skepticism

# Business models & sustainability

- Highs
  - \*\*Amazing support from Macquarie University (several times)
    - Special thanks to Prof Di Yerbury (past VC)
  - Willingness of some institutions to pay for services/support/features
  - Funding and endorsement from LAMS Beta partners
  - Learning about a new approach to building software
- Lows
  - Being expected to have fully formed answers to sustainability question from early on
  - Being regarded with distrust by some in open source because I talked about business models
  - Failing to more quickly understand how normal software business models don't apply to open source
  - Managing all the challenges of building a successful services business

# Highs and Lows: Open source community

- Highs
  - \*\*Unexpected, heart-felt support from unlikely places
  - Recent translation contributions
  - Sense of shared values
- Lows
  - Some uncertainty about whether we were really open source
  - Insufficient concern for the realities of end users (especially teachers)
  - [Open Standards Community: Struggles over dealing with IMS LD]

# Highs and Lows: Licensing and legals

- Highs
  - ...?  
(other than it makes everything possible?)
- Lows
  - Huge amount of time required on details
  - Being criticised for choosing the GPL as it was not “vendor friendly”
    - Publicly stated availability of dual licensing for those who didn’t like the GPL, but that doesn’t mean something for nothing...
  - Being publicly attacked for supposedly breaching the GPL
  - Being unable to bundle some key infrastructure software to make installation simple

# Highs and Lows: Funding

- Highs
  - Outstanding support from Macquarie University
  - Success of services business model
  - Potential for future funding in new areas (eg, E-Research workflows)
- Lows
  - \*\*Huge amount of time chasing funding opportunities
  - Personal cost of supporting LAMS (\$, time, family life)
  - Watching some other projects make big promises to get funding
  - Watching funding go into just evaluation, when it also needed to go into ongoing development
    - Evaluation is good in some ways, but much of the feedback is a function of the current stage in development

# Highs and Lows: User Feedback

- Highs
  - Teachers who “got it” always had lots of great ideas to share
  - Teachers who persevered despite bugs/crashes/etc
  - \*\*Seeing the lives of students transformed by LAMS
  - Encouragement to persevere during dark times
  - The success of the LAMS Community (over 1000 members after 6 months)
- Lows
  - Teachers/officials who “didn’t get it” making misleading comments
  - \*\*Watching LAMS fail in the classroom because funding shortfalls meant it wasn’t as stable as it should have been
  - Being seen as a traditional vendor who should provide whatever features are asked for
    - I’ve sometimes fallen into the “feature promise” trap myself



# Highs and Lows: Personal experiences

- Highs
  - \*\*Knowing that the decision to go open source has changed me forever
  - Being a part of the effort to reclaim the “commons”; greed is not good
  - Working with an amazing team of developers
  - Making a difference to education
- Mixed: Leading an OSS project as a non-programmer
- Lows
  - Impact on family life
    - Not just time, but the “distraction” factor even when I’m home
  - Discovering that adoption is taking much longer than I anticipated
  - Not being a big enough person to ignore funding to other (poor) projects
  - I haven’t yet slept well since I start LAMS
    - Funding and sustainability concerns remain

# Reflections on the Future of LAMS

- Very excited about growing adoption (LAMS Community has people from 82 countries)
- Excited by the new version, especially the “tools contract”
- Relieved that we invested so much time and money on the new version over the past 18 months, as it provides a foundation for the next 3-5 years
- Excited by the growth of the LAMS Community, but unsure about how to foster greater teacher engagement and re-use/adaptation of sequences
- Hopeful about new funding opportunities, and new areas of application
- Depressed about PHP vs Java issues in LAMS/Moodle integration
- Interested in deeper LAMS/LMS integration
- Sober about the challenges of building innovative open source
- Sober/Optimistic about the future of sustainability