

Wendy Fong

IISME Fellow, Synopsys, Summer 2005

Mentor: Terri Oropeza

IISME Veteran Reflection Essay

Summer 2005 marked my second-year return to the IISME fellowship program. Considering my lackluster experience last year, I was more than a little anxious. The position, *web-based knowledge management fellow*, was at Synopsys in Mountain View. *What, you mean I have to commute more than 5 minutes? Daily? !?* My anxiety level skipped a notch, considering I hadn't had a real 9-5 job, sitting sedately in front of a computer screen, in ages. I started madly digging in the back of my closet for those buried grown-up office clothes, trousers and blouses that I'd worn my first year of teaching to look more, ahem, "sophisticated". *What did I get myself into?*

Thankfully, my Synopsys summer experience redeemed my faith. Approaching things as a veteran had its advantages, the elements that were lacking in the past were much more conscious. Some of the things that I valued: a strong mentor who had previous IISME experience and knew how to manage our 8 week time period, other teacher fellows and interns that formed a supportive comraderie and engaging environment, specific projects to work on, and the daily online blog where we'd dutifully report in and dialogue with fellow IISME veterans.

As I reflected on the past 8 weeks, the theme that unites those elements that I most valued is *collaboration*. Webster's defines *collaborate* as: "*to work together, especially in some literary, artistic, or scientific undertaking.*" Many of the

projects from the summer involved a meeting of the minds; individually contributing our strengths, yet working as one team to get the job done. Below are some project highlights that really represented the collaborative effort.

End of Summer Presentation

Working with fellows Michelle and Andy, we were assigned to create a presentation for the End of Summer event. This took the form of an animation that represented 24 other IISMEs. Each person contributed their photos, along with essay answers to questions relating to their specific summer experience and what they would bring back to the classroom. In working on the production, a folder was created on the server to share our files. An instant messaging room became a great resource in getting quick answers, feedback, and simple stress relief! One of us could vent while the other two commiserated and sympathized until it was their turn for a meltdown! In addition to the finished project that premiered at Mid-Summer 2005, it will be used as potential IISME recruiting tools in the future. The feeling of support I received from working so closely on a shared goal was most rewarding and enjoyable.

Remote Access Website

Working closely with the web designer, Amy and project manager, Kylie, our ISME team helped transition a re-brand of the Virtual Private Network site. Many steps were involved, including thorough content review. This process was personally a big learning curve; I was made to understand what the existing methods were and tried to accurately identify the outdated, irrelevant materials. Our team would meet regularly to ensure that the project was moving along. This often included rewrites, review of the web pages, functionality, and checking in with others in the IT department. It was a good way to work directly with people in the department. After much hard work the new website, "Remote Access", was launched. The experience of going through a site re-brand was rewarding. I was able to experience and contribute to the entire process and

have an idea of what elements were required. To know that it is now an existing part of the company intranet, and will be long after I leave, is fulfilling.

IISME Online Blog

Each day veteran fellows were to share their experiences via an online journal. This idea of a virtual community was new to me. To my surprise, it was an excellent way to connect with what other teachers were doing at their sites. Journal entries included an assortment of thoughts, including: summaries of the day's work, differing office cultures, commiserating about commute times, the varieties of cafeteria entries, the differences between school life and office life. Even though there were several IISMEs at Synopsys, participating in the blog made this summer a fuller experience. I was able to get a better idea of what my routines were compared to those at Intel or Palm. And, yes, Synopsys was the best place for me to be this summer!

Intern forums

In addition to having IISME fellows, Synopsys also supports an intern program during the summertime. This year, there were 90 total. Having other interns around created a vibrant energy, with so many of us starting fresh and not knowing what to expect. While I did not directly collaborate with the interns, having them around created a welcoming, exciting work environment. Synopsys sponsored a number of activities that supported that idea by creating career forums that featured guest speakers from within the company. These were a treat- educational, interesting, and a good way to meet others. Through these talks, I gained a wider understanding of Synopsys's mission, which made the work I was assigned more relevant. It was an opportunity to see what others were working on and to strengthen a sense of work community.

One-on-One Mentoring

Last summer I was unwittingly tethered to my mentor; she'd pick me up in the morning, we'd drive to our sites, eat lunch together between our projects, then drive back to the city. While we got along well and it made sense to commute, there's something to be said about having some semblance of autonomy. Especially being a college teacher, where I prepare most of my lessons in isolation, present the work to my class, and then go back to my private enclave. Having Terri as a mentor was the perfect balance. She'd regularly schedule one-on-one time to check in. I appreciated this, especially in the beginning when I had little idea how things worked at Synopsys. *Is it okay to interrupt with questions? Gosh, Terri's so busy, I don't want to bug her! Should I just email?* Luckily, these anxieties were not a major issue because of the time she would set aside to mentor. It was less intimidating to ask her specific questions about projects, the department infrastructure and history, even general work culture, than trying to figure it out on my own! I learned a lot working under Terri, she allowed that valued autonomy but saw that I was headed in the right direction.

Looking back at these quick 8 weeks, I feel I participated in something truly worthwhile. The projects strengthened my skill set, adding value to what I'll share with my students when working on websites. I have a clearer idea of how I can be a strong mentor, based on how I was treated. As far as the collaborative aspect, I see it crossing several lines: the most relevant being the interactions I have with students and the work I share with my colleagues. All in all, a great summer!