



MIT E-Commerce Architecture Project Graduate Seminar Series

Digital & Physical **Place**, **Process** and **Presence**

Course Overview:

In this seminar, students will design a digital environment to house and facilitate self-governance in private online communities and participatory democracy in the public sector. Graduate students participating in this seminar will work as a team to 1. Develop the design concept and models of a Participatory Governance Environment; 2. Create working open source code implementing that design; and 3. Work closely with stakeholders and testers as part of user-centered design for requirements gathering and usability.

The final design and code will be generic enough to support various types of self-governing communities, from local governments to global NGO's; from Unions to Shareholders. To ground the design, Massachusetts's local form of government, known as "Open Town Meeting" (OTM), will be modeled as an example. OTM requires all interested townspeople to get together once a year and determine basic issues like the tax rate, zoning/development questions or allowing sex education in schools. The thesis of this seminar is that self-governance in general – including the very old form of direct democracy used in Massachusetts municipalities - can be facilitated, enhanced and made more broadly accessible by enabling users who are virtually present via the network to fully participate in the decision making process. A longer [course announcement and overview are available online](#).

Design Requirements: Electronic Self-Governance Through Collaborative Filtering & Open Source Code

There are two basic principles guiding the design of this Participatory Governance Environment: 1. that collaborative filtering can be used to leap frog the barriers to very large yet effective groups of individuals actively participating in the governance process; and 2. that Open Source Code can be used to assure ownership and control remains in the hands of those who consent to use and be governed through it. Our [Design Principles Page](#) details the reasoning and approach associated with these dual imperatives. Here is our ["unofficial" open source development page](#). This will be refined and included on our site soon . . .

Final-Term Design Concept for Participatory Governance Environment

This is a [powerpoint slide presentation](#) of the student's final design concept for the Open Governance Environment.

Mid-Term Design Concept for Participatory Governance Environment

This is a powerpoint [slide presentation representing the culmination of student work thus far](#) in the semester. It consists primarily of scanned images of paper sketches we have assembled to rough out our design concepts.

Link to Design History

Initial sketch of some of the basic features and functions that might be present in a Participatory Governance Environment (coming soon)

Further sketch

Further sketch

First Visit to New England Town Meeting

These [photographs chronicle our first field trip](#) to a working Open Town Meeting. Thanks to the facilitation of the elected Town Meeting Moderator Joe Harrington, participating graduate students were able to open discussions with several active Town Meeting voting members. Some of these individuals will be assisting this project as user testers and focus group participants.