Supplement to
Proposal for Inquiry attribute status

IT502, Intermediate Web Design
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Capacity: 25 students per section

Clarification
It appears that some additional information on the process used to assign students their topics for Individual Projects may be of some assistance.

Attached is a two page document entitled “IT502 Talent Self-Assessment” which is central to the process of establishing both the teams for the Team Project and the topics for the Individual Project. This document is distributed during a class meeting, and students are asked to consider the four “archetypes” listed on the first page and rank themselves from 1 to 10 to reflect the degree to which they feel that archetype matches their skills and interests. The instructor then asks students who have ranked themselves high on a particular archetype to identify themselves, and the individuals so identified are randomly assigned to different teams. This process is repeated for the remaining archetypes until all students have been assigned to a team. This process has historically resulted in teams that are well-balanced on the basis of skills and interests rather than social affinities.

During the same class meeting, students are asked to consider the range of topics listed on the second page of this worksheet. Although these topics may seem rather specific to the uninitiated, they are actually quite broad within the discipline. History has shown that students welcome the suggestion of topics since it opens up avenues of which they might not have been aware if asked to generate their own topics. For those students who do choose to explore a topic that is not already on the list, there is a blank at the bottom in which they can write their preferred topic. The students are asked to prioritize their top three choices from the list, and asked to share any other thoughts or preferences they would like the instructor to consider in assigning their topics.

When assigning topics, top priority is given to assigning students the topic they have added to the form themselves. Then, the remaining students are assigned based upon their prioritization of the topics listed by the instructor. Typically, the majority of students are assigned their first choice, and nearly all are at least assigned their second choice. Only on rare occasions will a student be assigned their third choice. It has not yet been necessary to assign a student a topic which was not amongst their top three choices.

First and foremost among the considerations that necessitate this approach is timing. The longer it takes to establish teams and assign topics, the less time there is for students to complete their projects. Teams cannot be effectively formed until the end of the second week of the semester due to
adds/drops. Individual project topics cannot be assigned until the teams are formed, since one of the criteria for assigning them is balancing student expertise among the teams. To allow students to arrive at their topics through a completely self-directed exploration approach would require more time and therefore reduce the time available for those students whose presentations to the class come up early in the cycle.

It should be noted that the topics for the individual projects will impact not only the composition of skills in each team, but also the composition of a significant part of the class, since project presentations occupy the middle third of the semester’s class meetings.

It is also worth noting that above and beyond the opportunity to express their preferences via the process described above, students are required to narrow the scope of their assigned topic in collaboration with the instructor and any fellow students who have been assigned the same general topic. These topics are quite broad, and need to be narrowed down to something more manageable in order to fulfill the requirements established by the instructor. This process in fact offers students substantial opportunities to determine the questions they ultimately formulate and address.