

## **Why I Deserve an OpenEd 2008 Scholarship**

I'm John Britton (<http://www.johndbritton.com>), a software developer by trade, genuine do-gooder by night. I'll graduate in May 2009 with a BS in Computer Science from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (<http://www.rpi.edu>). I'm currently on exchange at The Chinese University of Hong Kong (<http://www.cuhk.edu.hk>) where I study Mandarin. I live by the "pay it forward" philosophy, and I love CouchSurfing (<http://www.couchsurfing.com>). I develop open source software as a hobby and as a profession. I strongly believe in education as a right and my life goal is to found an institute of higher learning based entirely on open curriculum and free enrollment. Although some say my goals are lofty, I'm a lofty person.

Around a year and a half ago I was in Bilbao, Spain for an exchange program. It was nothing short of the experience of a lifetime. I had the opportunity to meet locals and foreigners and to study at an excellent university. While I was there I realized that I love to travel and that I never want to stop. I also love to learn and to teach and have a strong belief that the three fit together quite well.

I've spent days and nights thinking about how I can continue to do what I love, to travel and exchange knowledge. My experience in Spain triggered an idea that has evolved ever since. I had the thought to create a traveling school, where students could easily take courses around the world without having to deal with all the extra paperwork that is the school exchange office. I dreamed of an ideal world with affordable (read "zero") tuition and an open enrollment policy. Although seemingly impossible in a traditional institution, I believe with modern technology, open content, and motivated individuals we can exchange knowledge globally at zero monetary cost to the individual. My plan for this "ideal" learning venue is constantly changing in response to external forces. I passionately share my ideas and am met with both enthusiasm and skepticism. I welcome constructive criticism, in the end it will be beneficial to all parties involved.

I can't possibly explain the whole idea in this essay, but the basic plan is to leverage open course material and inspire individuals to lead and participate in learning groups worldwide. Learning groups will exist both online and offline. They will focus on any subject the participants deem worthy. My goal is to provide a set of tools to aid in the formation of learning groups, and to help learning groups gather necessary learning resources (ie: meeting venues for offline courses, access to specialized equipment, and course materials).

I discovered the Center for Open and Sustainable Learning by browsing through the famous MIT Open Courseware website. I was looking for like minded people that could help me solidify my ideas and help me improve upon them. OpenEd 2008 seems to be the perfect place to share my ideas and get feedback from experienced individuals. I also hope to find a number of enthusiastic supporters willing to give guidance throughout the planning and implementation of this "ideal" learning venue. After the conference I will use the feedback to flesh out a detailed plan and apply for grants from the Knight Drupal Initiative (<http://groups.drupal.org/knight-drupal-initiative>) and a few other sources to develop software to facilitate open learning groups.

By attending OpenEd 2008 I will make valuable contacts and gain a wealth of knowledge. I'll learn what hurdles exist when pursuing open education goals. I'll learn what it takes to bring Open Courseware to an established institution in hope of encouraging Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute to publish it's course materials. I will share my specialized knowledge with other conference goers and promote the Knight Drupal Initiative and related funding sources.

I'm an excellent candidate for this scholarship: I'm a highly motivated and experienced leader, my interests and goals match the those of the COSL, I have resources to share with other attendees, and I have great potential to benefit from attending. In addition I have substantial financial need; without this scholarship I will be unable to attend OpenEd 2008. Although the scholarship will not entirely offset my cost of attendance, I am prepared to pay the difference out of pocket if I am selected to attend.

*Note: If I am selected to attend I ask that the portion of the scholarship for hotel accommodations be reallocated. I will not need a hotel, but I would greatly appreciate the ability to use the entire scholarship for my airfare. I will be flying from Hong Kong so the cost of airfare will surely exceed \$750.*

References:

I encourage you to contact all of my references, I'm sure they will enthusiastically support my candidacy for this scholarship. All of my references have been notified that you may contact them.

***References removed for publication online.***