MIS 111 Freshman Honors Showcase

Asana Group 37

Brian Bornhoft, Katherine Barton, Cameron LeBlanc, Maxwell Plummer
Executive Summary

Our product, Asana, is the ideal application for improving communication, efficiency, and collaboration during group projects. It combines the most effective aspects of popular platforms such as Google Drive, GroupMe, and Microsoft Outlook. Asana allows the users the freedom to upload documents or pictures, create conversation threads, and assign due dates to tasks that are promptly displayed on Asana’s calendar. Asana also includes unique features such as project progress reports, email notifications for overdue tasks, and person-specific task assignment. For the convenience of the user, Asana is available on both computers and smartphones, giving users the flexibility to manage their projects on a busy schedule. Asana is the app that takes the work out of group work.

Although Asana is utilized by major companies for its task, conversation threads, and upload functions, Asana also boasts other features that simplify long-term planning. For example, Asana offers a progress section where the team leader can state whether the project is progressing great or if the project is at risk. There is an accompanying graph that models the tasks remaining, tasks completed, and any upcoming deadlines. Asana also allows users to track the amount of time that has been spent on a task, create subtasks, and “like”/comment on the progress of other teammates. Asana takes the time to give the user the freedom to efficiently work on projects, while adding nuance features that separate Asana from typical information mediums.

It is recommended that Asana is utilized in a classroom setting where there are multiple, long-term projects assigned to students. Asana is the perfect tool for managing a tight schedule of due dates, collaborating on complex tasks, and reminding users of upcoming events through email notifications to its users. However, Asana is also optimal for all classes and life planning as a whole. Asana can be used by one user, where he/she is able to rebuild the syllabus of a class and model it on Asana. For example, if Jim had an exam planned in two months, he could add it to his calendar and Asana would promptly remind him before the date of his exam. In terms of everyday living, Asana also contains a personal section, where individual users are able to plan out their entire day from getting to class, remembering his/her work hours, internships, to any other variety of activates.

In an age of ever rapidly expanding technology, a new application that has the ability to revolutionize the way teams communicate, plan, and work was bound to appear. With the ability for teams to freely upload documents or pictures, create conversation threads, and assign due date to tasks, Asana is the new, improved version of Drive, Outlook, and GroupMe. Asana is the ideal application because it is useful in a collegiate, professional, or personal setting, making it accessible to every type of individual. As the all around most efficient interface, other platforms better make room because Asana is the new giant in the age of information technology.
Table of Contents

Executive Summary........................................ II
Table of Contents.......................................... III
Table of Figures............................................. III
Introduction................................................ IV-V
Product Assessment/Overview...................... V-VIII
Proposed Instructional Activity.................... VIII-XIII
Feasibility/Design Assessment....................... XIII-XVIII
Pictures of Asana’s Interface....................... XVIII
Next Steps/Future Work................................. XIX-XX
Conclusions............................................... XXI
Bibliography................................................ XXI
Appendices............................................... XXII

Table of Figures

Table I: Student Assessment of Asana........ XIII
Pictures of Asana......................................... XVIII
Introduction

The objective of the application Asana is to create a platform that is intended for collaboration between two or more people, working together for group projects. This platform is available for both desktop and smartphone, making it widely accessible to the users. It revolutionizes communication between individuals, by allowing them to assign tasks and hold conversation threads. It also utilizes a calendar that organizes project timelines and can be a location to upload files such as word docs, pictures, or PowerPoint presentations. Asana is ultimately a central location for everything a college student needs to succeed on a project.

In college, students oftentimes struggle to manage their schedules around those of their classmates that they are collaborating with on a project. This often leads to final projects that turn out rushed or otherwise fall short of their full potential. On such a large campus, like the University of Arizona, with so many different activities and classes, it is a struggle to find a time when multiple people can meet up and focus on completing an assignment. Asana is the answer.

Asana additionally saves time when groups have the opportunity to physically meet up. It is not intended to remove all face to face contact, but instead it makes the time that is spent together more effective. By being easily accessible, due to its multi-platform capabilities, Asana is an excellent hub for communication and collaboration. By allowing users to interact through the application, the brainstorming and project planning phases can be done anywhere. This is important because time is one of the most valuable resources to a college student and being able to avoid the hassle of unnecessary face to face meetings can greatly increase the time and
energy the group members are willing to put into things like presentation practice and project coherence.

If adopted into a classroom here at the UofA, Asana will promote a more positive environment for completing group projects, boosting the productivity of the users and the final score of the project at hand.

**Product Assessment/Overview**

Asana is the ideal application for group work because it has many unique features that allow groups to focus on not how to get the project done, but actually working on it. The major benefit of Asana is that everything is in one place. Having due dates, reminders, tasks, and documents all in one place, makes Asana perfect for keeping work organized. Collecting all the information in one location also allows the entire group to access the information anywhere at any time, since Asana is available on iOS, Android, and desktops. Another advantage of Asana is that it is free, up to 15 people per group. This allows student in smaller group projects to use all of Asana’s features at no cost. Asana’s features include the ability to join multiple groups, file storage, group conversations, task assignment, and a lot more. There is also a progress tracker that allows groups to monitor the project’s overall status. Within the app, groups can set goals for themselves and track their progress to view how their work is furthering the project. Another helpful aspect of Asana is that it sends emails to remind users when projects and assignments are due. Lastly, a helpful feature is the ability to assign tasks to certain group members, that holds them accountable for their work. Using this application lessens the need for a team leader to micromanage other members because he/she can view who has or hasn’t completed their work. In summary, Asana is the perfect application for group work because all
of the information is in one place, the application is essentially free, and it efficiently organizes the assignment.

The key market for Asana is large, complex businesses. This application is used by a multitude of larger companies. Although it would cost money to use on such a large scale, the benefits of Asana are definitely worthwhile. Asana is integral in a variety of companies including NASA, The United Way, and Ernest and Young. This shows that the application is flexible to fit the needs of very different companies. Additionally, Asana has partnered up websites such as Dropbox and Google Drive to simplify group work further. Asana is ideal for companies to manage extensive communication networks, facilitate information, and complete tasks.

Although this app was designed for businesses, it is easily transferable to the classroom. In addition to Asana being free for up to 15 users, there is also a student discount available for larger groups. The conversation tools of Asana allow the group to seamlessly connect with each other without spamming emails or collecting everyone’s phone numbers. Everyone in the group can view the conversation threads, on either their smartphones or desktops, which facilitates communication. Asana’s calendar function also helps the group manage due dates and set up meeting times, which is helpful since students have varying and hectic schedules. Asana is the perfect application for managing large businesses as well as smaller classroom environments.

Although for teams under 15 people Asana is free, for larger teams Asana charges a premium. This premium includes additional features such as data export capabilities, private groups, and unlimited members of a project. The pricing structure is flexible for Asana. Typically, the premium costs $8.33 per user per month, however through communicating with Asana, the price can be adjusted depending on the team size and any available discounts. For
implementation at the University level it is also important to remember that there is a student discount. Asana is a low cost, if not free, solution to make group work simpler.

Company Assessment: Asana’s main source of income is generated through selling their premium services, for around $8.33 per month per user. This is the only form of income the app generates which goes into covering cost such as employee salaries. A large plus for Asana is that the application is advertisement free, which enables the user to remain focused and not become distracted. The main forms of advertising that Asana utilizes to promote itself are small advertisements and word of mouth from pleased customers. Asana has been able to grow as a franchise, not due to heavy advertising, but from the quality of its features and applicability to every company, individual, and group that needs to accomplish a goal.

Asana is a private company founded by Dustin Moskovitz, a co-founder of Facebook, and Justin Rosenstein, co-inventor of Gmail Chat and Google Drive. Currently Asana has a team of over 100 employees, who work as product managers, recruiters, marketers, financial analysts, etc. The company’s headquarters are in New York, San Francisco, and Dublin, and more are bound to pop up as Asana continues to expand its business globally.

Product Characteristics: The application, Asana, has four main features: tasks, reminders, calendars, and conversations. Tasks can be assigned to specific people or to the whole group, which informs each member of what they are responsible for within the project. Users can also create sub-tasks to make the project less daunting and easier to manage. The reminders feature helps to tell team members which tasks are due soon. These reminders are received as an email notification on a smartphone or desktop. The calendar function allows group members to see tasks and due dates all in one page. Additionally, documents can be
uploaded to the calendar, making navigation of the project simpler. Lastly, the conversations function allows groups to communicate with each other without the hassle of large group emails or complicated group texting circles. The task, reminder, calendar, and conversation features of Asana make it ideal for group projects because they keep the group informed, on task, aware, and involved in the assignment. These features are complemented by the accessibility of Asana. Asana is a vendor that is available on desktop (Mac and PC), iOS, and Android, making it the ideal application for every member of the group.

**Proposed Instructional Activity**

The primary market identified for Asana is any group-oriented project, whether it be at a secondary education institution, a university, or in the work place. Asana is appealing to environments that involve intensive collaboration because it offers a plethora of features that allow teams to communicate and perform more efficiently such as conversation threads and task updates. For the sake of this project, Asana would make collaboration between students much easier on the collegiate level. Although Asana is equally useful for utilization in all areas of subject including business, science, fine arts, etc., the application is most valuable in classrooms that require a high volume of group projects, discussions, or presentations. Focusing on Asana’s implementation into college classrooms is a wise starting point for a multitude of reasons. Primarily, students in college, typically ages 18 through 25, are well-versed in 21st century technology such as laptops, tablets, and smartphones. Additionally, a group of 4 college students typically have to plan around a multitude of events such as varying class schedules, participations in different clubs, and personal commitments with jobs or internships. The abilities of Asana pair equally as well with both the lower and upper division classes offered at
colleges. Therefore, Asana will remain an impactful implication for students throughout their entire university education.

Asana is principally useful for university classes that have long term projects, such as the Engineering 102B class polled, because it offers features to keep users on track through due dates, reminders, and email notifications. However, it is important to mention that Asana offers a personal section, completely separate from any group projects, where individual users are able to track their daily lives through assigning themselves tasks and providing a calendar function. This is important because it demonstrates the versatility of Asana. It firstly serves as a medium where members of a project are able to correspond and work, but also has the opportunity to remind a student when he/she has a meeting with an advisor, professor, or work schedule for the week. One of the few important mementos to consider is that Asana requires an instructor that is willing to implement pervasive usage of technology and is able to quickly learn new applications because Asana requires about an hour of tinkering and experiences to truly grasp.

The practical use of Asana for students is as a medium where each individual user is able to view the overall progress of the project, view tasks that are specifically assigned to them, and to communicate any issues that they encounter with their group mates. For instance, to more wholly embrace Asana, my teammates and I have begun to use Asana to track our MIS project. Currently on our page, each user is able to view the tasks that we have completed such as writing our elevator pitch and beginning this paper, along with the corresponding due dates and attached notes. For our project, the email notifications regarding due dates were lifesaving on multiple occasions and the calendar thread gave each individual a more holistic sense of
upcoming assignments. One unique aspect of Asana that is useful to students is that on Asana, users are able to comment on tasks, which could comprise of them planning a date to meet, stating what needs to be brought to a presentation, etc.

On the other hand, the primarily method of utilizing Asana is up to the teacher’s discretion. The teacher can either propose Asana as a completely optional program that has been beneficial to groups in the past or state that Asana is mandatory for usage and the teacher would oversee each individual group project through Asana.

When my group mates and I were presenting our project to Dr. Armin Sorooshian, he stated that if he were to implement Asana into his classroom instruction that he would present it as an option for students when they are completing their solar oven project during the first semester. In other words, Dr. Sorooshian would spend part of a class period informing the student of Asana and how the application works on a basic level, and then leave it up to the groups of students to decide if it is worth the time to download, understand, and use practically. With an optional implementation, the teacher would not be able to evaluate the student’s use of Asana on any assessment criteria, and the teacher would most likely opt to grade through a consistent medium such as D2L drop box or turnitin.com.

The second teacher that our group, polled about their opinions on Asana’s effectiveness, was Dr. Cac Dao, who teaches another section of Engineering 102B. He stated that he had not had the time, since it a busy section of the semester, to properly look at Asana and weigh the benefits and drawbacks, but that he has heard about the product before and is very interested in implementing the product in his classroom in upcoming semesters. He stated that he was going to make it an integral part of his solar oven project assignment. This entails
that Dr. Dao plans to become the leader of each individual’s group projects and oversee their projects. This also means that Dr. Dao would be able to assign the student groups tasks on the main page, comment on tasks to specify what is expected of students, and answer whatever questions the students incurred in a timely manner due to Asana’s email notifications. To evaluate the assessment criteria, Dr. Dao, as the leader of the group project, would be able to assign a task on Asana, view the task on the assigned due date, and be able to view if the task was completed on time. This completed task would include a link attached from the students with whatever work was due that day. Dr. Dao could then view these uploaded documents on Asana, and assign a grade accordingly.

The primary instructional outcome of utilizing Asana in the classroom is that it will provide the students a condensed website that has their documents, tasks, etc., instead of having four different websites with four different sets of information. It will additionally provide the professor a unique area where he/she can assign homework, essentially build a syllabus, and view/grade uploaded assignments. Asana could prove beneficial to any classroom because it has a calendar task layout that can be useful for long-term projects, allow students to plan study groups before exams, or promote individual planning for everyday scheduling.

Specifically, my group mates and I selected the University of Arizona as a prime location to begin testing the effectiveness of Asana because we are all students at the UofA and are familiar with the structure of different classes. We have multiple associates who are currently beginning their studies as engineering majors, and they pointed out that they perform a lot of group work in the class Engineering 102B. This class was selected because the students are assigned to create a solar oven over a majority of the first semester. Over the course of the
assignment, the students had to create different mathematical models for the oven, a prototype oven, pick up the materials, create the final oven, test the final oven, and put together a presentation.

Asana is a modification, or process improvement, of currently used information mediums such as Microsoft Outlook, GroupMe, or Google Drive. Asana allows the user to condense these popularly used platforms into one convenient location that is available on multiple technological platforms such as a tablet, computer, or smartphone. Students are currently corresponding through GroupMe, working on their documents on Drive, and planning out their long-term schedules on Outlook, but Asana is a one stop location for all of these activities.

**Feasibility/Design Assessment**

Our group has interviewed Dr. Armin Sorooshian and Dr. Cac Dao. Both men are doctors who teach Engineering 102B. Our group selected these teachers because our associates, Michael Gilboy Jr. and Sean Perea, are students of these instructors and they spoke highly of their openness to new technology and ability to teach. While working on a group project, constructing solar ovens, they found it difficult to communicate and work with their groups effectively. We felt that Asana was the ideal solution to their issues.

We met with Dr. Sorooshian and presented to his Engineering 102B class. Before presenting the application to the class of forty students, we distributed surveys that asked three questions. The students were to rate on a scale of one to five: if they felt the application would have been helpful for the solar oven project, if they would use the application if it were optional, and how receptive would they be if the if the application was required. After the
presentation of Asana to the class, each student responded to the survey and were given the option to give additional feedback as well. We received positive feedback as students responded with an average of 3.86 out of 5 on if they found the app would’ve been useful for the solar oven project, and a 3.69 out of 5 on both if Asana were to be optional or required.

Dr. Sorooshian then emailed the group his response to our presentation and his assessment of the application after we presented to the class. He stated that he had looked into the application last summer, but felt that the learning curve was too steep. However, the students seemed more than willing to delve into the application to utilize its diverse functions. Dr. Sorooshian’s feedback gave us a different perspective on our application and our presentation gave Dr. Sorooshian a new idea about Asana. After our presentation to his classroom, he hopefully realized that the students are eager to use Asana in their solar oven projects and that the students will be willing to spend the time to learn the nuances of Asana.

We met with Dr. Dao during his office hours and presented the application to him. He found the application very useful. He was very appreciative of the fact that the application had a multitude of essential features in one place. In the past, he has faced difficulty because he has
had to use so many different websites and applications for his class. Similar to Dr. Dao the only negative feedback he had was the learning curve, but mostly for himself. He is very busy teaching his classes and is worried about not being able to learn the application well enough to teach it to his students and to manage it. He also thought the addition of a feature similar to a doodle poll would be helpful. He plans on using the break to assess the application in further detail and potentially make it an integral part of his next Engineering 102B class.

On the technical side, accessing Asana for students is not difficult. The application works via internet and that is the only requirement to use the application. Also, there is a mobile version of the application that is available on iOS and Android. In terms of storage, the iOS version takes up 27.1 MB and the Android version takes up 5 MB. It also requires that iPhone users have iOS 8.0 and Android users would need similar updates. Asana is very accessible and there are not any major issues for its technical use.

The biggest challenge to using Asana is the complexity of its operation. As we see in Dr. Sorooshian’s and Dr. Dao’s feedback, this was their biggest worry for using the application in the classroom. Admittedly, as a group it took us awhile to grasp all the features of the application. We struggled to make tasks available to an entire project versus an individual, differentiate personal tasks from project tasks, etc. However, once we realized we just needed to use the dashboard and make sure we were working in our project, the application became much simpler to operate. The steep learning curve leads us to believe that proper use of Asana would require an in-class tutorial by an informed teacher. If students are able to see someone work through the application, they would be able to learn the application much quicker.
Additionally, there are multiple help features within Asana. With the correct training, the time commitment of understand the application could be shortened drastically.

Economically, a teacher could potentially face some costs, depending how they choose to run the application. If they present the application to their class and have their students join and operate their groups on their own, there shouldn’t be any issues for cost. However, the teacher could opt to manage the website through a large number of sub-groups within one giant group. This way the teacher could create due dates and assignments for each group and also track the progress of each group in one location. Asana is only free for up to 15 people in a group, so this method would incur a cost of $8.33 per month per user. This upgrade allows more users to participate in a group, allows private projects, class-wide progress tracking, etc.

The application has some potential costs, but still offers avenues to keep it a free application.

Asana is a very reliable application, but if it were ever discontinued or closed for an extended period of time, the students will still be able to complete their work. They would be able to refer to less effective communication mediums such as Outlook, GroupMe, or Drive and use the class syllabus to view upcoming due dates. Asana contains these platforms all in one place, which makes it optimal to use, but groups would still be able to progress with their product if it were to crash. This allows the use of Asana to be risk free, while the user reaps the benefits of the application.

Legally, there are few issues that could arise if students of UofA were to use Asana. Asana does not release any “educational record(s)” as according to the FERPA. The only thing it asks for is an email address, a password, and an option to fill in an affiliated company. Additionally, all other information within a project would only be visible to members of the
project. I don’t see any major issues arising for individuals with disabilities. The site is very visual and anyone that is impaired visually may have issues, but those could be managed through disability resources center. The website also doesn’t seem to have any issues with intellectual property. The information shared between a group is private and will not be taken by Asana. It does not violate the student’s expectations of privacy or their educational record. They provide an email which is used for Asana to contact them, which can be controlled by the student. The only thing that is not intellectual property of the student is if they were to provide feedback to Asana on the application, then any changes the developers were to make in response to the changes would not be the right of the students. Asana does not seem to have any major legal or regulatory issues.

Pictures of Asana’s Interface
Next Steps/Future Work

When it come to the implementation of Asana into a classroom setting there are two ways that it can be done. The first is to simply present the application to student and give them a quick run-through on its features and functions and then allow them to make the choice of embracing the application or sticking to previous methods. The second option for implementation would be to train the professor of the class on how to use the application so that he/she could then require students to use the app then include himself/herself in the project to monitor each group’s progress.

Option one may be the best place to start when it comes to phasing Asana into the classroom. By giving students the option of using the application to work on their projects with the professor is better able to develop an opinion about the application and what direction he/she wants to take with it. Once a few groups of students have used the application, the professor could then ask them if they felt that the application would make a good, mandatory addition the classroom. The teacher could then choose to keep the application optional or mandated

The advantage of this method of installmment is that the professor is not taking any risks when he/she allows the application to test the waters. Also, the teacher would not have to spend as much time getting to know the application, though it would require a basic understanding. All things considered this is a great place to start the integration of a new informational technology into the classroom.

Option two is plan that is attainable but it has more risk than the first option with an accompanying higher reward. Full classroom participation with Asana would mean that
everyone is on the same playing field unlike option one. By having all of the students in the class use the application, there would be a smaller learning curve, due to the fact that students could still interact with one another to better understand Asana’s multiple functions. To accomplish this goal, the professor would have to become proficient in the application and probably host a workshop that would teach students the “ins and outs” of Asana.

Once the class is all on the same page, they can then be split into groups to start their projects and make use of Asana. By having every student using the technology, the professor could better gage the effectiveness of the application by comparing the students’ projects to those of the students from previous semesters that did not use of Asana. There is a learning curve to using the application and this may deter students from wanting to really understand it, but once they see how helpful it is at organizing projects they will absolutely push to use it in the future because of its versatility, and ability to promote efficiency and communication.

**Conclusion**

In an age of rapid technological expansion, it would be foolish for group-work heavy classes to not take advantage of the free application, Asana, and integrate it into their learning experiences. The consolidation of many useful functions, such as a calendar, conversation threads, reminders, and tasks, that had to previously be sought out elsewhere, is what makes Asana an ideal one stop shop for everything that is needed for a successful group project. Collaboration, communication, and organization are the tools that students will gain when they use the multiplatform group work application Asana. It revolutionizes projects by the taking the group of out group work.
Bibliography


Dao, Cac. Personal Interview. 18 November 2015.


Appendices:

Appendix A:

Our group met with Dr. Cac Dao, a professor of Civil Engineering at the University of Arizona, for his advice on our application Asana. We went and met with him in his office hours and presented our application. We all explained different aspects of the application such as the calendar and conversations tools. He was very impressed with the ease of use and the many features it had. We went back again to his office hours to get feedback on our presentation. He said we did a good job presenting Asana. He had a couple of suggestions to improve the app such as adding a Doodle poll to figure out team member meet-ups. Dr. Dao said he would be willing to use the app for future classes and sees the potential it could have for future projects. He said he would look further into the app over the winter break and possibly use it next semester.

Appendix B:

After presenting to Dr. Sorooshian’s Engineering 102B class, we emailed him questions on the presentation as well as the product itself. He had a busy week after the presentation so he chose to email response rather than meeting in person. He felt we had presented well and appreciated that we all spoke rather just having one speaker. He spoke of his main and single concern with using the application. He is concerned with the learning curve of the application. It was helpful that he had a previous understanding of the application because of a previous search for a technology to use in the classroom. This limited his questions and concerns with Asana because he had prior knowledge. But, he is still interested in the application. Dr. Sorooshian provided us with valuable feedback that helped further our project.