

# Scaffolds

Experimenting with student-driven open badging in an iSchool context

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## BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

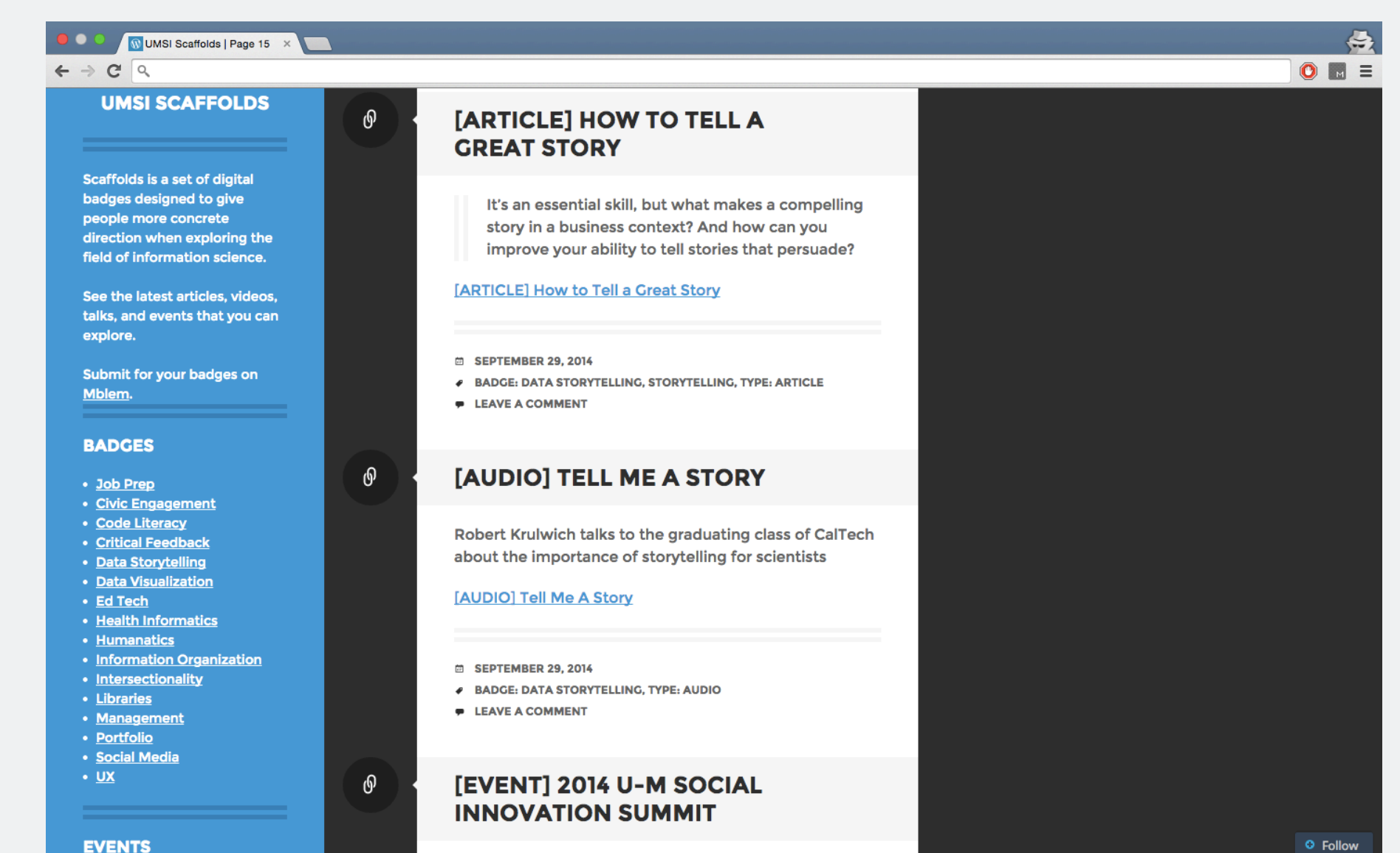


The interdisciplinary nature of iSchools means that students come from a variety of backgrounds. At the University of Michigan's School of Information, the curriculum is built around 8 different specializations. Scaffolds is an attempt to build connections across the different specializations.

- A set of digital badges created to give Masters- and Bachelors-level students guidance in exploring the field, build bridges between specializations and expose students to different ideas and perspectives outside of their coursework
- A way to motivate students, showcase evidence of achievement, and support freedom of choice in an informal learning environment
- Goal: understand student motivations and how an open badging platform can be used to encourage student engagement

## PHASE 1 - FALL 2014

- Interviewed students, alumni, employers, and professors about experiences that shaped their perspectives as information professionals to develop materials for Scaffolds
- Created a framework of co-curricular activities and online materials that exposed students to new ideas and encouraged them to make connections across campus
- 14 badges were introduced to students in September 2014. 10% of 350+ students signed up. Students received biweekly emails with materials for badges they expressed interest in
- Badges awarded after a student accomplishes the criteria set for the badge: submit a response to prompts designed to promote self-reflection and draw connections between classroom learnings and co-curricular activities



The Scaffolds website provided curated articles, resources, and events for each badge.

## RESULTS

*"I'm not sure that I would be motivated to complete a reflection after reading the articles or attending the events in order to obtain a badge [...] I just can't see who the badges would be serving other than myself. Completing reflections for my own benefit is not usually something I feel I have time for, however beneficial it may be for my better understanding of information-related concepts."*

- Feedback from a participant interview

- We surveyed students at the end of the Fall 2014 semester (116 responses, 24% response rate):

68%

were not familiar with the idea of digital badges

74%

were neutral or negative about badges being able to support conversations with future employers

33%

had low or very low experience, knowledge, or confidence in the badging topics

- Survey and interviews reflected an uncertainty about badging, especially its value proposition as a possible support structure for student's future careers

## PHASE 2 - WINTER 2015

- Restructure the badges to provide a more substantial framework for students to explore topics they are already interested in and state benefits of badges more explicitly
- Focus on the social benefits of the in-person university experience, bringing together small groups to attend talks around campus and holding small discussions after
- Facilitate conversations between students from different years and specializations about classes and resources they have found most useful



We collaborated with students in the Advanced Graphic Design class to develop a set of badges that reflect Scaffolds' unique visual culture, setting it apart from other badging projects at the university. Badges by Jasmine Hentschel.