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Developing a WebCT Support Program to Take Teaching to a Higher Level

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Introduction

As educational institutions increase the use of technology in their teaching, it becomes increasingly important to examine how we are integrating its use into our curricula. Experience and research has shown one of the challenges to campus wide adoption of a course management system is the support needed by faculty and designers to feel adept and effective in the use of this potent and complex teaching technology.

Background

In academic year 2004-2005 the University of Massachusetts selected WebCT Vista as the new course management system. In response to this initiative UMass Medical School designed and implemented a required training program for faculty and staff championed by a collaborative between three school offices and departments: Information Services (IS); the Office of Faculty Administration (OFA) and the Lamar Soutter Library (LSL). This strategic alliance brought together the expertise of three distinct departments with interconnected work. The results increased faculty adaptation with course offerings growing from approximately 120 to 330 online courses.

Phase III:	'Innovations in Teaching with Technology User Group' emerges with the goal of taking teaching to a higher level.
Phase II:	Targeted Technical Assistance additional consultation needed each time an instructor activates a new course tool.
Phase I:	Required WebCT Workshops addressing best practice content and tool training.

Materials and Methods

The Innovations in Teaching with Technology User Group was implemented in September 2006. Members of the UMass Worcester community who have completed the WebCT campus training program were invited to join the group. An online listserv was created to foster a sense of community and continue conversation beyond our face to face meetings. The Innovations group represents the only campus forum with designers, teachers, technologists and librarians in one room actively sharing, collaborating and presenting. Sessions are built around participant needs, highlighting WebCT and other teaching technologies, toward enhancing teaching and learning. The group has created a real time feed back loop resulting in an ongoing assessment of teaching with technology needs. Our campus users now have a forum for on demand technology troubleshooting, problem solving and innovation. The group meets monthly for a one hour brown bag session. The framework for each session—illustrated below--follows a consistent format with topics generated from our members. Each session contains a Faculty/Technology Showcase, Tips and Tricks, Questions and Answers and What's New. The consistent format allows participants the flexibility to drop in on a segment based on schedule and topic relevance.

Faculty Showcase	❖Online Assessments ❖Persistent Linking to Online Journals ❖Classroom Polling ❖Horizon Wimba ❖Apreso and Podcasting	Pods and Podcasts Tony Maciag Multimedia Specialist Technology and Media Services, IS
Tips and Tricks	❖Forwarding WebCT Mail ❖File Naming ❖Show/Hide Courses ❖WebCT Reports ❖RSS Feeds	
Questions and Answers	Could Wimba help us with a grading meeting from the Berkshires to Worcester? Is anyone using the Polling system for teaching? How?	
What's New	❖BlackBoard Vista 4 ❖ePortfolio Tool	HUMAN ANATOMY

Conclusion

Past workshop evaluations and individual comments from faculty and staff have told us that in an effort to take their teaching to a higher level, the campus teaching community seeks to do so in a collegial and supportive atmosphere with other users. Use of the real time feedback loop assists us in designing optimally effective programs for our teaching and learning community. The creation of the Virtual User Community is a critical extension of this model. Of the 72 session participants 100% have "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that the session was relevant to needs; the skills/ideas taught are useful; would recommend the session to a peer and found the handouts/materials useful.

Future Directions

Virtual Community

A clearing house and membership area for the group will be developed in the Ektron Content Management tool complete with Blogs, document sharing and RSS feeds.

Scholarship

Ideas and work generated as an outgrowth of this group can be further nurtured in the university's scholarship of teaching and learning program. This program supports faculty in achieving scholarship in their teaching and educator roles, by helping them develop peer reviewed and disseminated products.