

Working with the Learning Management System on your campus

Lesson objectives

By the time you complete this study unit, you will be able to:

1. Create and upload an assignment calendar.
2. Update an online grade book that matches course assignments.
3. Create learning units for online course sites.
4. Upload learning objects in web-friendly file type format.
5. Identify web-friendly file types.
6. Critique example beginning and ending semester procedures, for online course sites.

Refining the process

- Last week you learned to create a very basic course site using the LMS on your campus. This week we will focus on some things you should do and some things you should not do within a learning management system.
- We will also discuss some beginning of the semester procedures and end of the semester procedures that are good maintenance routines.

Don't do these things

- Upload:
 - Word Documents (.doc)
 - PowerPoint presentations (.ppt or .pps)
 - Excel Spreadsheets (.xls)
 - Video .avi files
 - Audio .wav files
 - Any non-web friendly files

The Microsoft file types will not open off campus for all students and in many cases, students will be required to log in again to view them. Video .avi and sound .wav files are too large!

Don't do these things

- Type lengthy content directly in the LMS.
 - Content should be created as separate learning objects and uploaded instead.
- Change the names of standard buttons and links.
 - Students will be taking other online courses and should not have to learn different navigation for each one. Consistency is golden!
- Load images that cause users to have to scroll to view them.
 - Keep image widths under 450 pixels
- Create "Fill-in-the-blank" type quizzes
 - These tend to be case and punctuation sensitive and frustrate students.

Do these things

Create learning objects off-line. Convert them to web-friendly formats, before uploading them to the course site.

- Acceptable formats include:
 - HTML
 - .pdf
 - .gif
 - .jpg
 - Java
 - JavaScript

- .rtf – only for documents intended to be used by students as templates

Do these things

- Keep link and button navigation constant.
- Create accurate grade books.
- Provide a printable syllabus in .pdf or HTML format.
- Provide a printable assignments calendar in .pdf or HTML format.

Do these things

- Keep copies of all your learning objects for a course in a folder on your campus network.
 - You will then be able to modify them as needed and reuse them.
- Download grade books periodically for safe keeping.

Example of beginning of semester procedures

- Activate existing course
- Load syllabus
- Add assignments calendar
- Add grades to grade book that are not automatically generated by online quizzes
- Enable course usage tracking
- Add new students

Example end of semester procedures

- Download grade books
- Recycle course
- Turn off course availability
- Archive a copy of course on the campus designated drive

Uploading content

- Use the online tutorials for Blackboard and WebCT to learn how to upload files to your course sites.
- Pay attention to file type and file size.
- Be very cautious about uploading file types that require plug-ins and high bandwidth. Many students will be accessing online course sites over slow modem connections and with older hardware.

Plug-in requirements

- Plug-in applications extend web browser functionality.
- If you must upload a learning object that requires a plug-in, be sure to supply a link to the plug-in.
- .pdf files require the Acrobat Reader plug-in. This plug-in is commonly installed in web browsers, so this is one we consider to be safe.

Media that requires a plug-in download

- Real media
- QuickTime
- Flash

- Proprietary

Tips for converting text content to web friendly formats

- All the Microsoft Office applications have a built-in function to save as .html.
- You will need to purchase and install Adobe Acrobat to convert files to .pdf. Almost any file can be converted to .pdf which is an excellent choice for non-HTML web documents.

Later in this course we will explore additional tools for converting text, PowerPoint, video and sound to web-friendly formats.

Learning objects

We have touched on the term “Learning object” several times already. Let’s discuss this term more. If you did a web search on this term you would find many complex, in-depth explanations. For this course, we are going to keep this very simple:

- A learning object is any teaching tool that is uploaded to a course site, and is reusable.

Examples of Learning Objects for online learning

- Interactive quiz
- Multimedia presentation/lecture
- Paper that teaches something
- Graphic image

Beyond this course

- When I refer to learning objects in this course, I am referring to objects you create for YOUR course site.
- You could certainly reuse these learning objects within other courses that you create later on.
- You could also share your learning objects with colleagues.
- This scope can be expanded by opening your mind to the possibilities of sharing learning objects freely with other academics world-wide, via websites dedicated to this purpose

These are all good reasons why it is good to create learning objects that are uploaded, rather than creating content within your LMS course site.

Free Learning Objects

- <http://www.merlot.org/Home.po>
- MERLOT is a free and open resource designed primarily for faculty and students of higher education. Links to online learning materials are collected here along with annotations such as peer reviews and assignments.

Reasons to create learning objects

What if.....

- you changed jobs and you did not have access to the same LMS at your new place of employment?
- your campus decided to switch to a new LMS?
- the LMS server crashed and you did not have a good recent backup of your course sites?
 - If you had created all your learning material directly in the LMS, you would no longer have access to all your hard work.

Sharing learning objects

- Think of the time and effort that could be saved, if we all created learning objects and made them available to one another.
- Think of the diverse ideas, points of view and new thought this could generate for all of us!