

Moodle and Sakai short listed for further analysis as Online Learning Management Systems at CSU

Two short listed solutions, Moodle and Sakai, were approved for further in-depth evaluation by the Online Learning Environment (OLE) Steering Committee on 25th May 2006. The OLE Steering Committee has representatives from Student Services, DIT, Library Services, Academic Senate and Heads of Schools. Assoc Prof Marian Tulloch, Director CELT is the sponsor of the OLE Programme.

Moodle and Sakai are both forms of open source non-proprietary solutions. The source code for open source software is made available enabling an institution like CSU to copy, modify and redistribute the source code without paying royalties or fees. Open source code evolves through community cooperation. A number of universities in UK, USA and other overseas countries are now using or moving to open source solutions for their Learning Management Systems.

Next Steps

The Programme Team are undertaking further in-depth analysis of the two short-listed products, Moodle and Sakai, with a recommendation of the preferred Online Learning Management System (OLMS) and suggested rollout approach to be presented to the OLE Steering Committee in mid July 2006.

Background

In 2004 the ILSC, after consideration of feedback from the faculties, accepted the recommendations of a report, *Implementation of a Commercial Virtual Learning Environment at Charles Sturt University*, recommending that the University adopt a 'best of breed' strategy in the short to medium term development of its Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and a working party be formed, led by CELT, to prioritise the tools that would enhance online teaching and learning.

In October 2004 the VLE Working Party was established with representation from Faculties and Divisions. The working party conducted an extensive consultation and research process, during 2004-2005, in order to ensure that its recommendations about learning technologies relate to the needs of staff and students.

The VLE Working Party Report recommended to the ILSC the following priorities:

- Online Grade Book enabling easy managing of assessment marks for academics and timely access to assignment marks for students
- Enhanced functionality and workspace for students to support individual and collaborative online work.

In addition, further areas in which significant interest was demonstrated included; online survey polls, online marking, assembler technology and instant messaging and online monitoring. Other features will also be made available in the future.

During the consultative process many respondents stressed the need for an **integrated approach** to learning technologies in the CSU environment for both students and staff. The Working Party considered this integration to be a major goal of any VLE development.

The report of the VLE Working Party and the Subject Entry Point working group were approved at September 2005 meeting of the ILSC and a VLE Project was established to implement their recommendations. Academic Senate was briefed on the progress of the VLE at its October 2005 meeting.

Goals

Due to the importance of an integrated approach to learning technologies adopted, the Online Learning Environment (OLE) Programme Team was formed in February 2006, to assist in the University's process of selecting an acceptable OLMS. The Programme Team has the following goals:

- Balancing short and long term objectives.
While the long term objectives focus on the strategic outcome of a fully integrated OLMS i.e. the Framework, the short term objectives could be achieved through a *controlled release* to be used by a small group of users with selected functionality and would involve very little if any data integration.
- By the end of 2007 the framework is to be fully integrated and available.
This does not mean that every possible tool is available given policy, training, support and change management concerns.
- By end of 2006 one tool would be available, as a *controlled release*
- Multiple frameworks are not the preferred solution.
The tools within the selected framework become the de facto standard i.e. you start from this point. Requirements for each tool, however, will be evaluated in its own right, and another solution from outside of the framework could be selected for integration and implementation.
- Existing CSU tools will be evaluated.
Need to establish whether existing tools need to be changed to work within the selected framework or be replaced by a comparable tool in the framework. It is vital that the functionality and range of tools is equal to, or higher, than what is available at CSU at present.

Process

The first step of the OLE Programme was the selection of a 'framework' product. A framework is used by the Programme to mean an Online Learning Management System i.e. the environment that facilitates online learning and teaching. The decision on a framework needed to be taken before any of the detailed projects start to ensure integration and a high level of user-friendliness.

The OLE Programme Team undertook a rigorous, iterative process to select the framework, which included the:

- definition of requirements
- establishment of evaluation criteria and weightings for each requirement
- definition of areas of analysis required for each requirement
- high level evaluation and analysis of 12 solution approaches, which were selected on the basis of being prominent national and international solutions, as well as on the basis of current CSU policy.

Moodle and Sakai were selected for further evaluation for the following reasons:

- their extended functionality while providing access to the source code for free;
- rated strongly on the ability to control recurring (ongoing) costs;
- ability to integrate to existing system;
- provided a consistency of user interface;
- a number of universities in the US and UK are migrating to these open/ community source LMSs suggesting permanence of the solution and provider;
- to mitigate the risk and/or current uncertainty of being locked into a single commercial vendor;

- ability to provide a phased implementation allowing specific tools to be utilised through a controlled release; and
- ability for customisation, further development and enhancements to meet the unique needs of CSU

Interested in contributing to the process?

Members of the CSU community may be interested in providing input to aspects of the OLE Programme (e.g. subject matter experts for the detailed analysis and user acceptance testing) If you would like to be involved please contact the Programme Manager, Dawn Calvert, DIT Project Services Centre, (dcalvert@csu.edu.au)

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More information on the two short-listed frameworks is available at <http://moodle.org> and <http://sakaiproject.org>