Distance Learning Steering Committee
Minutes of the Meeting
October 29, 2004


The meeting was called to order at 11:00 AM in the Carriage House.

Summary of Decision Items

1. We will request to be able to test WebCT CE 6.0, which uses the same database as Vista.
2. We will continue to monitor issues with Vista and statewide server performance before planning to migrate.
3. The committee recommended that the VPAA provide leadership and directive in determining which full programs should go online.

Discussion

1. In the last Distance Learning Steering Committee meeting the committee recommended, based on the concerns and wishes of UWG faculty, that UWG stay on WebCT CE for the 2005-2006 school year. This decision was made based on issues of stability, performance, and administration. There are still many concerns about migrating to Vista.
   a. Andy Leavitt (eCore faculty currently using Vista), stated that Vista performance has improved this term. He also stated the Vista has excellent assessment and communications tools that are much better than C.E.
   b. Janet Gubbins acknowledged the improvement in performance and functionality, over CE. She shared the BOR responses to the Known Issues brought up at the last meeting. See response document here: http://www.westga.edu/~distance/steeringcommittee/concerns_sept04_KnownIssues3.0_Response.htm. She also expressed the BOR’s advisement that UWG should not attempt to migrate all courses at once, come Fall 2006.
   c. Gubbins noted that remaining concerns included:
      (1) There is no way for faculty to backup a course section for archiving or re-use/ copy to next term... administrators can copy a section up to a template but this has to be done at a time and copying a template can take an hour or more per course section (depending on size) and all student data/ messages are lost in this case.
      (2) There is no separate archive server or thus any way to efficiently or effectively archive the courses in their entirety, including student work, messages, tracking, etc…; the current archive workaround is to leave courses up for period of time; for us that would mean one year for most course and six years for CS courses; there is no way to hide archived courses from users; thus, faculty would see every single course section they had taught over past year or 6 years; students would see every single course section taken over past year and every CS course for 6 years.

According to Gubbins, the conclusion that Kennesaw State has come to, based on these and other reasons, is that Vista currently lacks scalability and has higher costs in terms of resources ... (see KSU document shared: http://www.westga.edu/~distance/steeringcommittee/3.0_KSU_vista_itac_oct04.htm). If one section takes an hour to copy up then our current 800 would take 800 hours – it is just not possible to do this for faculty; even eCore faculty are being told that ALT cannot do this, they'll have to do it themselves or re-build each term and it's far harder than CE's backup/ restore function and far more time-consuming. The only people whom we have talked with that are happy with Vista are the ones that run very few sections or have little CE admin experience to compare it with. Most USG users of Vista have very few course sections running on Vista and are instead using CE or nothing at all for other courses. It take four servers and four back-up servers, with staff monitoring theses servers day and night to keep them running… all of this for about 900 course sections. UWG runs 800
course sections alone, much more stably, with much less and much better resources.

d. Mike Russell added that he believed the Vista system was designed to run on individual campuses, not on one or two centralized servers with all of the sections from BOR schools combined.

e. Faculty member May O’Neill stated that she would like to explore the Vista tool as a designer but would not use the tool for a live course until the issues of beginning term stability, backing up, and archiving courses were resolved.

f. Christy Talley mentioned that Vista still doesn’t integrate with Campus Pipeline and according to Brian Finnegan from ALT, he doesn’t know when it will work—but they are working on it.

g. Russell brought up the fact that the future version of WebCT CE 6.0 appears to be moving to the same database system that Vista uses. Clay asked Gubbins to find out how far along the development of CE 6.0 is and if we can get a copy here to test.

h. Other concerns mentioned were a history of system collapse, little progress in the resolution of bugs, and issues regarding faculty autonomy.

2. Melanie Clay brought up Vice President Hynes’ request for us to explore the possibility of offering a complete online program to benefit Teacher Education, specifically for K-12 Math or Science teachers. As Clay explained that incentives for developing or teaching online courses varied from department to department; and that we as a service entity, cannot dictate or force a program that the department does not want to offer.

a. Gubbins explained that while Dalton College had never had any online course at all, prior to 2001, it is now offering a completely online BSIT program. The WebCT Admin at Dalton State College explained that the program would never have come to fruition without the directive and additional support resources provided from the Dalton president.

b. The committee recommended that, if UWG is to offer a complete online program to benefit Teacher Education, the directive and supporting resources would most likely have to come from the VPAA and deans.