Distance Learning Steering Committee

Minutes of the Meeting

9/27/2004

Members Present: Kathy Kral, Mary O'Neill, Matthew Clay, Paul Smith, Brian McCrary, Melanie Clay, Janet Gubbins, Stacey Rowland and Diane Williamson.

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

Summary of Decision Items

1. The committee decided to recommend to the Pipeline Committee that the myUWG Pipeline portal CourseTools be turned on for all course sections for Spring 2005, so that every link under the Courses tab would automatically lead to a CourseTools page, a WebCT site if the faculty chose to use WebCT instead, or other URL of the faculty's choice.

2. The committee recommended that all distance courses, whether taught by WebCT or any other technology, still have to fill out the Course Proposal Form, as approved by the Faculty Senate previously. Non-distance (enhanced) courses, except those using WebCT, do not have to complete the form; that data will no longer be reasonable to try and collect. Non-distance WebCT courses may be given the option of a shorter version of the form. The DE dept will address this issue.

3. The committee recommended that UWG stay on WebCT 4.1 CE for the 2005-2006 school year.

Discussion

1. Melanie Clay reviewed the agenda for the meeting:

   a. To discuss the WebCT/ Pipeline integration… how the Fall implementation policies/ procedures might be improved upon in the Spring

   b. To review the DL Course Evaluation Summaries for Spring 2004

   c. To discuss Vista implementation

2. Melanie Clay proposed that the myUWG Pipeline portal CourseTools be turned on for all course sections for Spring 2005, so that every link under the Courses tab would automatically lead to a CourseTools page OR a WebCT site if the faculty chose to use WebCT instead.

Kathy Kral explained the reasons why the tools were not initially turned on during Fall 2004 (worry over confusion by students looking for info that would never come if faculty elected not to use the tools; lack of lead time to train; and concern over lack of tracking and back-up functionality) and the reasons why we might want to recommend to the Pipeline Committee that the tools be turned on in the Spring (faculty who knew of the tools wanted then back, due to ease-of-use issues; student help calls soared when they had links to courses that either went nowhere or caused an error message). Janet Gubbins and Kathy Kral told of speaking to other institutions who had done this (turned on the portal CourseTools) and reported back that it rarely created a problem for anyone.. if a faculty chose to not to use it then the students just ignored the link. Gubbins did warn that there might be an occasion where the students take it upon themselves to have class discussions without the instructor; that the Pipeline Committee may want to consider turning of the Discussion Board by default, for this reason.

The committee decided to recommend to the Pipeline Committee that the myUWG Pipeline portal CourseTools be turned on for all course sections for Spring 2005, so that every link under the Courses tab would automatically lead to a CourseTools page, a WebCT site if the faculty chose to use WebCT instead, or other URL of the faculty's choice.

3. Melanie Clay posed the question “Could someone teach a distance course via the myUWG portal CourseTools?

   a. Melanie brought up the issue of how the DE dept. would then keep track of distance courses? She reviewed the reasons why keeping track of this info is necessary (to make sure distance courses follow accreditation guidelines; make sure distance courses are marked in the bulletin as such so that students know what they are getting; and to maintain valuable data).
Matthew Clay brought up that even now this could be happening – that faculty could teach a distance course using a listserv and we no know about it. Janet Gubbins noted that some faculty are already using other tools like Moodle and publisher's PageOut to teach enhanced courses.

The committee recommended that all distance courses, whether taught by WebCT or any other technology, still have to fill out the Course Proposal Form, as approved by the Faculty Senate previously. Non-distance (enhanced) courses, except those using WebCT, do not have to complete the form; that data will no longer be reasonable to try and collect. Non-distance WebCT courses may be given the option of a shorter version of the form. The DE dept will address this issue.

b. Janet Gubbins brought up concern over the lack of course-specific backup and restore features in myUWG portal CourseTools. She noted that SACS accreditation of distance programs specifically mentions the ability to maintain course archiving, back-up, and restore data as a requirement of accredited distance programs. Kathy Kral agreed that the backup and restore features in myUWG portal CourseTools are far more difficult to use than those in WebCT and that the portal CourseTools do not include the valuable tracking data that WebCT CE does. However, Kral added that ITS does do a server backup every night and could, if they had to, find and restore myUWG portal CourseTools data for a class. The process would be time intensive and the data might not be as inclusive as needed. Janet Gubbins reviewed the limitations of the myUWG portal CourseTools, as compared to the current WebCT CE tools.

The committee decided to “highly recommend that the myUWG portal CourseTools not be used to teach a true distance course at this time” until back-up/restore concerns could be resolved and tested. Other than that, the myUWG portal CourseTools were recommended as an easy alternative to WebCT, for use in enhancing a traditional course or providing an integrated to link to a faculty's website or other tool. The committee decided that the best plan would be to educate faculty and staff of the pros/cons of each approach and the required distance course policies.

4. Janet Gubbins asked the committee to make a recommendation regarding the timeline for changing over to the USG's WebCT Vista. Gubbins explained that according to the USG's timeline, everyone is supposed to change over by next Fall 2005… this would mean that we'd need to start training on Vista and migrating courses this term, in order to meet that deadline.

Diane Williamson asked how the eCore courses were performing on Vista, this Fall term. Janet Gubbins replied that there are issues currently negatively impacting eCore; the move to Vista's format has increased instability and increased support issues; some of the course content is in need of updating to fit in the new Vista format; some faculty need to be more properly trained on how to teach a course that they themselves did not design; and some faculty need assistance editing and releasing information using Vista. Janet Gubbins shared two handouts: Concern about Vista and a draft of Known Issues.

Diane asked if the WebMBA has migrated yet. Janet said they have not. Janet Gubbins warned that the BOR has said that they will stop funding to any source that wishes to use anything other than Vista. Melanie Clay questioned how that could be achieved if a faculty person wished to use the myUWG portal CourseTools that we are already using?

Mary O'Neill explained that there is no way that she could see the Nursing program using Vista, based on its instability. She stated that even though the product is improving, the current Vista system is still absolutely unacceptable. O'Neill explained that their non-traditional returning RNs are scared enough of technology as it is… that if their program experienced the down-time and slow-downs that eCore has, it would give their program a bad name. Gubbins agreed that when eCore students call the helpdesk because of issues with Vista, they are often blaming UWG… no matter the reality of the situation. Melanie Clay asked how many others actually have live courses and how many courses on the current Vista servers. Janet Gubbins reported that they are an estimated 900 course sections from the various institutions combined, on the GSU Vista server. In comparison, UWG has approximately 800 course sections on our own CE server. Gubbins also added that two other WebCT admin had contacted her by phone to discuss their unhappiness with the stability of Vista and the BOR's forced migration.

The committee recommended that UWG stay on WebCT 4.1 CE for the 2005-2006 school year.

5. Melanie Clay handed out a copy of the DL Course Evaluation Summaries for Spring 2004, for term review by the Distance Learning Steering Committee for discussion of improvements and actions as needed.

a. Janet Gubbins pointed out that students specifically mentioned liking PowerPoint delivered through Impatica. Impatica is a software that was purchased using TechFee funds, to help alleviate some of the technical problems some students were having trying to access PPTs online.
b. Mary O'Neill noted that a basic lack of computer skills is an issue with their non-traditional RNs. Janet Gubbins suggested that departments require students to display a certain level of computer proficiency before accepting a student into a program.

6. The meeting was adjourned at 12:30pm.