

Duke Office of Information Technology

Minutes

January 19, 2006

Members present : Ed Anapol, John Board, Shailesh Chandrasekharan, Tammy Closs, Dick Danner represented by Wayne Miller, Angel Dronsfield, Brian Eder represented by Michael Holt, Nevin Fouts, Tracy Futhey, Michael Gettes, Daron Gunn, Billy Herndon, Deborah Jakubs represented by Ed Gomes, David Jamieson-Drake represented by Bob Newlin, Eileen Kuo, Roger Loyd, Joseph Meyerowitz, Kyle Johnson, George Oberlander, Lynne O'Brien, Mike Pickett, Rafael Rodriguez, Molly Tamarkin, Christopher Timmins, Trey Turner III, Robert Wolpert, Steve Woody

Guests: Chris Meyer, OIT; Neal Caidin, CIT; Tod Orr, ASM; Roger Barr, BME; Tom Wall, Perkins; Ned Neeley, ASM; Julian Lombardi, OIT; Bruce Cunningham, Registrar's Office; John Campbell, SISS; Dmitriy Morozov, Comp. Sci.; Ginny Cake, OIT; Chris Cramer, OIT

Start time : 4:06 p.m.

I. Review of Minutes and Announcements:

- ? Tallman Trask attending February 2nd ITAC meeting
- ? Peter Lange attending March 2nd ITAC meeting
- ? Scholarly Content Officer position announcement

Chris Cramer says the scholarly content officer position is one that will report to Lynne O'Brien, and will be responsible for intellectual property issues. I'm on the search committee for this position, and we have identified two candidates and picked a date for one coming in for an interview. The two individuals who are going to be interviewing are going to give presentations on how digital rights effects copyright. It will not be a technical presentation, but more of a discussion of policy implications.

Lynne asked also to set up an open time in the afternoon so those who can't make it to the presentation will have another chance to come by.

II. Courseware

A. Submitting grades online

Bruce Cunningham, Lynne O'Brien

Bruce says the first group of folks who used Gradebook, the online grading system, was the medical school in fall of 2004. We rolled it out to the rest of the faculty for grading of summer sessions 1 and 2. That went very well, and 60% of grades in that period were entered online. We got very little feedback, and what we got was mostly positive. There

were some access issues, such as with faculty who had never used Storm. We sent lists out to departments ahead of time to let know which faculty didn't have passwords, so a lot of that was encountered ahead of time. We did a full-blown rollout in fall for both midterm and final grading; we sent a memo and a short instruction piece to all faculty who had undergrad enrollment. We had the best response on midterm grades we've ever had. It was a combination of the ease of entering online grades and we were very aggressive in following up on those who hadn't submitted grades.

Based on the feedback, there are three main issues. One is that there is no way to be sure midterm grades that have been entered are there. Final grades are posted to the official records, but midterms aren't. Second, when entering grades, the system was set up so that it edits each time you enter a grade, and that took a while. We were able to adjust system so it just edits when someone saves the whole list for a class. People also had concerns about radio buttons versus dropdowns, and we fixed that for the final grading process.

For fall usage, we got 72% of grades entered online. The school that entered the most grades online was the nursing school, which isn't surprising given its history. Since we started Storm, Nursing has told faculty "you will use it!" The second most frequent users were Fuqua. The least frequent was Divinity. We got a very positive response very little negative feedback, though there were some folks who wrote to us with issues. Another side issue we ran into were faculty who weren't actually listed as teaching on their classes, so we're going to be fairly aggressive with departments this semester. We got a few reports of the system crashing during grade entry. We did some tracking, but it hard to tell what the issue was – it was from faculty here and there, so it could have been a provider issue or a local PC issue. There was no evidence that the system itself was crashing.

The Gradebook system has an upload capability, and faculty can upload grades from a spreadsheet or directly from Blackboard. We saw about 40-50 cases of that, so not that many. We are going to do a quick survey to faculty who did and didn't use it to find out why.

John Campbell says usability was a big issue, and faculty wanted to make changes quickly if needed to be made.

Shailesh Chandrasekharan asks if a faculty member makes a mistake, does Gradebook have some kind of support system?

Bruce says if people call the help desk, they can help out. If it's a grading issue, one thing that's good is if you click on a send button accidentally before you have entered all of the grades, it actually won't let you do that.

B. Blackboard course retention policy

Lynne O'Brien, Neal Caidin, Chris Meyer

I believe the assumption was stated that the rationale for a Blackboard Course Site Retention Policy will likely apply to retention policies for other academic tools used by the institution (this is stated in the proposed policy itself)

I also recollect mentioned the fact that we anticipate greater growth in the disk space consumption of the system due to DDI (Duke Digital Initiative) and the anticipated raising of file size quotas.

Lynne says this is a proposed policy, and I hope to get your feedback on it. So far it has gone to the Blackboard advisory group and ASTEC. The short version of the policy

is that the number of courses using blackboard is expanding, the amount of material is expanding, and number of years we have been doing this is expanding. We feel like we should not keep everything. The time we are proposing is three years; people will always have the chance to roll a course forward. After three years a course would be archived off-system and not be available again. The rationale for the Blackboard retention policy will likely apply to retention policies for other academic tools used by the institution. There are technical and policy reasons for doing this. Part of the policy is to not have people thinking of Blackboard as a permanent record for every course. On the technical side, every time we need to upgrade blackboard, the bigger it is, the more you need to back up and the longer it takes to migrate to new systems. We anticipate greater growth in the disk space consumption of the system due to the Duke Digital Initiative and rising file size quotas. Our concern is that eventually performance issues will arise.

Robert Wolpert says the policy says that after three years a course will be archived; the word “archived” suggests that there will be some way to get them back. Over time Blackboard changes, so how comfortable are you with saying you having the ability to recover these materials?

Lynne says we will not set the expectation that they can get material back.

Robert asks is no way to store the information in an outside space?

Lynne says yes, all course content can be stored; it’s the framework that won’t be retained.

Robert asks how difficult or expensive would it be to take the content and burn it to a CD?

Lynne says with 1,300 courses per semester, it’s not practical for us to do that, but we certainly can provide information so that others can do it themselves.

Molly Tamarkin says problem with that is CDs fails and burning CDs fails; maybe you should just not use the word “archiving.” The other question I had: why three years?

Lynne says the logic is that often courses are taught every other year, and because of people going on sabbatical and traveling it is possible someone might miss something.

Tracy Futhey says you said if someone is going to use a course for next year they can carry it over, but someone could also carry it over because they think they will use it again in a few years.

Lynne says now, if someone teaches the same course for seven years, we would have seven copies of the same course on Blackboard. The new policy would keep the course around, but there would only be one version of the course at any given time.

Daron Gunn asks when you roll sites forward, would students who were in the course the past semester lose access to site?

Lynne says not unless the old copy was reset.

Neal says students would only have access to an older course if the instructor leaves it up.

Michael Gettes asks is there some kind of analysis available on system performance? How much is there to maintain?

Chris says right now it’s using about 160 GB, and it consumes about 25-30 Gigabytes per semester.

Lynne says the issue is not just the storage; it's also the backup and transferring the information to a new server.

Chris says now it takes 10-12 hours to do a restore.

Daron says from a student perspective, if it only takes up 25 gigs per semester you might want to keep a course around for four years, so if student needs something from freshman year when he or she is a senior they can still access it.

C. Brownstone assignment software

Roger Barr

Roger says Brownstone is a web-based program. A student will see an assignment available, get a series of questions, print the questions, work on them, and then come back and enter the answers. If questions can be scored by Brownstone, then it will score the assignment and tell the student which ones he got right and wrong. Depending on the choice of the instructor, it may tell you what the correct answer is. Students have the choice of doing an assignment again or doing related assignments. After a certain point, the assignment is no longer available.

Since it's web-based, students can go anywhere and have access to assignments. I think it's a good program of this kind, and I think it's a value for college courses in general because the paradigm of instructor we familiar with is instructor on one side and student on other. The instructor asks questions, the student responds, and the dialogue continues. Attributes of this paradigm it is important to understand is that the instructor gets quick feedback, hears quickly what the answer is, and the student is faced with another question reasonably quickly. While that's ideal, it doesn't happen too often in college courses. Our response time is very sluggish. Even homework problems may not be collected until a week later. Brownstone is important because it addresses the core issue of asking questions and getting answers. Students like it because they see it as objective and because it has good record keeping. Students are a linked group: this means that if the same questions are asked to everyone in group, answers get propagated. Brownstone gives the instructor the opportunity to have a library of questions from which to be selected for different students, so no student encounters same set of questions. Brownstone also really moves the instructor's time away from things that aren't very productive into time for creating better questions.

Robert Wolpert asks do you find this moves you away from more open-ended questions? Does it change the way you ask questions in a negative way?

Roger says the software doesn't require focused questions in any way. Questions can be asked a lot of different ways.

D. Update on other courseware (Sakai, Moodle)

Michael Gettes, Julian Lombardi

Julian says with the increasing development of course software, we need to look at interoperability. With help from the Mellon Foundation, there was an effort to develop the Open Knowledge Initiative to create a language things could talk to each other in. That initiative resulted in some good things, but it didn't go as far as it intended to. Two years ago, to carry the ball forward, the Sakai project started. Sakai moved forward, primarily as the domain of four institutions: Stanford, Michigan, Indiana, and MIT. They developed a core framework course management system that was derivative of an in-house course management system being developed at one of the schools. The

project was named after one of the chefs on the TV show “Iron Chef” who can make good things out of a lot of little pieces of garbage.

Sakai represents a fairly monolithic course management system not differentiable from other commercial course management systems other than that it is open source. The question is: is the monolithic approach good for something becoming as important as course management system?

Moodle is the second fairly high-profile course management system. Unlike Sakai, Moodle has a more distributive nature and is gaining a high level of acceptance and popularity.

Michael Gettes says Sakai does have the appearances of commercial offerings; although it is open source, it's not easy to get involved in development and future design.

Julian says the Sakai technology is relatively monolithic. It relies on a central database as the chokepoint, so in that sense it's considered something that doesn't scale very well. Moodle has architecture that allows for distribution of resources, so departments could put up their own instances of Moodle.

Michael says Moodle has been around since August 2002, so it has a little more time under its belt. It looks good, but is distributed what is good for the institution?

John board asks is anyone at Duke running this to try it out?

Kyle Johnson says we've had one instance running just for testing, but no one is really using it.

III. Administrative Software

A. SAP iForms rollout this summer and BrassRing (Resumix replacement)

Todd Orr

Iforms is about HR/payroll transaction processing. Before iForms all of that was basically manual. Iforms provides simple, secure access to people, positions, and with addition of BrassRing, applicants. You can make changes to people for hires, terminations, etc. They are routed to the appropriate approvers, and then routed to SAP. We went live with three transactions in August: cost distribution, termination, and personal data changes. To date, 11,000+ transactions have been processed. The TIP program terminated 300 or so positions in one swoop; I can't imagine how they would have been able to do that manually. We've been in pilot mode with the next transaction, which is changing rate of pay or work schedule (full-time to part-time or vice versa).

Next, we are going to start with the hire process for faculty/students, because they don't have the issue of exempt/nonexempt status. We'll go to pilot with that next month, and if all goes well we will roll it out fully across the university and health system. Next we will roll out on position management, reclassifying or creating a position, etc.

The biggest challenge ahead of us is around the hiring of exempt and nonexempt staff because it's tracked by Resumix. We're replacing the applicant tracking piece with software from a vendor called BrassRing. It will be integrated into the whole iForms structure, so that when we go out and train people, we won't even talk about BrassRing. It will be essentially invisible to end user. That is planned to go live June 1. That's the part where we will provide the most training and support to departments. Training needs

have been minimal so far with iForms. Because of the complexity of the processes involved with applicant tracking, we will certainly provide more training.

Technical infrastructure: iForms is authenticated through WebAuth and uses standard SAP structures to route around processes. We're also using the platform tagged as iForms for other SAP functions; the next one is the budget preparation system.

Robert Wolpert says I see Safari missing from list.

Todd says that's an SAP support issue.

Kyle Johnson says said in BrassRing, there are a couple of chunks of functionality needed. One is that it would be good to allow more than one person able to get into applicant referral.

Todd says don't see why that would be problem.

Kyle says second is that we now duplicate the entire HR system so search committees can get in to see stuff; we'd rather do it here so we don't end up with resumes all over the place.

Todd says there is some capability around this; I can go back and get more information. There are ways in the BrassRing environment to easily push out information to a search committee via email.

IV. Discussion: potential upcoming ITAC topics - Mike Pickett

Please look over the list and tell us things you'd like to hear other people talk about. Right before Christmas we talked about Web security policy, and we will be bringing that back. Strategic planning is moving along, and we will talk about how that relates to IT as well as specific things we're talking about for IT planning at Duke. There's lots of interest in network planning and network monitoring. Career tracking and development systems are helping folks think about what might do with those areas. We had a meeting today to talk about piloting a new way of organizing teams of people to do services together. One of the things we talked about was storage and backup services. Are there things you'd like to add toady?

Kyle Johnson says social networking.

Molly Tamarkin says I like having the courseware theme this meeting. It would be nice if do that for future meetings.

Joseph Meyerowitz says from student perspective, events announcement systems.

Lynne O'Brien says maybe we could have a whole meeting on student-focused technologies.

V. Common Solutions Group meeting update - Mike Pickett

I'd like to thank Nevin Fouts for hosting the meeting. This was reported by many folks as one of the best sights it has been in. The long workshop focused on IT governance, and was lead by the ex-CIO of Berkeley. He did a review of how to categorize IT governance in universities: IT monarchy, duopoly, federalized, feudal, and anarchy. The majority of folks in room felt like their institution was a feudal IT government, in which warlords have gathered IT dominance and are holding onto it. That's interesting, because I kept talking about Duke being a federalized approach. Duke was well-represented because we had panel with Tallman Trask and Peter Lange

talked about how governance is done at Duke. The second day was things like email and calendaring. If you go to www.stonesoup.org, all presentations are up there.

End time : 5:32 p.m.

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