

To: Faculty Senate
From: ATAC
Re: Recommendation for new Learning Management System
Date: April 22, 2008

For the past two years, ATAC has been considering the options available to replace the WebCT system as that system will no longer be supported after this year. The committee solicited input from faculty, attended demonstrations from vendors and CNU IT personnel on the various systems, and reviewed comparisons among systems that were available from internet sources.

The committee overwhelmingly recommends a replacement for WebCT for the following reasons:

- extend the educational experience to beyond the classroom which our students, many current faculty members, and future hires expect
- efficiently convey and house course-specific information
- provide faculty with tools to grade, test, and other forms of evaluation
- promote solid undergraduate research and scholastic methods as well as the Honor Code with a source checking function that teaches pre-emptive source citation habits
- maintain consistent practices with peer institutions

The committee concluded that the two systems that would best fit our needs are Moodle, an open source system and Blackboard, the company that purchased Web CT. The features we compared are:

- Cost
- Support
- Functionality
- Appearance
- Ease of use

Cost: The annual cost for licensing Blackboard is \$50,000-\$54,000. This includes technical support and all of the features including a plagiarism tool that is now being purchased separately by several departments. From our survey of faculty it appears that about 50 faculty currently use Web CT. This breaks down to \$1000 per year per faculty member at the current rate. We expect the numbers of users to increase as new faculty members are more comfortable with online management of their courses, and this will decrease the cost per faculty member going forward. The startup costs are estimated to be between \$20,000 and \$50,000. These charges are for the initial installation and implementation, and for integration of Blackboard with Banner.

Moodle is open source so there is no licensing cost for the software. However, in order to keep the program stable and consistent, IT Services must hire an additional dedicated programmer who will support, develop, and maintain the software, as well as cross-train existing personnel in minor duties. Cost is estimated at \$65,000 annually.

Support: Support for Blackboard is part of the licensing price. Support for Moodle is infinitely more complex. When issues arise, dedicated personnel in IT will try to resolve these issues in house, and will also rely on the online Moodle community which is made up of other universities that are also using this software. There is no definite turn around time or guarantee of response through this method. Thus, a down system could result in serious consequences for faculty and students. It is likely that to make Moodle work for our university and tie in with Banner, we will need to write programs to meet our needs. This would be the responsibility of our in house IT Services to fund their personnel for time spent.

Functionality: With the exception of the plagiarism tool that is included in Blackboard, the functionality of the two programs is comparable.

Appearance: Some members of the committee found Moodle to be visually confusing due to the amount of information contained on each page. While individual instructors may be able to alleviate this through the design of the course, it is likely that most users will use the template the way it is presented. Blackboard's appearance is more intuitive.

Ease of Use: The committee consists of faculty members who have been using WebCT and other online course tools, so we are not in the best position to say which system is easier for a new user. However, the availability of training and support in house is crucial. Shannon Phillips, our Instructional Technology expert has considerable experience with Blackboard from her years at Virginia Tech including training and creating a Blackboard community of users for support.

Recommendation: It is the unanimous recommendation of ATAC that CNU purchase Blackboard as the university-wide learning management system. Blackboard's substantial technical support will provide the stability both faculty and students must have in an online information exchange system. Moodle's lack of support will cause instability, thus creating a lack of confidence from faculty and students, and undue burden on CNU's IT Service Department. As is, Moodle is simply not an option unless IT Services hires an additional programmer, where Blackboard would not require a new hire.