Using Web-Based Technology to Enhance First Year Experience Programs

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First Year Programs at the University of Connecticut

- UConn is the Flagship university of the state of Connecticut
- A land-grant, sea-grant, and space-grant Research I Extensive University
- Undergraduate enrollment of 16,600
- 8 campuses – UConn’s main campus is located in Storrs, CT

Our Challenges at the University of Connecticut

- Sizeable First Year Experience program
  - 3,500 new students each year, 2,500 enroll in FYE
  - 120+ instructors and faculty, all volunteer
  - 100+ undergraduate student mentors/teaching assistants
- Program is still relatively new (founded in Fall 1996)
- One credit course (one hour per wk.)
- No text or “mandatory” curriculum

Why Web Technology?

- UConn’s overall commitment to technology
  - Resources (i.e. support, maintenance, $$$)
  - Wide usage amongst senior faculty and their courses
- Cost-effective
- Easily edited and customized
- Allows us to give students timely and immediate information and feedback
- Interactive features can be built in

Our Challenges at the University of Connecticut (con’t.)

- Specialized topics strain guest speaker/ “content expert” resources
- Desire to reach out to all first year students at UConn, even those not in FYE
- Need to foster community and increase student engagement
- Need for easier and more timely program-to-instructor communication

Our Solution: Web Technology

- At UConn, we use WebCT (Web Course Tools), a third-party course management software package purchased and maintained by the University
- Other schools might use similar course management software packages (such as Blackboard) or might use simple web pages to accomplish the same results
Objectives in Implementing Web Technology into FYE
- Extend teaching time
- Foster increased interaction
- Allow motivated students the opportunity to explore topics in depth at their own pace
- Organize around an “official” curriculum
- Vehicle for training new instructors

Objectives in Implementing Web Technology into FYE (con’t.)
- Give new instructors a way to focus their course
- Reach out to ALL first year students
- Better prepare students
- More easily connect instructors/faculty to our program’s central office
- Provide lots of pertinent, timely, and helpful information, yet still be simple and user-friendly in design

Our Three-Pronged Approach to Implementing Web Technology
- Course Websites for each FYE class
- FYI - First Year Interactive portal site
- FYE Instructor Site

A Step-by-Step Process for Implementing Web Technology
1. Create course website template(s)
2. Train instructors
3. Follow-up with instructors
4. Encourage instructors to actively incorporate web technology into their courses
5. Assist students as issues arise
6. [Optional] Create online mechanism to reach new students not in FYE
7. [Optional] Create site for instructors

Implementing Web Technology: A Success?
- Students report a learning curve in using the technology but big benefits in the end

Implementing Web Technology: A Success?
- Faculty report a higher level of engagement with their students
Continuing Challenges

- Instructor/faculty learning curve
- As the technology grows, time demands on our program staff is increasing
- However, with limited resources, web technology still seems to present our program with excellent returns

Questions, Comments, or to Contact us:

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THANK YOU!
University of Connecticut
Sample First Year Experience Course Website

COURSE CALENDAR
Instructors post course dates; our program preloads important University dates and deadlines

COURSE CONTENT
UConn-specific content tailored by our FYE program in conjunction with our campus “content experts”

CLASS EMAIL
Email communication between students and instructors

COURSE SYLLABUS
Easily uploaded and edited by individual course instructors

CLASS DISCUSSIONS
Threaded discussion list allows in-class discussions to continue to take place outside of the classroom

CLASS ASSIGNMENTS
Instructors post assignments here; students can also send in their completed assignments electronically

MY GRADES
Instructors post grades here; students have instantaneous access to their grades as soon as they are posted

LINKS/RESOURCES
Instructors and/or our program can put links to important sites, documents, and other resources here

CLASS PHOTOS
We offer to go into classes and take digital photos of each student to help them learn each other’s names

FYE SURVEY
Program assessment is built right into the course; results are easily and quickly tabulated

INTD180 - FYE University Learning Skills
Be successful from the start! This University Learning Skills course will provide you with all the tools necessary for you to achieve your academic and personal goals at UConn.

Course Calendar  Course Syllabus  Course Content  Class Discussions  Class Email

Class Assignments  Class Photos  My Grades  FYE Survey  Links/Resources
University of Connecticut
FYE Instructor Site

WELCOME MESSAGE
Includes overview of FYE Instructor site

DISCUSSION TOOL
Threaded discussion list for Instructors to post ideas, class problems/challenges and solutions

TRAINING AND WORKSHOP CALENDAR

“BAG OF TRICKS”
Activies and ice breakers that cover UConn FYE’s learning objectives

COURSE CONTENT
UConn FYE Online Textbook

INSTRUCTOR EMAIL
Email communication between instructors and undergraduate peer mentors

WEBCT TIPS, TRICKS AND TOOLS
For getting the most out of the interactive tool

SAMPLE CURRICULUM and SAMPLE SYLLABI

LINKS, ARTICLES, AND RESOURCES RELEVANT TO THE FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE PROGRAM

ROLES OF THE UNDERGRADUATE PEER MENTOR
As a peer, a teaching assistant, a role model, etc.

MEETING, WORKSHOP, AND CONFERENCE REVIEWS
For those who could not attend