Moodle Migration

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The term “Moodle Migration” may not mean much to some students at College of Marin, but for those taking courses online through the Distance Education Program, it amounts to a heap of good news.

Historically, Blackboard has been the primary system for teaching online courses but when COM’s license agreement expires in June, the official transition to Moodle will begin.

“COM’s version of Blackboard for the past few years has been clunky and dated,” said Alisa Klinger, an English teacher who has been assisting instructors with the transition to the new system.

As part of a three-year development plan, COM will soon be changing the Learning Management System for all its Distance Education courses, beginning with a pilot program this summer. It will also be addressing the reaccreditation recommendations made by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges last October.

In accordance with the ACCJC’s recommendations, COM aims to improve the learning resources, library accessibility, and student services for online, evening, and Indian Valley Campus students. It also intends to increase the student success rate in the DE program. Migrating to Moodle should help facilitate these improvements.

For many students, the DE program is a critical part of their education, allowing them to complete course requirements while working full-time. It can also be a great program for students who learn best by re-reading material or listening to information repeatedly.

Dozens of instructors outside the DE program use web enhancements as part of their curriculum and will also benefit from the new program. The transition away from Blackboard is a welcome change for DE and non-DE teachers alike.

“As an instructor, I’m thrilled we are moving to Moodle. I think our students will love it,” said Alice Dieli, who teaches computer literacy in the adult education program.

Among the features that Moodle offers is a checklist feature so students can be sure they are on track with course assignments from week to week. Teachers will also be able to monitor students’ progress and activity more accurately. Overall, the Moodle system is expected to be significantly more user-friendly than Blackboard.

A number of other institutions in the area have already switched to Moodle as their primary LMS, including Dominican University, Sonoma State University, the Peralta Community Colleges and City College of San Francisco.

“With Moodle, COM becomes part of a widespread, international community for support and development,” said Klinger.
The Moodle Pilot Program begins this summer by offering three courses: ENGL 150 and 151, and HED 130. The courses will be taught by instructors with experience and training in Blackboard and Moodle. No regular DE courses will be offered this summer.

Phase I of the transition begins in Fall 2011. New DE courses and former Blackboard courses will be taught using Moodle at that time. The course offerings are not yet final but Phase I should include about 31 DE sections and/or courses.

Spring 2012 marks Phase II of the transition. The goal of this phase is to use Moodle for all DE courses as well as regular face-to-face courses that use an online component.

Updates are available online on the DE homepage at www.marin.edu/distance.