Moodle

Spring 2012 has brought phase two of Moodle, which is now available to all students and faculty. Moodle stands for “Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment”, and is used in 214 countries in more than 75 languages, with over 55,110 registered sites. The program was ranked #8 in the Top 100 list of 2011 with the Center for Learning and Performance Technologies (C4LPT), with Twitter coming in at #1. C4LPT compiled the list based on the Top Ten

**Moodle students learn from a distance**

By C.J. McCormick

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Tools List of 531 learning professionals across the world.

The transition to Moodle allows for a more comprehensive experience with Distance Education for students and faculty. Participants can chat, post videos, comment on other student’s posts and create their own. Uploading an avatar makes the interactions more personal, enhancing the experience of the “virtual classroom”.

Viviana Lletget, COM student since Fall 2010, is majoring in Computer Science. Lletget is enrolled in her first Distance Learning Course (DLC) this semester, English 151.

“I didn’t know what to expect from Moodle, but it was nice because I didn’t need to set anything up— it already knew all my classes,” she said. “It feels interconnected to it all, even though it’s a DLC. It’s like a virtual classroom and you know that people are present and will be responsive to your posts.”

While the transition to Moodle has been positive by virtue of the overall accessibility and fluidity of the system, COM only offers 12 DLC’s and comes in fourth from the bottom of the list of California community colleges in terms of Distance Education classes offered. Palomar College in San Marcos, San Diego offers the most distance learning courses, with 479.

The Distance Education Committee at COM meets about every two weeks, and the future of distance education will be a collaborative effort between students, faculty, and the administration. The distance education classes at COM have a fill rate of 100 percent, with long wait lists. However, not all students are finding the program easy to work with. A second year student who preferred to remain anonymous said, “When I first joined the class, my instructor was having trouble posting assignments and topics. I’m not sure if she ever figured out how to fix it because I dropped the class.” The student went on to say, “The instructor didn’t organize the discussion boards well. Each student just submitted a post without creating meaningful responses to each other’s posts. I think part of the reason was that students were unsure how to use the forums.”

Training sessions are offered to faculty members throughout the year on Moodle, to ensure familiarity and effectiveness with the system. Given that it is a new LMS, there will always be a learning curve for students and faculty.

Alisa Klinger, English Instructor, Distance Education and Online Writing Center Coordinator at COM shared her perspective on Moodle. “The two best things about Moodle are its accessibility and affordability. It is an LMS of the highest quality and one that is used by thousands of educational institutions. We are part of the international Moodle Community, and we do not have to reinvent the wheel or pay a proprietary entity for Moodle.”

Klinger, along with Ingrid Kelly, English Instructor and Online Writing Center Coordinator, were the driving forces behind the Online Writing Center’s redesign in Moodle. It was funded through a grant from the Educational Excellence Innovation Fund (EEIF), from the Office of the President, Dr. David Wain Coon, and awarded to them in Fall 2011. “(The goal was) to migrate the OWC to Moodle, and make it more a robust writing support service available to all registered COM students anytime,” said Klinger.

The OWC is open 24/7 to help students with writing assignments, grammar, idea development, organization, as well as research and essays. OWC offers additional support with transfer essays, scholarship, job applications, resumes and cover letters.

Paul Byrne is a first semester student at COM with plans of going into Nuclear or Civil Engineering. Byrne uploaded his resume on the OWC, and was provided with feedback in less than 24 hours.

“The instructor that helped me was very nice and helped me find small errors in my resume that I had skimmed over,” Bryn said. “The OWC is extremely useful and easy to use. It also takes up no time, so I don’t have to sit around while someone else looks over my work.”

The OWC currently has 252 students that self-registered. The entire process is quite easy and takes less than a minute. Students can register for the OWC by logging into their MyCOM account, and clicking on the Distance Education Link. On the right side of the screen click on “Moodle”, after which you will see the link for the OWC.

Courtney Buffington, featured COM Poster Student, is in her second semester at COM and an Art Education Major. Buffington expressed that Klinger and Kelly are “doing a wonderful job at continuously working to expand the resources available through the OWC. I would like to see more students using the OWC as the norm, not the exception. I think it would be great for the Professors to encourage their students to make use of it before they submit their papers.”

Buffington questioned whether there may be a stigma attached to the OWC, and whether students may somehow feel “less than” by making use of resources available. As Klinger pointed out, “Most students benefit from getting help in writing. This way you have a record of it you can refer to in the future.”

The OWC provides benefits to all students at COM, regardless of what level they are at. “Not everyone comes from the same background,” Buffington says. “How do you know if high school adequately prepared you, or with years away from school you may not remember certain things? All the answers you need are right in front of you, there are so many resources available through the OWC.”

For further information about Moodle, students can access Frequently Asked Questions at “http://www.marin.edu/DE/faq.html”. Student Support services can be accessed at “http://www.marin.edu/DE/student”.

Since the transition to Moodle, technical support requests have dropped significantly, but can be sent to moodlehelp@marin.edu.