Chapter VIII

CMS Implementation as a Catalyst for Curricular Change

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Abstract

In this chapter, we draw on examples from selected disciplines to highlight how implementing a course management system can encourage curricular discussions and catalyze curricular change at a university. We suggest that broad use of a CMS can both drive and support changes in teaching and curricular development. We close by providing some best practices and concrete suggestions on how to use a CMS to foster technology-enhanced curricular change.
Introduction

An art history faculty member wishes to provide students easier access to her slide collections, thereby hoping to improve the learning outcomes in her class. A biology faculty member and his 20 teaching assistants look for better methods to manage and coordinate their 40 laboratory sections, providing a more consistent experience for students across varied sections and setting standards for student feedback. A sociology graduate student instructor wishes for a way to carry rich in-class conversations beyond the two-hour discussion section he leads, deepening student learning and building a sense of community among his students. A group of nursing faculty members asks for a simple way to provide distant students access to their lecture materials, allowing them to work and take classes concurrently.

In each of these examples, the course instructors or program leaders are searching for better ways to meet the needs of their classes and programs. In many cases, new technologies offer potential for meeting these needs and improving teaching and learning. However, many colleges and universities have found that significant investments in technology have not met their expectations for bringing about these types of educational changes. Difficulty in learning to use new hardware and software has limited many faculty members’ experimentation with technology in teaching, and faculty with minimal technology skills often find it difficult to envision ways technology could improve their teaching or enhance their curricula. While some more technically adept faculty have had success in creating impressive new course materials or making substantive changes in their curricula, these faculty — as well as their “low-tech” colleagues — are often dismayed at the time and effort needed for this innovation. Thus, faculty members with both low and high technical proficiency often forego technology-based curricular change.

At Duke University, as at many other institutions in the U.S. (Morgan, 2003), we have found that the adoption of a Web-based course management system has served as a practical and effective tool for integrating technology with curricular change. Our CMS is a tool available institution-wide and is used by faculty in nearly all nine of Duke’s schools. By learning a few basic features of the CMS, faculty have acquired a common understanding of technology tools and their potential application in university instruction and have a common platform for more deliberate infusion