LMS Faculty Forum Notes – Selected Written responses from some of the
Q&A
9/27/07

1. What is DELTA’s position on keeping WolfWare going? We thought your plan was to evolve WolfWare?

The functionality of WolfWare will not go away, and there are no plans to dismantle WolfWare at this time. When we adopted Blackboard Vista, it was our goal to interweave Vista and WolfWare into a more integrated environment from the user. Unfortunately, because of the vast amount of resources needed to simply keep Vista running, this integration has not been possible at this point. Our hope is that in moving towards an open source solution, that we will be able to build on the existing functionality in WolfWare, leveraging what we already have with additional tools. The elements of WolfWare that are kept because their functionality is not available elsewhere will need to be rewritten, because the code base is 10 years old.

2. What tools do people use in Vista as compared to WolfWare?

While this varies, an analysis of the tool usage using fall 2006 data indicated that the majority of Vista users utilize the following tools:
- 98% of Vista users were using the Vista discussions tool (14% of the WolfWare users were using the WolfWare discussions tool)
- 60% of Vista users were using the Gradebook tool (13% of the WolfWare users were using the Gradebook tool); and 80% of the students in Vista had accessed the “MyGrades” tool to view entries in the online gradebook.
- 42% of Vista users were using the Announcements Tool (no announcements tool in WolfWare)
- 33% of Vista users were using the Assignments Tool (3.3% of WolfWare users were using the Assignments tool)
- 20% of Vista users were using the Calendar Tool (no calendar tool in WolfWare)
- 7% of Vista users were using the Chat Tool (no chat tool in WolfWare)
- Both Vista and WolfWare were used to store content, but WolfWare appeared to be storing more larger files, and more media files. About 30% of Vista sections were estimated to have a large amount of content that would need significant migration resources.
- There are also a number of other tools that WolfWare does not have that get utilized, in Vista, including, but not limited to: the Learning Modules (28% of sections, includes selective release), and add URL entries (67% of sections).

3. Which LMS/CMS are you promoting in DELTA? Do I use Vista any more? Do I want to make that investment for new users?

We are asking users to use the tools they need based on their instructional situation. Right now, that may mean using Vista, Elluminate, WolfWare, some combination of the three, or perhaps in addition to other tools (WebAssign, etc.). We need to be led by pedagogy and not the product.
You can, however, work with the users to make their content as transportable as possible, and you can ask us for help on that.

4. You were projecting a hypothetical case where you would run both Moodle and Vista, is that feasible?

We are committed to supporting our Vista users through any transition, and the minimal time needed for a transition will probably be around two years from the start of a Moodle pilot, assuming Moodle works well within the NC State infrastructure. Running both systems really isn’t possible over any significant period of time because of resources. At some point, we will have to decide which path to commit to, because of the available resources.

5. We hope that whatever decision is made will to be “user friendly,” because it is enough of a challenge to do put stuff in a course management system, even without the problems we had in the spring.

We are keenly aware that it isn’t easy for faculty to use these systems, especially at first. The ease of use of these systems is one of our main concerns in the discussions we have in-house. First of all, if we move to another system, then we have (in the previous migration), and we will (in future migrations), take the philosophy that we are migrating faculty, and not just content. Every time that we have changed course management systems/technologies prior, we’ve always communicated the reality that the product selected is the “best today.” These systems are in an evolving market/product space, and a lot is still changing and will continue to do so. As a campus, we must be ready to handle change in this space.

6. I work with a group that delivers about twenty online sections per semester and I’m trying to encourage these instructors to give you feedback about problems they have with Vista. Do you want us to send a help message every time we have a problem?

We do want to hear it. And we will offer to attend one of your staff meetings if you’d like to directly give us feedback as a group. The answer you will get from us regarding the issues you are experiencing is probably that we have reported it, as a number of the issues know are “known bugs”. The more people we hear from, though, the better our analysis if we have a local problem that we can fix. When it comes to product enhancement, we have to send it to Blackboard because we can’t make modifications.

7. Is there more info on Moodle, and when you will have a pilot?

You can find more information on Moodle at http://moodle.org/. We don’t have the details worked out yet as we wanted to get input from these forums, but we will make some more concrete plans soon. Hopefully sooner than next fall, but it requires more talk in-house. Our goal for this forum today was not to commit to the details of a pilot, but to throw out the idea so that we can get support. We want to engage the IT support units across campus and get faculty volunteers. If you want to participate in a Moodle pilot, please email learntech@ncsu.edu.

8. I can’t move my files from WolfWare to Vista because I need a large space for files. I hope that you will maintain the file system access.
In fact, that is one of the things that we like about Moodle. Course content lives in the file system. It makes buckets and puts files in the buckets and manages them, but we are very pleased that it stores data space.

9. Where do we put our feedback in and get heard in this process?

There is a variety of channels. We’ll have discussions, and feedback is welcome through the usual campus channels and directly to us. One venue will certainly be to participate in the TLTR, because we will engage this community as part of the process. We are certainly interested in feedback. We will engage all of our connections among faculty and we’d like all colleges involved. The pilot will be an input gathering stage to see if Moodle is best fit right now for the university.