

May 7, 2009

Central Committee for Educational Technology
Annual Report to the Faculty, Academic Year 2008-2009

The Central Committee for Educational Technology met 10 times in academic year 2008-2009. The usual task of the Committee is to solicit and evaluate faculty proposals for the Student Computer Access Program, otherwise known as SCAP, and award SCAP funds to the applicants. Because SUNY Central did not allocate funds this year, instead we focused our attention on two other tasks: VCR availability in the classroom and considering alternatives to Blackboard.

VCRs in the Classroom

One of our members conveyed questions and concerns some faculty had regarding the persistent need for VCRs in classrooms, because in some cases, VHS tapes cannot be legally converted to DVD format. Accordingly, Academic Computing and IMS determined which classrooms had VCRs, and the Committee sent a list of these rooms to the Scheduling office. We completed the task with a memo to Deans and Department Chairs, informing them that faculty can make requests for a classroom with a VCR when preparing a new semester's schedule.

Alternatives to the Blackboard Course Management System (CMS)

The Committee considered designing a technology survey, but before this could take shape, Jon Lewit approached us to review alternatives to the new Blackboard 9 upgrade. We looked at the Angel and Moodle course management systems. Primarily, we focused on comparing their features to Blackboard's to establish whether they might be as good as or better than Blackboard, and perhaps realize a cost savings. Linda Smith of

Academic Computing arranged demonstrations (“webinars”) for the Committee with representatives of Angel Learning and Moodlerooms, a vendor who supports Moodle users. We found that Moodle lacked a *Communities* component, and that their *Repository* was inadequate as an alternative to Blackboard’s *Content Collection*, which is needed to support ERes. On the other hand, Angel had many more features comparable to Blackboard in addition to some plusses. These included a SUNY-wide contract that encompasses many Angel installations across the University, support for the product from ITEC in Buffalo, and a more elegant and flexible interface than Blackboard’s.

By the end of year, the Committee believed that it was worthwhile to continue to evaluate Angel into next fall. First, we planned to identify and assemble a focus group of New Paltz Blackboard “power users” to evaluate the features of Angel in depth, possibly during a session where questions and concerns they might have could be addressed by an Angel representative. Next we planned to consult with a SUNY campus that had already migrated from Blackboard to Angel. We had proposed to contact Oneonta’s head of Information Technology to thoroughly discuss that campus’s experience migrating from Blackboard to Angel.

Our plan was that if we decided that Angel still was a viable alternative, in the fall we would present our findings to the Academic Affairs Committee for their consideration. Then we anticipated the issue would be brought before the whole faculty.

We learned just last Wednesday night, however, that Blackboard has acquired Angel in a deal that is expected to be complete by the end of this month. Considerations of system features, customer support, and cost, both for Blackboard and existing Angel instances, are completely up in the air. We simply do not know what will come to pass as

a Blackboard/Angel hybrid goes forward. The Committee will have to explore the impact this acquisition will have on Angel. It is disappointing that the field of course and learning management system providers to higher education and other sectors is dwindling.

The co-Chairs wish to thank the members of the Committee, who worked earnestly, thoughtfully, and collegially on our projects throughout the year. The entire Committee wishes to thank Linda Smith for her assistance and advice, sharing her knowledge related to Blackboard and other CMSs, and for organizing demonstrations of both Angel and Moodle.

Respectfully submitted by Rebecca Adae and Susan DeMaio

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