LMS Team Meeting Minutes
January 29, 2010

Members Present: Karen McPhaul, Janice Stewart, Steve Leadon, Brent McCardle, Dave Sorenson, Megan Nicholson, Susan Horton, Charlene West, Tracy Mancini, Becky Roehrs.

Guests: Patrick Coin

Updates:

1. Karen informed the team that Erin Riney had to resign from the LMS team for personal reasons. After consulting with Christine Kelly Cleese about whether she would want to put another Developmental Studies representative on the team and hearing that Christine did not see it as a necessity, we will not add a replacement team member at this time. Karen did ask us all to be vigilant about considering the needs and concerns of our colleagues who are not as comfortable or familiar with technology, since Erin had been a good reminder of them for us.
2. Karen also relayed the news that Dr. Evans agreed to extend our LMS team recommendation deadline to March 31 (from February 28). The extended deadline will still fit with the budgeting and planning timeline to allow us to plan for next steps before many faculty leave for the summer, if needed.

Discussion of NCCCS Assessment Report Summary:

After reviewing the North Carolina Community College System's Assessment Report Summary, team members had many thoughts about how it was or was not useful to our own charge. One member said the report seemed to echo a lot of our own team comments and basically names Moodle as a viable alternative to Blackboard. Another said she was not happy with the research cited in the report, since they seemed to survey people who were unhappy with Blackboard to begin with and did not represent those who were happy with it. Another member called it a "pretty flawed study," saying they worked mostly with smaller schools without many issues whose goal was to be cost-effective, not to provide the best LMS for the school. Someone noted that Sakai had not been ready/available for preview when the study came out, so it is not included as an alternative. The summary did point out that the system expected no savings from a switch until later down the road due to the cost of training and migrating. Karen noted that since Durham Tech has not been using Blackboard for hosting, any route we choose will be more expensive (especially if the System no longer subsidizes).

Team members wondered about the future health of Moodle as a company. Dave said that while changes are inevitable, open-source software cannot all of a sudden go private, so there is no real concern that Moodle could go "closed-source." Karen also mentioned that Moodle 2.0 is due for release in Beta form in March and should be widely available in July, at which time, there may be some improvements that would

appeal to the group. One team member urged the team to build a cost analysis with estimated costs for the next three to five years for each of the alternative LMS's we are considering.

Karen mentioned that the NCCCS report indicates their "next step" is to appoint a study group to determine the best LMS for the Community College system and to address hosting, training, a systemwide hosting solution, and support for dual-system project during the migration period. Knowledge of such a study group led some team members to want to delay a final decision, since the System's decisions could impact our choices. For example, if the System chose to offer support to community colleges using Moodle, then it might be wise to use Moodle, and so on. Though we couldn't necessarily be "forced" to use Moodle, it might be financially unrealistic to choose a different alternative in such a case.

Charlene, Karen, Susan, and Dave sat in on a Sakai webinar last week. They report that Sakai looks a lot like Moodle in terms of course set-up, but a lot of the features look like Blackboard, such as the student panel appearing on the left, a more polished look, options for deploying tests, copying tests from course to course, etc.

Charlene mentioned that Moodle makes it difficult to preview a test when creating it. The tests look clean from the student view, but less so from the instructor view. The set-up has a lot more steps (this is for View/Complete Assignments). It is also difficult to attach document files in student feedback sections on View/Complete. Brent noted that it took a long time to export tests from Blackboard to Moodle. With regard to coding tests so students can't print them, Moodle has a check box that makes it hard to print tests – an easier option than exists on Blackboard.

The group discussed the fact that competition among open-source software providers creates a better product. Blackboard could have trouble surviving the open-source competition. Still, all of these open-source options are still in the early stages, so we can't be sure what will come out (whereas Blackboard is kind of more in its mid-life period). We are dealing in some ways with known vs. unknown quantities.

Team members once again discussed the viability of charging students $5.00 more in their student activity fees to cover the cost of staying with Blackboard (or switching to another LMS). We were reminded that Bill Ingram and Wanda Maggart seem to be in support of such an activity fee increase, so we should keep that in mind as we proceed with cost analysis and recommendations. There was some concern noted about faculty stress levels when it comes to migration of courses, if that's the route we choose, since there are many vacancies and fewer faculty available to serve on committees and advise. Faculty are being asked to do more and more to cover for the vacancies, and course migration from Blackboard to a new system "might just push some faculty over the edge!"   Karen reminded us that she once heard the head of Blackboard make the statement that he does not think Blackboard is that expensive, and considering the cost of accounting and data systems the campus uses, it's really not. We may need to help shift perceptions about cost so that the College will set

aside more money for LMS. The question should not be "Which LMS should we use?" but "What do we need to best support student learning?"

Team Survey Results:

The group reviewed the results of the anonymous survey in which the ten team members described their present thoughts about Blackboard and Moodle. The team seems to be "all over the place" in terms of reaching a final decision, with 1 member "completely confused," 2 "neutral – either way could be fine," 2 "somewhat inclined to move to Moodle," 2 "strongly favor moving to Moodle," and 3 "strongly favor staying with Blackboard."

The team suggested that we survey all instructors at Durham Tech to see the ways they use Blackboard and their comfort levels. If we do, the survey should be as objective as possible so the results are easy to read and analyze (not too many open-ended or qualitative questions). We could use the Bb-Announce list to reach part-time instructors who use Blackboard. We can ask instructors if they have experience with Moodle or other LMS's to get their insights.

There was some concern that instructors might say "more video" would be a desired feature – and that the issue is not really about LMS's, but about a streaming server. So we will need to educate people about that and consider the needs for a streaming server in a separate discussion. Some ideas for the survey include the following:

- List out features of Blackboard and ask what are the top 3 (most important) to the instructor
- Ask for a self-assessment of the instructor's level of use (beginner, advanced…)
- Ask about learning curve information/comfort with change
- Start with an instructor survey, and maybe do a student survey down the line

Going Forward:

The LMS team recommendation may need to be that Durham Tech should pilot Moodle in the summer and fall before making a final decision about staying with Blackboard or switching to another system. Suggesting a pilot might give us the time needed to hear back about the NCCCS study group and systemwide decisions that could affect our budget or support.

We need to do a cost analysis to have a better handle on the cost of staying/changing. We may be able to use the 9 implementation steps listed in the System Report as a partial guide. It will be difficult to estimate the cost of migrating course content, since it mostly involves faculty time, but we DO NOT WANT TO LOSE THAT FACTOR IN OUR DECISION-MAKING PROCESS, or a huge amount of time will have to be absorbed and not compensated.

The team feels it is necessary to view Sakai a bit more closely. Susan is participating in a webinar this week (others may join her). For those unable to make the webinar, Karen will try to schedule a demonstration.

We formed subcommittees to meet before our next full team meeting and to work on the following aspects of our charge:

- Budget/cost analysis: Steve, Karen, Tracy, Janice
- Survey: Becky, Susan
- Pilot program: Charlene, Brent, Janice, Dave

Subcommittees will try to meet on February 5 or near then. The next LMS team meetings will be Friday, February 12, from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm in Tech 941, and Friday, February 26, from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm in the TLC.