

Learning management Systems: One Size Fits All?

Learning management systems such as WebCT and Blackboard are rapidly becoming the principal systems behind institutions' moves to technology-based learning settings. In settings where lecturers have had no or limited exposure to ICT as a teaching tool, LMSs pave the way for quick introduction and eventual adoption of technology-based teaching practices. Many lecturers quickly progress and grow in the field. But there are those who argue that the use of LMS tend to be counter-productive and that in their current forms, they cannot be used effectively as a learning tool. Critics argue that they support only traditional forms of teaching and encourage poor learning designs in their implementation. This panel will explore LMSs as they exist today and will explore whether they are the solution to a pressing problem or in fact problems within themselves.

The Panelists

1. Allard Strijker from University of Twente in The Netherlands whose interest is in the concept of learning objects and reusability.
2. Duan van der Westhuizen from Rand Afrikaans University in South Africa with an interest in staff development and ICT adoption within the University.
3. Tom Reeves from the University of Georgia,, USA, has expertise in the evaluation of technology-based learning;
4. Barry Harper from Wollongong University in Australia who is working on a large project exploring the development of generic learning designs for Web-based teaching and learning; and
5. Ron Oliver from Edith Cowan University in Australia will chair the panel session.

Session Summary

Duan van der Westhuizen (South Africa): LMS as successful change agents for HE

The use of LMS with their seamless and intuitive support for Web-based learning has helped to pave the way for institutions and organisations throughout the world to adopt ICT as a support for teaching and learning. They necessarily lack some flexibility and openness in their design so that they can be used by novices and experts alike. Duan will argue their strong influence and obvious success with some data showing the level of use and uptake in the short time they have been around.

Allard Strijker (University of Twente): "One Size, but still growing, LMSs: up to the next generation"

I think the current forms of LMSs are a solution that will not last long. The information that is retrieved from the objects are most of the time not useful or needed for standalone bases. LMSs will be incorporated within overall management systems and will be a feature that can be added to the existing Human Resource Systems. The weakness at this moment is that LMSs are used as a combination between portals and extended logging systems. The information that comes available is most of the times not used for adaptive learning or for management decisions.

Barry Harper (University of Wollongong). Designing Learning with LMSs

While many criticise LMS because they don't provide any learning designs, in many cases they don't need to. With the development of generic learning designs, the various LMS become very powerful tools and their flexibility and apparent lack of structure is perhaps their most powerful attribute (not the weakness that many claim). LMS serve very useful purposes if they are designed to be able to deliver resources of many forms to the users, coupled with powerful communication supports and learning management supports.

Tom Reeves (University of Georgia)

"So You Want to Know What They Have Learned: The Strengths and Limitations of LMS for High Quality Assessment"

High quality assessment is the lynchpin in an effective learning environment. Although LMS provide opportunities for alternative forms of assessment that faculty may fail to utilize, they also have their limitations. Tom's stance will be both critical and constructive.