

Innovative F.R.E.E. Open Source Personal Learning Systems For Higher Educational Institutes

Robert Moody

Assistant Professor, Department of Advanced Education Programs
Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas USA
ramoody@fhsu.edu

Abstract: Course management systems (CMS) provide online access to course materials such as syllabi, lecture notes, tests, etc... in one location. Among the most notable is Blackboard, a vendor-driven software solution that has been adopted by higher educational institutions to support instruction. After two years of experiencing frustrations with Blackboard, the presenter began to seek free open-source tools that could be adopted to create a more user/end-user friendlier social learning environment. After an exhausting search, several Free Resources for Educator Excellence (FREE) were field-tested. After three and half years of trial and error experimentation, Ning, a social networking site was selected as the host. Google Docs, Youtube, Facebook, Skype, Engrade, and Screencast-o-matic were all integrated into a new creative personal learning system. This paper demonstrates how these free open-source tools were organized into an innovative and effective model that improved instruction, student engagement, and achievement.