

SPIDER Newsletter

December 2004

SPIDER-DEV hardware failure

The SPIDER development server suffered a major hardware failure on 22nd December, resulting in the retirement of the server after over 6 years of uninterrupted service. This system was the used to host the original SPIDER system which was launched in the winter of 1998, and continued in this role until new hardware was purchased in early 2001. At this point the server took on the role of the development system, allowing new SPIDER-based innovations to be tested without the risk of interrupting the live service. An old test-server was donated by the School of Pharmacy to act as the new development system, and some of the components rescued from the failed system have been used to up the specification of this system. For those interested, the "new" development server is a Dell PowerEdge 1600, PIII 450Mhz, 384MB RAM, 1x9GB + 2x4.7GB SCSI running Fedora Core 2 Linux, replacing Custom Aria Dual PII Pro 180MHz, 256MB RAM, 2x4.7GB SCSI which ran Linux Mandrake 7.2.

General Updates

MySettings

Users are able to enter a nickname in the mySettings pages which is displayed on the "who's online" feature on the home page and next to any discussion postings. Nicknames are now checked to ensure they are unique following student requests for this feature. When changing nicknames, users are asked if they wish to update it in previous discussion postings.

Staff now have a new option in mySettings relating to news/ messaging to set the news/ email target list. The options are limit to myClasses or all classes on cluster. Setting the former option should simplify selection of targets when authoring news postings.

Groups

The groups tool allows staff (and student) users to create groups that have their own private discussion, chat room and "info" page. The "info" page options for groups have been expanded so that any staff user can manage the content as well as the pre-existing options of "any user" or "owner only".

Staff tools

MyCounselees

The myCounselees tool allows staff to quickly access information relating to their counselees such as quiz and exam performance, email address and ePDP information. The tool has been updated to allow staff to "label" students to group them e.g. into year/ course groups. The addition of new counselees has been speeded up and simplified by replacing the drop down list with a search and "click to add" feature.

Messaging & News

The private messaging feature allows staff to post a message on SPIDER only visible to the target student(s), with an option to email copies. Targets were either myCounselees or one or more selected students in a drop down list, which was becoming very slow due to large student numbers. This has been altered to allow targets to be any counselee "label" group, any group on the cluster, or a cutNpaste list of usernames (registration numbers).

Admin tools

Discussions

Admins are now able to view an "unread list" showing all new posts on one page to allow quick scanning for unsuitable postings in discussion groups.

SysInfo

A "system info" option is now available in the admin tools that shows details of the server system – CPU, memory, disk usage, load average and a few other technical details.

In development

A number of new tools are in the pipe-line, some are already in place on the live system, but will be covered in the January newsletter (see the development site for details). These include improvements to the EEL (electronic examination listings) for mark input, moving content between class "session tabs", SQuID extras and multi-file content upload.

SPIDER Status

Site Usage

Listed below are some usage statistics for the current academic session

2004		
Month	Page visits*	No of Users visited
September	285,340	2,615
October	1,325,512	4,189
November	1,701,827	4,249
December	1,194,879	3,900

* page visits = visit by a single user to a single page. Web servers often quote "hits" which are a combination of page visits, views of images etc. A single page view would generate many "hits", made up of requests for the html page itself plus one hit for each request for any images. On a typical page this gives an unrealistic indication of site usage as each "page visit" would generate many "hits" (depending on how many images etc per page). This is why page visits is a more useful statistic. SPIDER gets around 10+ million "hits" a month.

Users

Total number of registered users = **8018**

Type of user	Number
Staff	578
Students	7,440
Alumni*	413
Dormant* (not logged in for 6 months +)	680
Inactive* (graduated/ left university and not part of alumni scheme on SPIDER cluster)	635

*included in the "students" total

Around half the registered users are logging in at least once a week - SPIDER typically gets around 3-4,000+ different users logging in per week, at around 1,500+/day, with page visits up to around

80,000/day. Most of the "monthly" users visit at least once/ week - most visit more often. Some users log in irregularly e.g. just to check marks. Over 5,000 users logged in during session 2003-04 and the user base has risen significantly since this time.

Clusters

SPIDER is divided into *clusters*, which represent degrees or groups of degrees, containing departments, material, tools and users related to these degrees. Each cluster has a level of autonomy and local administrator(s) are able to customise certain features to suit their user base.

Users by Cluster		
Cluster	Total	(staff)
Applied Physiology	441	18
Bioscience	593	103
Business*	270	24
CAS*	49	7
Chemeng*	111	14
Chemistry	791	60
Computing	698	53
Economics*	114	10
Maths-Stams	1313	66
Pharmacy	1648	184
Physics	994	39

Cluster	Department(s)
Applied Physiology	Applied Physiology
Bioscience	Bioscience, Immunology, Physiology & Pharmacology, Psychology*
Business*	Master of International Management (multi-dept course*)
CAS*	Creative and Aesthetic Studies*
Chemeng*	Chemical and Process Engineering*
Chemistry	Pure and Applied Chemistry
Computing	Computer and Information Sciences
Economics*	Economics*
Maths-Stams	Mathematics, Statistics and Modelling Science
Pharmacy	Pharmaceutical Sciences, Physiology & Pharmacology
Physics	Physics

* -External to Faculty of Science

That's most things covered. If you want to see more information on SPIDER developments see the "development diary" link on SPIDER-DEV at <http://spider-dev.pharmacy.strath.ac.uk/>

As always, feel free to email me comments or suggestions,

best wishes,

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