

SPIDER

spider.science.strath.ac.uk

SPIDER is a bespoke VLE delivering learning material, providing online support and departmental management tools to a wide sector of the university community.

This newsletter outlines recent innovations, updates and changes made to the system

More information on current SPIDER development is available via the "development diary" link on SPIDER-DEV at spider-dev.pharmacy.strath.ac.uk/

Feel free to email comments or suggestions about SPIDER or this newsletter.

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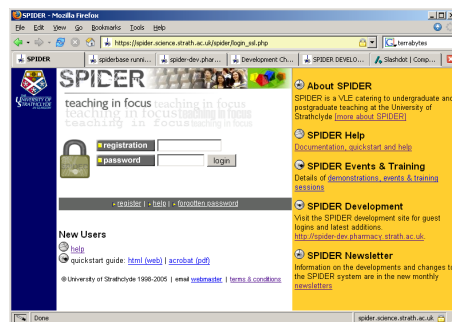
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SPIDER newsletter Feb 2005

SPIDER SSL

The SPIDER login process now uses the Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) protocol, thanks to the generosity of ITS donating an SSL "certificate". This increases the security of logins, vastly reducing the chances of anyone "sniffing" passwords when users log in to the system. Having this in place should allow integration with the PEGASUS portal to move on, the intention being to allow users to move seamlessly from a curriculum /teaching responsibilities page in PEGASUS to the relevant class page on SPIDER (or WebCT).



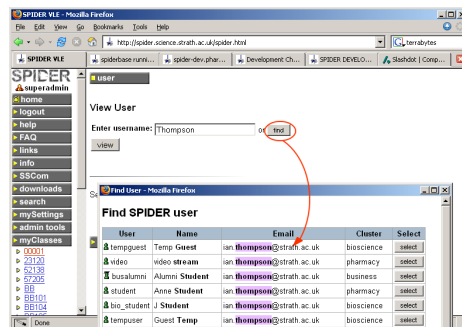
General Updates

Documentation

The SPIDER documentation and help pages continue to be updated to include all the latest tool and changes to the system.

User Lists

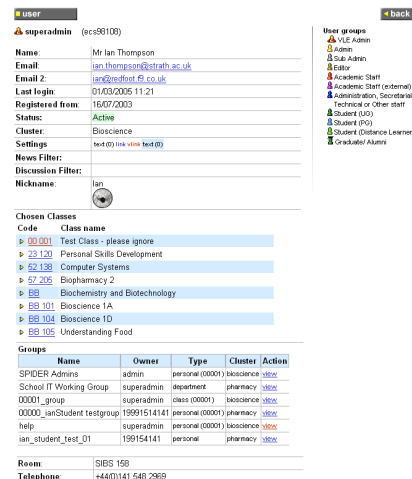
SPIDER now has over 8000 registered users, and a number of tools on the system display the user list in a drop down (select) list. This has become impractical both in terms of speed and usability.



These lists have been replaced with an "enter username" box, with a "find" popup search option to check usernames. This mainly effects staff and admin users, but is also used in the groups tool which will benefit student users as well.

User Info

Users on SPIDER are able to view details of other users by clicking on the "pawn" icons. Student users are only able to view staff contact details (typically accessed via the icons on a class home page). Staff users, depending on their user group, are able to view most users in more detail. The info page has been revamped and reorganised to improve readability and clarity of information.



Staff tools

Class tools & content

Class content is displayed under "session" tabs. Last month we added the ability to move content between sessions. This has now been extended so that multiple files can be copied to another class by clicking one button.

class tools

Change the following files:

- Introduction [2004-2005] [59102]
- The Cell [2004-2005] [59102]
- Neurons [2004-2005] [59102]



Either move to session: Or copy to class:
[2004-2005] [59102]

Change Cancel



Or delete the files
N.B. Deleting here will completely remove the file(s) from the SPIDER system and remove the database entries.

delete

SPIDER Status

Page visits

February 2005: 1,000,057

Monthly 2005

January 1,109,057

Monthly 2004

January 670,745

February 700,745

March 921,142

April 702,324

May 638,881

June 167,310

July 124,638

August 167,754

September 285,340

October 1,325,512

November 1,701,827

December 1,194,879

Monthly 2003

July* 25,593

August 111,082

September 147,304

October 822,565

November 910,088

December 897,199

Busiest day

Dec 13th 2004: 95,221 visits

*SPIDER faculty went live mid-July 2003

Users

Total registered 8232

Staff 613

Students 7205

Alumni 414

Classes

Total: 479

per cluster

applied-phys 37

bioscience 143

business 21

CAS 6

chemeng 1

chemistry 48

computing 14

economics 28

maths-stams 55

pharmacy 49

physics 77

SPIDER uses Linux, Apache, MySQL and PHP aka "LAMP"

all code developed in house by Ian Thompson, Tim Plumridge, Ian Thurlbeck and Fraser Murray

This new feature is limited so that class editors can only copy content to other classes to which they have class editor status. Admins and cluster editors can copy to any class in their own cluster. Content can now also be deleted using this tool, in addition to using the "manage content" class tool.

The permissions system on file content in classes has also been modified to allow class editor users to manage files in their classes that were uploaded by other users. They can now edit/ delete any file in the classes they are responsible for, which was previously limited to cluster editors and admins.

ZIP uploads

In response to user requests, it is now possible to upload content in a zip archive, which effectively allows uploading of multiple files at once. Once the archive of files is uploaded, SPIDER extracts each file from the zip archive and treats it as a "normally" uploaded file – displaying the file for download under the selected category heading (lecture notes, workshop, etc.). This feature combined with the tab management options should allow staff handling content to operate more efficiently, particularly when dealing with large numbers of files, and files shared by multiple classes.

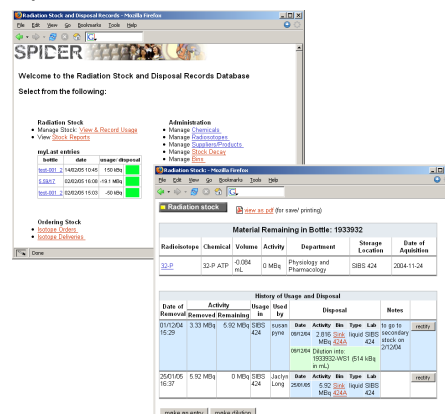
EEL

The EEL is the electronic examination listings, a tool that allows staff to view and manage examination marks on SPIDER. The tool has been updated to allow class editors to delete marks for an entire class, which was previously limited to admin users. This is available as a new "delete" button when viewing the results page. The system also now blocks edits/ deletes if results have been "locked".

Radiation database

Since last December, SPIDER has been used to run this database in tandem with the existing paper system dealing with radiation stock and usage for the Dept. of Physiology & Pharmacology. The trial with one research group lead to a number of changes to the radiation database, but has by and large been successful. The system should result in a reduction of tedious calculations by users and offers much improved

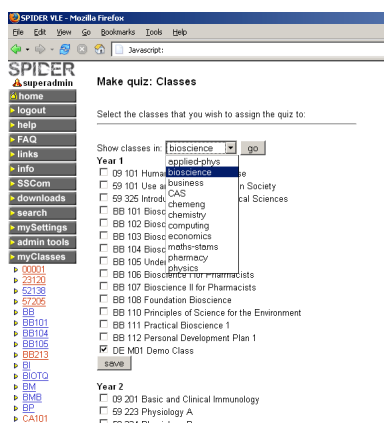
reporting on laboratory and departmental usage and holdings. It is intended to roll this out for all users of radiation in the department in the near future.



The system has been developed so that it could be used by any department that uses SPIDER.

SINQ & SWIMS

SWIMS is used by staff on SPIDER to create question banks and quizzes, and SINQ allows student users to access and complete the quizzes. The SWIMS tool has been updated so that the quiz builder can assign their quiz to any class on the system, rather than being limited to their own cluster. This will enable staff who have teaching responsibilities for "off-cluster" classes to target quizzes at these classes.



In development

SPIDER is currently the platform of choice for PDP for several undergraduate degree programmes, providing two alternative ePDP systems. Discussions are underway to modify and expand the PDP system to cater for postgraduate students, creating a "research log" based on the existing ePDP tool. Any user wishing to suggest improvements or other new features, just contact us at spider-vle@strath.ac.uk