

SPIDER Newsletter

March 2005

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.

Contact

Ian Thompson
e:ian.thompson@strath.ac.uk

SPIDER cluster admins

applied phys
Phil Riches

bioscience
Ian Thompson/ Irene McKay

business
Jane Brittin

CAS
Charles Byrne

chemeng
Linda Campbell

chemistry
Fraser Murray

computing
Paul Woolfries

economics
Roger Perman

maths-stams
Iain Thurlbeck/ Fraser Murray

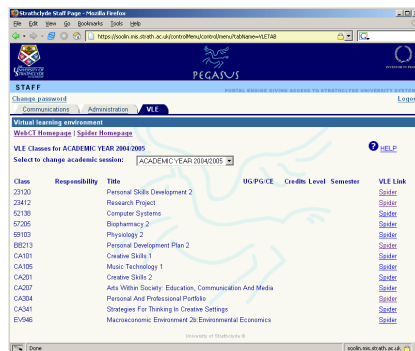
pharmacy
Ian Thompson/ Tim Plumridge

physics
Ricky Martin

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SPIDER & PEGASUS

Work has been going on to allow users to seamlessly access either of the major VLE systems in use on campus after logging in to the PEGASUS system, without having to re-enter usernames and passwords. Initial teething problems resulted in the "VLE tab" appearing with webCT listed before SPIDER, but these problems have been resolved by the PEGASUS development team. The "auto-login" to SPIDER should be live by the time you read this.



This development should make it easier for users making use of both online learning environments, allowing them to move quickly between the systems without having to repeat the login process. Although only a few staff using SPIDER also use webCT, a number of students are in this position, so this development should benefit these users.

General Updates

SPIDER Help

The SPIDER help pages give quick access to various help and other related information, such as the site terms and conditions, site documentation and training files.



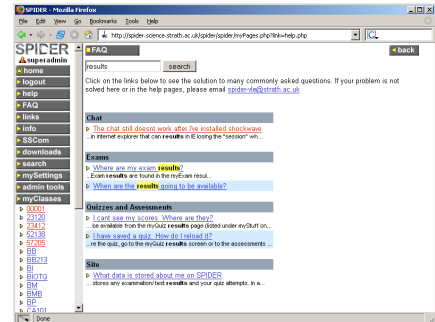
The page has been updated to list all the current clusters and their administrators so that users can more easily contact these individuals for help.

Documentation

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

FAQs

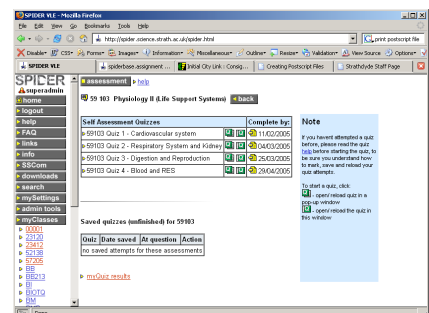
SPIDER has a Frequently Asked Questions database, where answers to common student and staff questions can be found.



This tool has been updated with a search feature to assist users in finding the information they need.

Quizzes and Assessments

SPIDER makes use of the SINQ and SWIMS system for presenting online quizzes and assessments. Quizzes used to open in a new "pop-up" window in order to present an uncluttered screen. An increase in browsers using pop-up blocker utilities, which many users seem unsure how to customise, meant quizzes were being blocked for a number of users.



SPIDER Status

Page visits

March 2005: 1,110,545

Monthly 2005

January 1,109,057
February 1,012,323

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: 486

per cluster

applied-phys 38
bioscience 143
business 21
CAS 7
chemeng 1
chemistry 48
computing 15
economics 28
maths-stams 56
pharmacy 49
physics 80

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

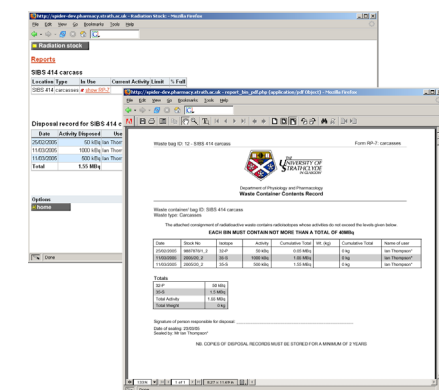
all code developed in house by Ian Thompson, Tim Plumridge, Ian Thurlbeck and Fraser Murray

The quizzes can now be opened in the current active window to circumvent this problem. Users who prefer the "old way" can continue to open the quiz in a pop-up window as before.

Staff Tools

Radiation Database

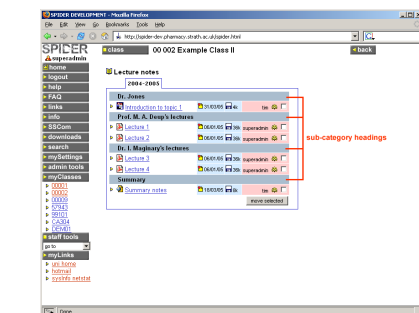
As reported last month, SPIDER is to be used as the management tool for the Department of Physiology and Pharmacology for recording stock and usage of radioactive materials.



The system has had numerous updates and changes implemented over the last month to better emulate current departmental practice. These changes include improved "bin" management, bin "sealing" with dynamic acrobat pdf reports, automatic emailing of critical events, daily decay calculations and others. The planned roll-out date for the system to be used by all the radiation users in the department is 2nd May.

Class Content

Content in SPIDER classes is shown under different category headings, such as "lecture notes", "lab notes", "workshops" etc., which are divided automatically into session "tabs". Within each tab there is the option to further categorise content using sub-headings.



The sub-heading feature has been extended to allow the numeric ranking of sub-headings, which will allow class editor users to have greater control over

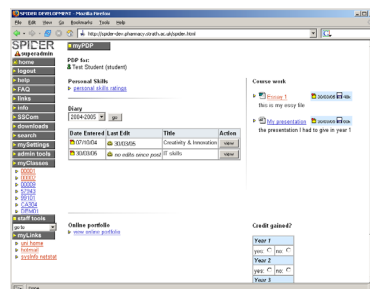
the display of content in their class(es). Sub-headings previously appeared in alphabetical order.

Class lists

SPIDER is capable of managing, importing and exporting class list information. The tools already allow for data to be imported from the PEGASUS/registry Oracle database, but these have been updated to allow superadmin users to import data for any or all clusters in one action. Previously, the tool was altered to allow lists to be merged with existing SPIDER data, or to replace the data with the registry import. This new change allows improved control over the maintenance of class lists.

New Cluster?

SPIDER offers an integrated student Personal Development Planning tool (ePDP), which is already in use by all Pharmacy & Bioscience undergraduates, as well as by Chemical Engineering and Creative & Aesthetic Studies. An alternative ePDP is available to Chemistry students.



The Faculty of Law, Arts and Social Sciences invited Ian Thompson to demonstrate this system earlier this month. Interest in the ePDP and the SPIDER system in general was shown and further meetings to discuss incorporating SPDP into the faculty's ITASS course (Information Technology in the Arts & Social Sciences) are planned.

In development

March has been a relatively quiet month for SPIDER developments, with few feature requests. This has allowed for a number of minor bugs to be fixed and a number of server based tweaks to be carried out. Here's hoping April will be as quiet... As always, anyone wishing to suggest new features or any other improvements to SPIDER, just contact us at spider-vle@strath.ac.uk