

SPIDER

<http://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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SPIDER newsletter June 2005

SPIDER v5

The latest iteration of SPIDER, version 5 is now well under way, the major changes being to the user interface. As noted in Under Development last month, a series of different interfaces will be available, so that users can select the interface that they are most comfortable with. The current interface, which uses frames, will still be available using the "classic" option. The frames have been replaced by CSS and div tags to modernise the underlying HTML and to improve accessibility. Three other interface options will be available, a simplified, "buttons" interface for new or less IT confident users, a menu system giving fast access to all system tools for power users, and a text only navigation for maximum speed and accessibility. See the box-out, right.

In combination with the existing options available to users via the mySettings tool, the new options should make SPIDER even easier for users to navigate. The increased customisation of the system will give users more options in tailoring SPIDER to fit their own needs, but still giving access to all the various tools and features.

SPIDER v5 can be accessed at <http://spider-dev.pharmacy.strath.ac.uk/spiderV> but is in very early beta, so be aware that a lot of the site doesn't work yet.



SPIDER Awards - Results

The first annual SPIDER Awards (the "SPIDEES") were given out last month. The lucky winners have the honour of their SPIDEE being displayed next to their discussion postings and in their "user info" page. The Best Avatar award went to Toranaga, whose avatar image is a surreal animated short. The 2 Best Class awards went to 13110 Foundation Chemistry and Year 4 Bioscience, which are both heavy users of SPIDER for class communication and content presentation. The Best Staff User was awarded to Phil Knight (Maths-STAMS) for his efforts with the 1st year Maths classes on SPIDER. The Babel Awards, for the highest usage of the discussions went to MadSkull (1632 posts) in the student category and to valferro (365 posts) in the staff category. Val was highly praised for her use of the discussions to interact with the students in the bioscience PDP classes.

The 'Jester' Award went to Minislack (bioscience), a final year student who has been entertaining the users via the discussions for the last 4 years. The Golden SPIDEES, awarded to users making significant contributions to the SPIDER community went to Red & Vixen (both final year bioscience), both of whom have provided valuable input into the discussions over the last 4 years.

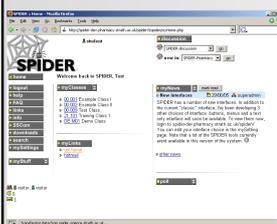
Full details on the SPIDEES and the runners up available by following the link in the "Links" page on SPIDER

New faces...

The new login page (top) has been simplified, reducing clutter. It now allows login, and access to site help, about and registration



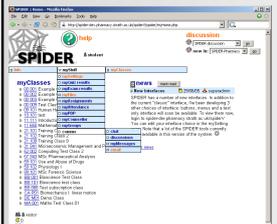
SPIDER classic (2nd top) - the original interface will remain so users familiar with the current navigation system can continue to use it if they wish



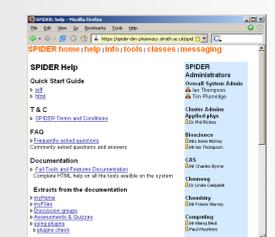
SPIDER buttons (3rd top) - this new interface is aimed at new users. It simplifies access to all site features by categorising all the tools under 4 main buttons - info, tools, classes and messaging. Help, news and discussion buttons are also present.



SPIDER menus (bottom left) - this interface is aimed at power users, the menuing system providing fast access to any tool on the system, from any other page on the site.



SPIDER text (bottom right)- this provides a text only navigation, for the ultimate in accessibility or for users wishing for maximum download speeds on slower connections.



Focus on...

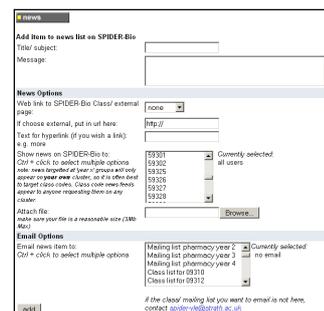
The *Focus on...* section is a regular monthly feature used to highlight some of SPIDER's many tools.

News & private messaging

SPIDER has 2 major tools used to communicate with users - news and private messaging. They allow staff to contact one or more individuals and groups of users, by posting a "note" in the site news or users private "myMessages".

News

News items are shown on the SPIDER home page, and can be targeted to appear to one or more groups of users. For example, a news item can be posted to appear only to users in a single class, 2 or more classes, all year 2 students in the cluster, staff users only, to all users in the cluster or any variation of these. So if a member of staff wishes to alert their students to a timetable or room change, they simply select the class(es) that this change is relevant to, and only these users will see the news item. Options include adding a hyperlink to



SPIDER Status

Page visits

June 2005: 280,000

Monthly 2005

January	1,109,057
February	1,012,323
March	1,110,545
April	1,026,083
May	1,028,573

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 went live mid-July 2003

Users

Total registered	8539
Staff	642
Students	7410
Alumni	487

Classes

Total: 541

applied-phys	38
bioscience	146
business	21
CAS	10
chemeng	1
chemistry	49
computing	15
economics	28
education	26
maths-stams	58
pharmacy*	57
physics	92

*includes 8 duplicate classes for IMU twin programme

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

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

another web site, linking directly to a SPIDER class (e.g. for posting notification of updates to content) and it is also possible to add a file attachment to the message.

In addition to appearing on the site home page, a copy of the news item can be emailed to the same target groups or to any mailing list that exists on SPIDER. There is even the option to send the news item "email only", so SPIDER can be used as an alternative to emailing lists.

The "show news to" target defaults to every class on the cluster, but users can limit this list to their "myClasses" list only, by changing their preferences in the mySettings tool.

Private messaging

Like news, private messaging can be targeted at different users, but instead of appearing on the site news, the message appears in the user's myMessages tool. Arrival of messages is flagged by the letter icon on the home page, with a number indicating how many

messages there are for the user. Private messaging is intended for communicating with smaller numbers of users. It is typically used to send a message to a single individual, a staff members counsellors (or sub-group of counsellors if these have been created). Private messages can also be targeted at any SPIDER group that is present on the cluster. If a user wishes to, there is also the option to send the message to a "user list", added by the user, to give ultimate flexibility in the target of your message. As with news, there is the option to send a copy of the message via email, so even users not regularly logging in to SPIDER will get the message as long as they check their email more frequently.

Mailing Lists

SPIDER mailing lists are intended to allow staff users to better target email copies of news items. The standard option when emailing a copy of a news item is to copy the message to all the students in the class list.

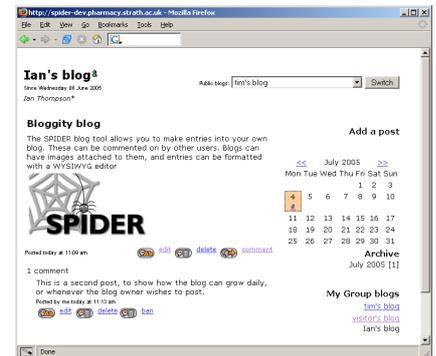
Mailing lists extend this by giving the option to combine multiple class lists into one mailing list and the ability to

add staff emails to the list, so that staff involved in teaching the class can be kept informed of what their colleagues are sending to the class or cohort. Admin and sub-admin users can make mailing lists, which are then available to any staff user on their cluster in the "email to" option in the news tool. If the same user appears in more than one of the classes, they still only get one copy of the message.

SPIDER Updates

Bloggit

Tim has been working hard on the new Blog tool for SPIDER. A blog is a web log or "diary", which has options to allow others to view, and in some cases, post comments on entries. This tool is still undergoing development and testing on the SPIDER development server, but already allows users to create a Blog, determine if it is



public or private and post messages. Other users can post comments if the blog is set up to allow it. There will be options to link a blog to the users PDP, to increase the features and interactivity of the existing ePDP.

New Clusters

The department of Sports, Culture and the Arts now have a cluster on the development server ("SCA") and are currently evaluating SPIDER's ePDP system with the intention of launching their PDP in time for the coming session.

Childhood & Primary Studies, who are also keen to implement PDP using SPIDER, invited Ian Thompson to give a presentation on SPIDER at their recent departmental "away day". Feedback was positive and a significant interest was shown in SPIDER.

LASS too are continuing their investigation of SPIDER for student PDP. A meeting was held at the end of June to discuss the next steps in progressing their use of SPIDER to allow provision of PDP for session 2005-06.

In development

Work is continuing on SPIDER v5, which will primarily involved the interface changes noted above, finishing the new blog tool, and various additions and modification to the ePDP.

As always, anyone wishing to suggest new features or any other improvements to SPIDER, or if you want to submit anything for publication in the newsletter, just contact us at: e: spider-vle@strath.ac.uk t: x2969