SPIDER Newsletter

July 2005

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University of Strathclyde

SPIDER

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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 Progress

During the last month a great deal of time has been spent continuing the development of SPIDER v5. One of the key additions to the latest iteration of SPIDER is a new student Personal Development Planning (PDP) tool. The new version of the tool is firmly based on the existing ePDP, but has been reworked and expanded in response to user requests. It now provides extra features, is more customisable and has an improved, user-friendly interface for both staff counsellors and students for accessing and completing the ePDP.

Build your own PDP

Admins on SPIDER can now create one or more customised PDPs for their cluster, so could create one PDP for undergraduates and one for postgraduates, or have different PDPs for different degrees on the cluster. The admin can determine which features appear in the PDP, if it is credit
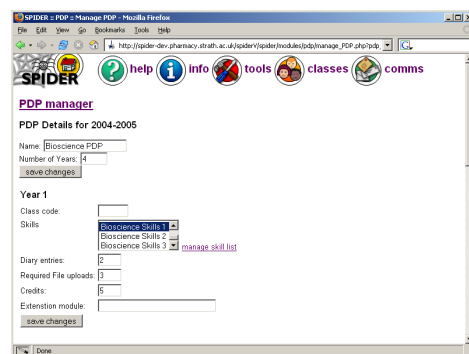

bearing or not, which class it applies to (if any) and allows specification of how many entries must be made e.g. number of diary entries or file uploads. The PDP is "year aware" so that each year of the PDP can be further customised and the features presented to the student are relevant to their current year of study. The PDP can contain one or more of the following tools.

• Personal Skills list(s)
• Diary
• Course files (portfolio of work)
• Extension modules

The **personal skills** lists have been extended to allow the admin to create and update the lists (these were previously fixed in the code), and to assign multiple lists to a single year of the ePDP. This means that the skill list a student is presented with in first year can be modified or

Anatomy of the ePDP

The new ePDP home page gives students access to each of the tools - skills, diary and course files. It

also indicates using coloured boxes their status in that activity - green boxes for "complete", red for "in-progress", and the number of boxes indicating the number of tasks required.
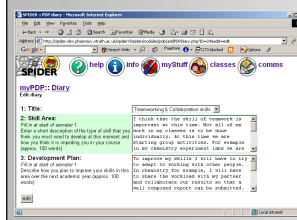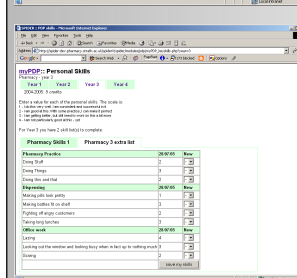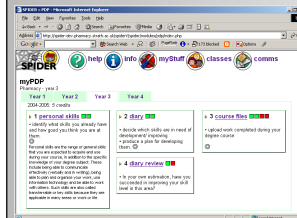
The personal skills now allows tabbed viewing of multiple skill sets, giving PDP creators greater flexibility in tailoring skill lists to their students current state of development and year of study. The shot shows 2 skill lists, clicking on the "tab" with the skill list name switches between them.

The diary tool has been split into "diary entries" and "diary reviews" to better indicate to students that these 2 processes are separate activities that take place at different times during the session.

replaced for students in later years who may need to consider different aspects of their personal development. Students rate themselves on a scale of 1-4, 1 meaning "I do this very well" through to 4 "I am not particularly good at this - yet".

The **diary** tool allows students to elaborate on how they have rated their skills, normally highlighting 2 or 3 skill areas that they intend to develop over the year. The diary has 2 main areas: the *diary entry*, which is broken down into a "skill area" box and a "development plan", which are used to describe the skill in question and the student's plan for developing and improving that skill; and the *diary review*, which the student completes once they have had time to reflect on their progress later in the session. The new version of the diary has been split into "diary entries" and "diary reviews" to make these two processes more distinct to the student.

The **course files** tool has also been modified, and is now split into 3 areas - *file management*, *file upload* and a *file view*, again to make these 3 tasks distinct proc-

SPIDER Status

Page visits

July 2005:	169,710

Monthly 2005

January	1,109,057
February	1,012,323
March	1,110,545
April	1,026,083
May	1,028,573
June	280,072

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	8556
Staff	647
Students	7422
Alumni	487

Classes
Total: 544

|	
applied-phys	38
bioscience	146
business	21
CAS	10
chemeng	1
chemistry	52
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

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esses to help students to better manage this aspect of the PDP. These areas are accessed by clicking the relevant "tab" on the course files page . The upload tab deals with uploading a file, and setting it's attributes (link name, rank, public or private, extra info text etc.). The manage tab allows the student to modify existing file's data and to delete files. The new view tab allows the student to see
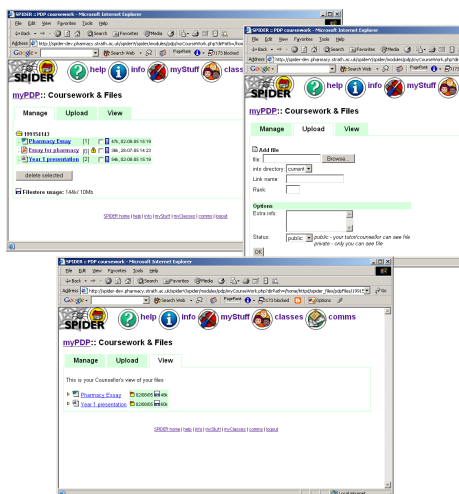
their files as their counsellor will see them. This should avoid the problems of previous years when students didn't realise that they had made a file "private", and their counsellor was unable to view the file.

Custom Extensions

The new PDP allows for the addition of custom modules, using the "extension module" option. Developers will be able to easily add extra features to the stock ePDP. This will mean that the PDP will be able to cater for even more customisation to meet the needs of the varied disciplines using the SPIDER ePDP system, as well as better integrating the existing alternative ePDPs used by Chemistry and in development for Mathematics.

On Reflection

In addition, a blog (see last months newsletter) will be made available to each student, tied to their ePDP. This will allow them to post more free-form diary entries that can either be private to them or visible to the student and their counsellor. Counsellors will only be able to view entries that the student has set to be visible, but may post additional entries or feedback, visible to both themselves and the student, to comment on the student's entries, their PDP or any other relevant topic.

In Development

The work on SPIDER v5 continues, polishing the new features of the ePDP and continuing to improve and expand the current set of features and tools that SPIDER provides. Enhancing the existing clusters with a programme management tool is underway. This will enable numerous administrative and practical advantages, such as auto-populating students "myClasses" with their programmes core classes and enabling messaging to target programme years. Talks are underway with colleagues in IT Services and Registry to enable further integration with the central Oracle systems to automate much of the programme management.
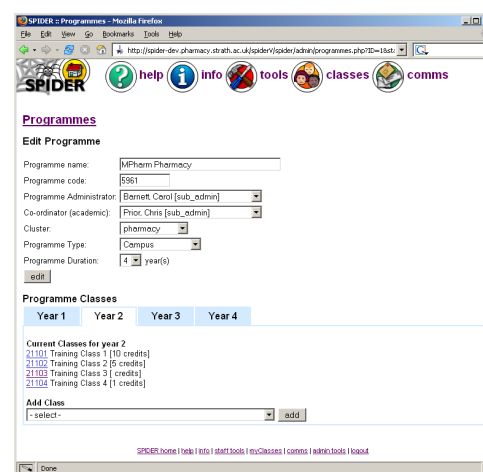
Further improvements to the new interfaces is also planned and updating all the system tools to take advantage of these interfaces is well underway. All these additions will improve SPIDER's emulation of the structures, common
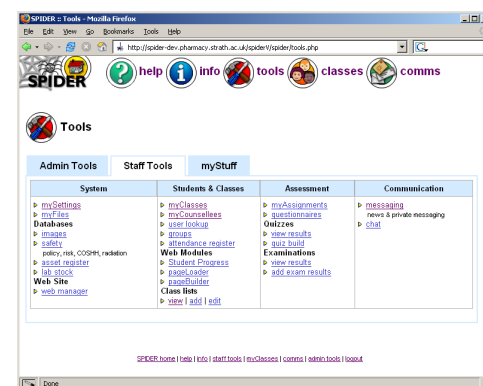
practice and work-flows in use in off-line teaching in the on-line environment.

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