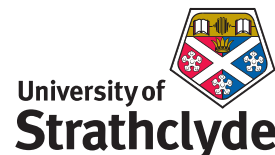


<http://spider.science.strath.ac.uk>
spider-vle@strath.ac.uk

SPIDER Newsletter

August/September 2005



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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LASS
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maths-stams
 Iain Thurlbeck/ Fraser Murray

pharmacy
 Ian Thompson/ Tim Plumridge

physics
 Ricky Martin

SCA
 Eric Norris/ Glen Coutts

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Five Live

SPIDER v5 went live on 16th September, and so far has met with positive feedback from users. The slicker interface choices and updates to a number of the tools have generated a number of discussions, numerous e-mails and other queries & comments. Users have requested some more changes and features too. Generally, users are pleased with the changes, and those few that prefer the older version can essentially stick with it using the "classic" interface.

No flies on us?

With such a large number of updates (every tool has had at least minor changes), the move to v5 of SPIDER resulted in a few small bugs. None of these were serious, and all of those brought to our attention have now been fixed. Thanks must go to all the staff and students who tested v5 in the weeks before the launch date, as without them, many more bugs would no doubt have crept in.

SPIDER Registration

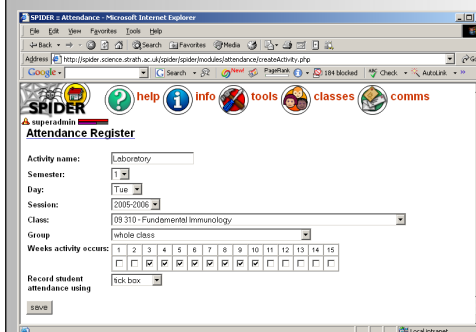
The SPIDER registration procedure has been simplified so that new users only have to enter their DS username/ password and select the appropriate cluster relating to their study/ teaching. Improvements in the interface between PEGASUS/ registry and SPIDER mean that all the other user details, from name and email to degree and year of study are automatically entered for the user when they register. In previous years, the user was required to enter this information manually. Occasionally a typographical error could result in delays in users being able to access the system, but with the new level of automation that SPIDER provides, this will no longer be a problem.

10K

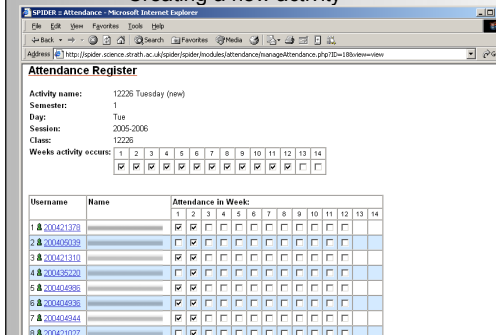
The SPIDER user-base is now over 10,000 and climbing. The clusters for LASS (Law, Arts and Social Sciences), Education and SCA (Sports, Culture & the Arts) have had a significant impact on these figures, as SPIDER is new to several of these departments/ faculties' programmes staff and students. The user-base is continuing to grow daily, as new users register on clusters old and new

Attendance Register

The attendance register allows staff to record and monitor student attendance at events such as laboratories or tutorials.



Creating a new activity



Recording attendance is simply a case of ticking box next to the students name

during these early weeks of the new session.

Focus on....

The Focus on... Section is a regular monthly feature used to highlight some of SPIDER's many tools. This month...

Attendance Register

SPIDER's attendance register allows staff users to monitor student attendance at any "event" they wish, so student turnout at lectures, laboratory, seminars, tutorials or any other activity can be recorded.

Group or Class?

An activity is created, e.g. a laboratory session, and its details entered - what semester, day and week(s) it occurs. The activity is then associated with either a class list or any SPIDER group. Once the activity has been created, the attendance at that activity can be recorded - see box-out, above. Viewing the activity allows staff to tick a box next to the students name to show the student was present for that week, or leave it blank to show absence from the activity.

SPIDER Status

Page visits

August 2005: 202,628
 September 2005: 486,100

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
 July 169,710

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 10,384
 Staff 690
 Students 8,898
 Alumni 796

Classes

Total: 687

applied-phys 39
 bioscience 143
 business 26
 CAS 10
 chemeng 1
 chemistry 57
 computing 15
 economics 30
 education 57
 maths-stams 74
 pharmacy* 60
 physics 92
 SCA 81

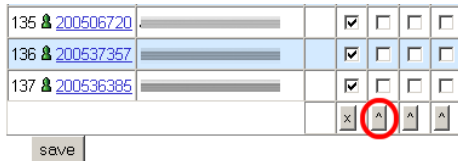
*includes 8 duplicate classes for IMU twin programme

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

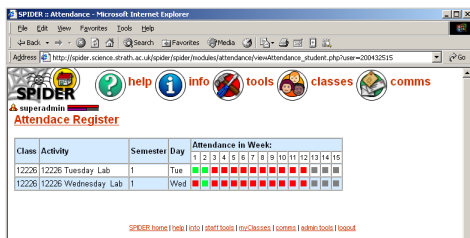
all code developed in house by Ian Thompson, Tim Plumridge, Ian Thurlbeck and Fraser Murray

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A button at the bottom of the list allows for all boxes for a particular week to be filled, allowing staff to simply un-tick absences, which is of particular benefit for activities relating to larger classes of students. As well as viewing attendance



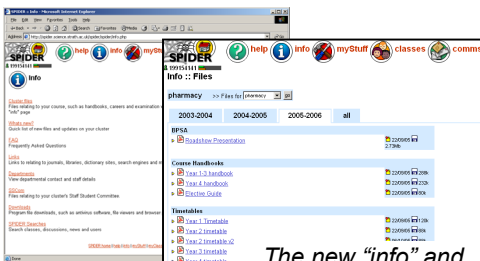
for this single activity, staff can view a student's attendance at all the activities for which a record has been kept. Students are also able to view their own attendance records.



An individual students attendance record
 If the attendance register becomes more widely used, it will offer the opportunity to improve the "Early Warning System" section of the "myCounselees" tool. The attendance information would supplement the existing assessment performance record, allowing staff to better monitor their counselees/ tutees progress at any point in the year.

New Tools - Info update

The SPIDER "info" pages have been re-developed as part of v5. On previous versions of SPIDER, the info pages were used simply as a place to upload and list files which were of interest to all users on a cluster or which didn't belong to one particular class, such as year handbooks and careers related documents.



The new "info" and "cluster files" pages

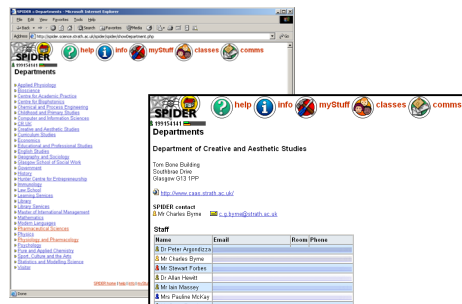
Cluster Files

The old "info" page is still present but has been renamed "cluster files" to better represent its purpose. The cluster files page has also been update and now adopts the "session tabs" which are in use on various parts of SPIDER, such as

on class pages to organise content into the academic session in which it was uploaded and used.

Other Info

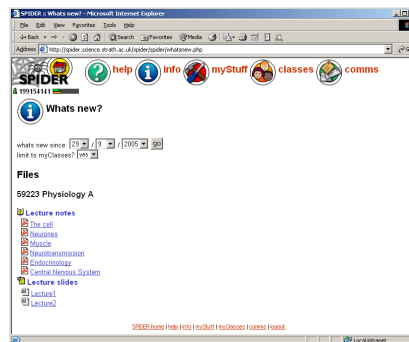
The info now also includes a direct link to the FAQ, the old "links" page, SCom, downloads and SPIDER Searches. It also gives access to the Departments pages, which list each department using SPIDER and gives access to staff details, such as email, phone and room no.



Department listing and staff list

Whats new?

This new tool on the info page allows users to quickly see what files have been uploaded to SPIDER. By default, it shows files uploaded in the last 7 days, limited to files in the users myClasses. However, the user can change these defaults, changing the "what's new since" to any date, and changing the limit to be all classes or sticking with the myClasses option.



In Development

The assignment tool on SPIDER allows staff to receive student assignments electronically. The tool is getting an update to allow staff to set up a model answer that is automatically sent to the student once they make their submission. Changes to the questionnaire tool and simplifying the news filters by connecting it to a user's myClasses are also underway.

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