SPIDER Newsletter

December 2005- January 2006

University of Strathclyde

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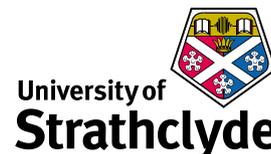
SPIDER

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.

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

SPIDER cluster admins

applied phys
Phil Riches

bioscience
Ian Thompson/ Irene McKay

business
Carol Badger

CAS
Charles Byrne

chemeng
Linda Campbell

chemistry
Fraser Murray

computing
Paul Woolfries

economics
Roger Perman

education
Ian Thompson [temp]

LASS
Tricia Barton

maths-stams
Iain Thurlbeck/ Fraser Murray

pharmacy
Ian Thompson/ Tim Plumridge

physics
Ricky Martin

SCA
Eric Norris/ Glen Coutts

SPIDER newsletter Dec05-Jan06

Lucky 7

SPIDER's 7th birthday was in December, and heralded the end of a record year. 10.5 million page visits were made in 2005, two million more than the previous year. The number of users, classes, content and features that the system supported continued to grow. 2006 also promises to be an interesting year for SPIDER, as five departments in the Faculty of Science are to merge into the new Strathclyde Institute for Pharmacy and Biomedical Sciences (SIPBS) in August, which will have a dramatic impact on the teaching, support and administrative role SPIDER has to play for the staff and students involved. As always, SPIDER will evolve and adapt to meet the requirements of these users, while continuing to offer improvements and new features to all users of the system.

New Features
RSS feeds

SPIDER now supplies news postings as "RSS" news feeds (Rich Site Summary or Really Simple Syndication is an XML format for distributing news headlines and other content on the Web). Any news item posted on the site is automatically made available as an RSS news item (see boxout), so users with RSS readers or web browsers that support RSS feeds can quickly view news items without having to visit SPIDER.

Quiz updates

The SINQ & SWIMS quiz system received a few tweaks. It is now possible for administrators to change the author/ ownership of quizzes and questions. This allows staff


*Admins can now quickly change the owner of quizzes and questions to any other user*

who are assuming responsibility for a colleague's class to manage any associated formative or summative quizzes and question banks.

RSS R-US

The new RSS feature allows you to view news items without having to be on the SPIDER home page
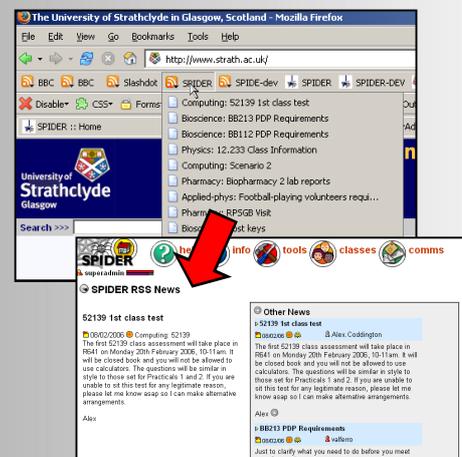
The FireFox web browser allows you to view RSS headlines of SPIDER news item, then visit SPIDER for the full story. Other browsers or dedicated RSS software, such as the freeware "Feedreader" package, are also able to get access to these feeds. The dedicated packages often allow you to read and display the latest notices on your desktop without having to open a browser.
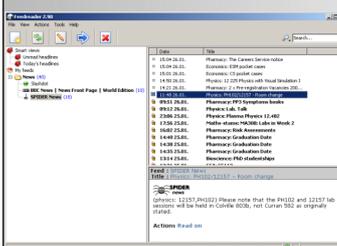
The results (available via Squid) for all quizzes assigned to a class now also in-

Use SQuID to view all the student results for all the quizzes assigned to one class

cludes revision attempts and gives the option to choose whether "not live" quizzes are included in the results listings.

SPIDER Status

Page visits

January 2006	1,185,389
December 2005	1,641,738

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
August	202,628
September	486,100
October	1,455,483
November	1,641,738

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	12,171
Staff	766
Students	10,602
Alumni	803

Classes

Total: 751

applied-phys	32
bioscience	143
business	26
CAS	10
chemeng	1
chemistry	94
computing	17
economics	30
education	60
maths-stams	78
pharmacy*	63
physics	93
SCA	101

**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

SPIDER newsletter Dec05-Jan06

Lab Exercise returns

SPIDER has provided an online results submission & marking form for laboratory results in the 3rd year Pharmacy course for a number of years. This has now been extended to four lab reports for the 2nd year Biopharmacy class.
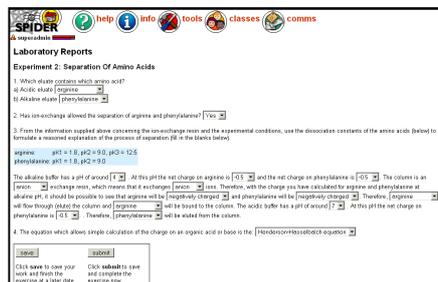
Students submit their lab reports via a web form, removing the need for staff marking

ePDP credits

A number of the Personal Development classes that use SPIDER assign credits to the successful completion of the PDP process. The option for staff to assign credit to their counsellees via the online ePDP has been updated to work with the new version of the ePDP system.

Focus on....

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

Discussions part 2

In the last newsletter, a general overview of discussions was given. This time - some more details about discussions.

Posting

Any user can post in any of the open discussions (general, year or class). Only group discussions are private, viewing and posting limited to the members of the group. When posting, there is the option to email copy the message to the class co-ordinator or any staff member listed as teaching on the class. For the general/ year discussions, this email goes to the cluster admin. When posting, users' nicknames appear by the post. Student users can only see nicknames, but staff users can identify posters real names by clicking on the "pawn" icon. Users have the option of adding an "avatar" image (via mySettings) which will then appear alongside their post. Replying to a discussion topic is simply a case of hitting the "Reply" button and typing in your comments.
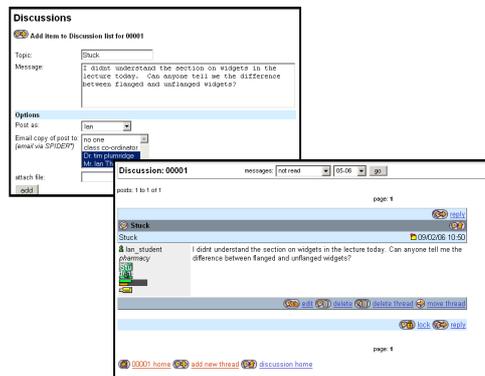
Monitoring

All discussions are monitored regularly by the various admins on SPIDER. Admin level users are able to edit or delete any posting, or to delete an entire thread with the click on a button. Admins also have access to an "unread list" of discussions, which simply lists all new postings outwith the board hierarchy for quick access to all new postings.

Locking & moving

The first poster in a thread, or an admin users can lock a thread, preventing further replies. This can be used to ensure students respond to a class based discussion by a certain time or by admins to prevent an out of control thread drifting further away from the original topic. Admins are also able to move threads, so if the conversation is more suited to a year or general board that to the class discussion, the entire thread can be moved.

So now you have a grounding in SPIDER discussions, why not use them more in your teaching or learning?

Business cluster admin

Cluster admin Jane Brittin has moved to a new job at Glasgow University. We wish her well in her new post. Carol Badger has taken over as admin for the cluster, which supports 26 classes for 50+ postgraduate students each year.

In Development

A number of minor changes to the questionnaire tool have been requested: improved nag options and a student "myQuestionnaires", showing the user a list of live questionnaires on a single page, rather than spread amongst their classes. The option for students to add themselves to the class list on SPIDER if they are on the registry list is also in development.

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