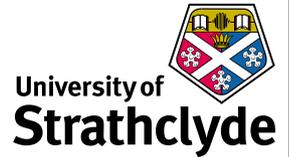




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SPIDER Newsletter

February 2006



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 cluster admins

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maths-stams
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pharmacy
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physics
 Ricky Martin

SCA
 Eric Norris/ Glen Coutts

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Bloggity-blog

I've been using the SPIDER blog tool for the last 6 months to record all the feature changes and bug fixes that have been made to SPIDER, so was keen to attend a recent seminar hosted by CAPLE on using wikis, web logs and web-essays in teaching, to see how this kind of technology was being used in real educational scenarios. The event gave some useful insight into the possibilities this technology has, how it might be used by educators and learners as a means of delivering, presenting, working, storing and retrieving information. The post-seminar debate gave rise to an interesting discussion on some of the practical considerations of using this technology, such as copyright, access, and how to assess the dynamic workspaces that use of such technology inevitably generates. SPIDER's blog isn't currently used by anyone expressly for teaching purposes, but no doubt this will come in time (the ePDP already has links to the blogging tool). If (when?) such a requirement arises, we are confident that SPIDER can adapt to meet the technological needs of the pioneers in this new educational frontier.

Updates & New Features Questionnaires

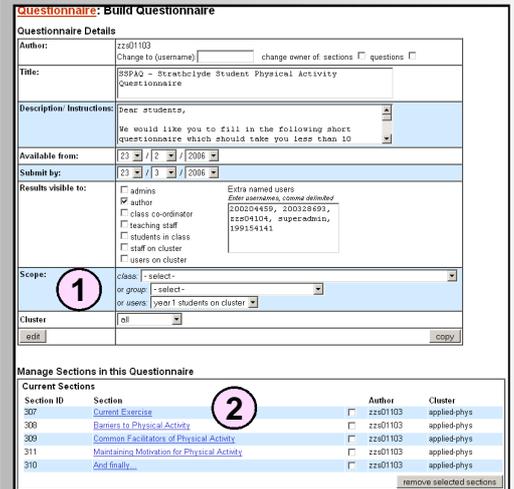
The questionnaire tool now allows authors to select year groupings as the "scope" (target) of a questionnaire, in addition to the existing "class", "group" or "cluster" options. The editing tools have been updated to include direct links to edit the "sections" (pages) that make up the questionnaire from the questionnaire edit page. Direct links to edit the questions that make up a section are also available, both of which should help users to manage their questionnaires more easily. The questionnaire edit page now also has a "copy" button, allowing authors to quickly clone a complete questionnaire without having to return to the questionnaire home page.



The new myQuestionnaires allows students to access any available questionnaires on one page

Questionnaire update

The questionnaire tools have been modified to give improved flexibility and a few new features have been added. The scope (1) of a questionnaire determines who is able to submit a response. The options have

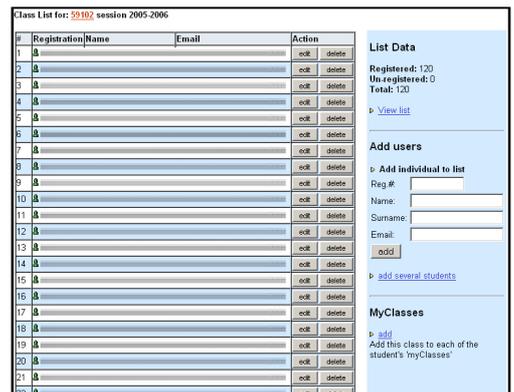


been extended to allow users to target different year groups in addition to the existing options to target users by SPIDER cluster, group or class code. Authors are now able to move more quickly between the sections that make up the different pages of a questionnaire using the "direct links" (2). The questions that make up each section have the same direct links, reducing the need to select these from a long list, required by the previous version of the tool.

A new link in the student "myStuff" area, "myQuestionnaires", lists all the questionnaires that a student is eligible to respond to, on one page. This is in addition to access via the SPIDER home page (for cluster-wide targets) or the relevant class or group questionnaire page.

myClasses

Class editor and higher access users now have the option of auto-populating students "myClasses" lists with a particular class. If a student is listed on the class list, then a single click will add the class



Class editors & admins can now update a user's myClasses to include a class they manage

SPIDER Status

Page visits

February 2006 1,132,823

Monthly 2006

January 1,185,389

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

December 1,016,651

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 12,412

Staff 779

Students 10,830

Alumni 803

Classes

Total: 751

applied-phys 32

bioscience 143

business 26

CAS 14

chemeng 1

chemistry 94

computing 17

economics 30

education 30

LASS 1

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

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code to the students myClasses list if it is not already present. The option for users to manage their own myClasses remains.

Class lists

SPIDER gets class lists from the Registry database, but keeps this data in a separate table from its own class list information. Class editors and admins are able to populate the SPIDER class list from the Registry data, amend the SPIDER list in isolation, or a combination of both to ensure the class list is as accurate as possible. However, for a variety of reasons, students sometimes don't appear on class lists. A new option is available to students on the myClasses page that lets them check they are on class lists. If they are on the Registry list, but not on the SPIDER list, then they can add themselves with a few clicks of their mouse, where previously they had to email an admin or class editor.

Add	Code	Name	Class on SPIDER?	On SPIDER list?
	S1101		✓	✓
	S1102		✓	✓
	S1103		✓	✓
	S1104		✓	✓
	S1105	Introduction to Statistics	✓	✓
	S1106	Making it Count: Data Presentation and Communication	✓	✓
	MA101	Mathematics 1A	✓	✓
	MA102	Mathematics 2A	✓	✓
	MA103	T. Skills and Mathematical Software	✓	✓
	MA104	Introduction to Mechanics	✓	✓

Students can add themselves to class lists as long as they are on the PEGASUS/ Registry list

Downloads

The downloads page is used by cluster admins to store files for users to download, such as browser plug-ins or executable programs. The page management tools have been updated to allow the re-assignment of headings and sub-headings, and a shortcut to managing the file attributes has been added to the display page.

Category	File Name	Date	User
Downloads	Anti-virus	08/01/06 12:28	supadmin
Chemical tools	Chemical tools	08/01/06 12:28	supadmin
File viewers	MS Office viewers	08/01/06 12:28	supadmin
Graph Plotting Tools	Graph Plotting Tools	08/01/06 12:28	supadmin

The downloads page is used to give access to common file viewers, plug-ins and program files

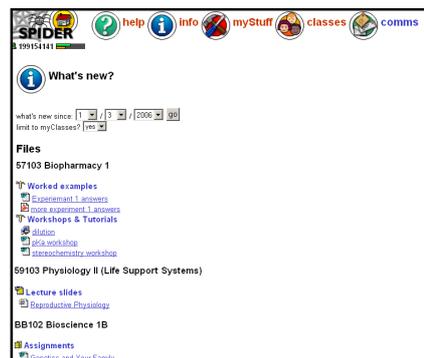
Focus on....

The Focus on... Section is a regular

monthly feature used to highlight some of SPIDER's many tools. This month...

What's new?

The *what's new* tool is available to all users from the "info" page on SPIDER. It allows a user to quickly list and view all the latest file uploads on SPIDER. The user is able to switch between limiting the list to their chosen "myClasses" or simply showing all the new items on their cluster. The "what's new since" option defaults to showing files uploaded in the last 7 days, but the user can change this to determine a time period of their choice. The list returned is sorted by class and category heading (lecture



What's new for quick access to the latest uploads in your classes

notes, workshops etc.) and is active, so the user can click on any file to view it immediately, or click a heading to view that page within the class as if they had visited it directly from the class home page. If a class is "locked" so only students in the class list are able to view it, the permissions are upheld for any files belonging to that class, and files with future availability (not yet visible to students) aren't returned in the list.

In Development

Users have requested a "student notes" tool to record information relating to students, as an extension in the current my-Counsellors tool. A number of minor tweaks to the news posting system have also been suggested, to enable email copies to automatically be sent to staff on a class (currently defaults to only students) and to record 'email only' news items and number of emails sent. We will endeavour to get these additions in place, time allowing.

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