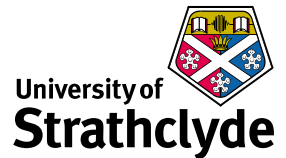




<http://spider.science.strath.ac.uk>
spider-vle@strath.ac.uk

SPIDER Newsletter

June-October 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

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

law
 Michael Hughes

maths-stams
 Iain Thurlbeck/ Fraser Murray

pharmacy
 Ian Thompson/ Tim Plumridge

physics
 Ricky Martin

SCA
 Eric Norris/ Glen Coutts

SPIDER newsletter Jun-Oct 06

The Long Summer

In SPIDER's nearly 8 year history, the summer has traditionally been set aside as a period of system development and innovation. However, primarily due to the formation of the new Strathclyde Institute of Pharmacy & Biomedical Sciences (SIPBS), the normal buzz of activity was reduced to a quiet hum, as the primary developers turned their attentions to updating and creating IT systems for the new institute. Much of this work is ongoing, and as a consequence, the changes to SPIDER for the next six months will be at a slower pace than normal. This may come as a disappointment to some, but it should mean that those users not currently making full use of SPIDER's capabilities have had a chance to get up to speed with the current tool-set - without having to learn yet another new enhancement or tool. SPIDER is still evolving to meet the needs of its users - things have just slowed up a little.

New Records

The start of the new academic session has seen two SPIDER records broken - October 2nd surpassed the previous "busiest day" record, the daily page visits total of 98,852 surpassing the nearly 2 year old record of 95,221 on December 13th 2004. The monthly page visits for October nearly hit 2 million (1,982,792), surpassing the old 1.7M page visits of November 2004. November is traditionally SPIDER's busiest month, so perhaps the 2 million barrier will fall soon.

New Cluster

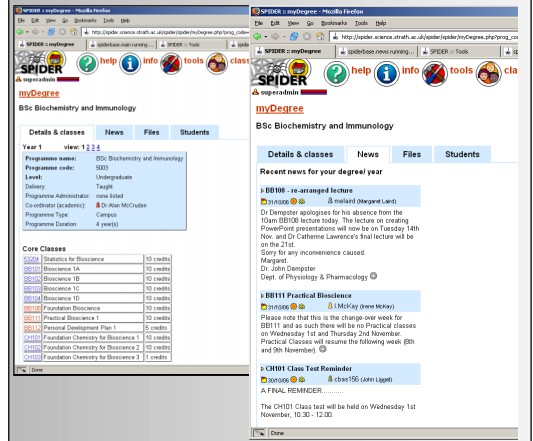
The School of Law are now using SPIDER to support their teaching and management of student data. The School has a long tradition of innovative IT in teaching, resulting in a steady uptake of SPIDER usage - at present nearly 1,000 students and around 60 staff are using SPIDER, with admins Scott Walker, Michael Hughes, Lisa McWhinnie and David Sams providing localised support to the School.

Updates & New Features myDegree

This new tool allows core classes to be related to degree programmes, list news and "degree level" (rather than class) files and show students on the programme (to

myDegree

SPIDER has added an additional level of organisation within the cluster structure by providing a myDegree tool to both staff (who can view any degree in their cluster) and students (who can see their own degree).



staff). Students can access their own degree, while staff can view any degree in their cluster.

Active and Archived classes

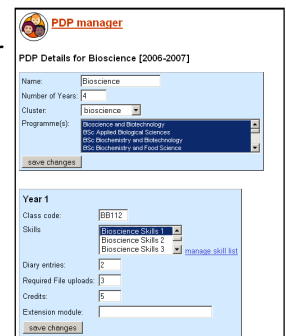
Classes can now be marked as "archived" when they are no longer being actively taught. This enables SPIDER to hold the old class data but indicate to users that the class is no longer being taught

Class list copy

The SPIDER class lists are kept in a separate table from the "official" class lists copied daily from the registry servers. Normally these lists are just copied to the SPIDER lists, but in some cases having the ability to copy the class list from one code to a different code is useful. For example, mix ups can result in students being registered on an old class code instead of new code - the copy can alleviate this until the mix ups are dealt with. This tool is only available to cluster admins.

ePDP manager

The ePDP manager tool has had a makeover to make it easier for admins to edit and update the ePDPs on their clusters. The layout has been improved by "boxing" related items to make it easier to see which section of the ePDP they are



SPIDER Status

Page visits

Monthly 2006

January	1,185,389
February	1,132,823
March	1,359,610
April	949,394
May	1,125,300
June	293,814
July	168,742
August	206,478
September	624,875
October	1,982,792

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

Oct 2 nd 2006:	98,842 visits
---------------------------	---------------

Users

Total registered	16,736
Staff	933
Students	14,393
Alumni	1,410

Classes

Total:	916
applied-phys	34
bioscience	152
business	31
CAS	16
chemeng	1
chemistry	110
computing	17
economics	30
education	60
LASS	16
Law	71
maths-stams	83
pharmacy*	73
physics	110
SCA	110
other	2

*includes 8 duplicate IMU classes

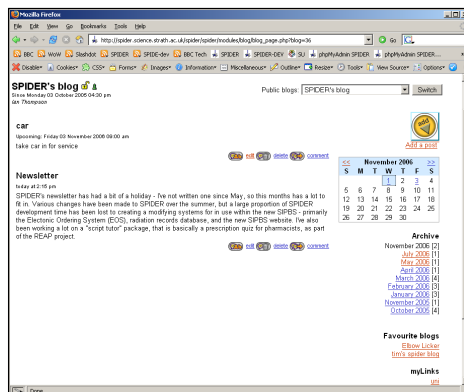
SPIDER uses Linux, Apache, MySQL and PHP aka "LAMP". All code developed in house by Ian Thompson, Tim Plumridge, Ian Thurlbeck and Fraser Murray

SPIDER newsletter Jun-Oct 06

editing. The ePDP tool now has two extensions - the "strengths/ weaknesses" tool developed last year, and a new "action plan" tool was added for this session.

Blogalendar

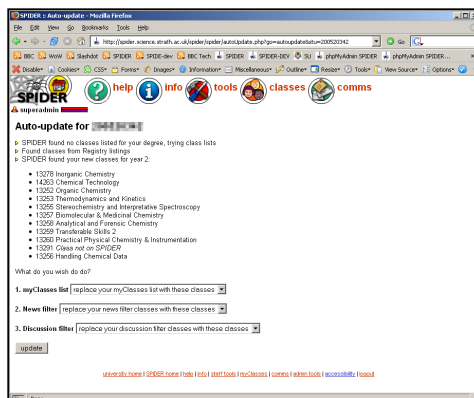
The blog tool on SPIDER has been updated to allow users to modify the posting date, so that it can also be used as a calendar by posting items on future dates. The blog home page has also been tweaked - student users can now access their "favourite blogs" (any other user's public blog can be made a favourite), and staff get a quick link to their counsellors PDP and public blogs. The blog tool can be added to a cluster by the admins using the "customise" option in the admin tools.



SPIDER's blog now allows for future events so it can be used as a calendar

Auto-update

SPIDER now allows student users to auto-update their myClasses list as well as their news and discussion filters, based on the classes stored in either their myDegree (if set up) or from the class lists. All users still have the option of managing their myClasses list manually if they wish.



Auto-update of classes and filters makes it easier for new users to start using SPIDER

Rx Tutor

The Pharmacy Rx Tutor, that allows pharmacy students to test their ability to recognise legal or incorrect prescriptions has been released to current 3rd year students. This version of the tool expanded the num-

ber of scripts from 9 to around 200 different scripts and includes an editing tool to allow staff to modify scripts as well as adding new scripts to the database on SPIDER. This unique tool has been developed as part of the School of Pharmacy's contribution to the REAP project (see <http://www.reap.ac.uk/> for details)

Sign-up groups

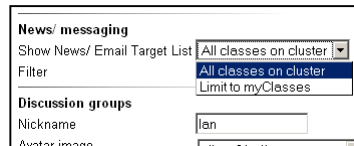
Staff can now create groups that allow students to self sign-up to their chosen group in the group "family" e.g. If 4 tutorial groups are in the family, the student can join one of the four groups. This is accessed from the class' group page. All groups now have an "info" field to allow the group owner to detail the purpose of the group.

Focus on....

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

News targets

Staff users on SPIDER can target news at different groups on the cluster. For some of the larger clusters this list can be quite large, as by default, each class on the cluster is available in the drop down list as a potential target for a news item. Staff can limit this list to include only the classes that are in their myClasses list, vastly reducing the number of classes they can target, and reducing the time it takes to target their news.



If you happen to teach on classes belonging to more than one cluster, this also has the benefit of giving you the capability of targeting news items at classes outwith your current cluster without having to switch clusters.

In Development

The peer assignment marking tool is nearly completed - currently undergoing testing on the development server. A "feedback generator" integrated into the ePDP is soon to commence development, as part of the REAP project. In the longer term, implementing a few features suggested by the Law School - anonymous marking for the assignments tool, additional web and pod-cast content categories and a new "Tutor" level user group.

Want 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