

SPIDER Newsletter

November 2004

SPIDER millions

SPIDER had over 1.7 million page views in November, breaking the month record for the second time in a row. The busiest day was 15th Nov with over 83,000 visits, again a record high. The busiest cluster until now has always been bioscience, but the chemistry cluster has now stolen the top spot, overhauling bioscience by just over 700 visits. A short article detailing SPIDER's increased usage & ePDP has been submitted to Prism.

General Updates

Discussions

The discussion boards have been given a bit of a face lift, with a series of new icons and a few other visual improvements. Technical changes now mean users can set up a discussion filter via mySettings to limit which discussions appear in their "unread messages" list on the home page. This allows people to limit their discussions to only classes they are interested in, whereas previously new posts in any discussion would be listed. In addition a new discussion "list" page is accessible via the "discussion" image on the home page, listing the stats (#posts, #threads, last post) on the discussions in the users chosen discussion filter.

Admin and sub-admin users can now move threads between the boards, so off-topic threads in class discussions can be placed in a more suitable place (usually the year or general boards).

Threads can now be locked - the original poster or editor/admin users can lock a thread to prevent further postings.

Groups tool

The groups tool allows staff (and student) users to create groups that have their own private discussion, chat room and "info" page. A few minor refinements have been made. Users creating groups can now limit the user list by cluster to make it easier to find people when adding individual users to a group. Staff can now view a list of all the groups on their cluster or that they are members of, on one page.

Documentation

The documentation and help files covering the news/messaging system and the questionnaire tools have been updated.

myClasses

The myClasses tool allows users to select the list of classes they see on SPIDER. There is now a search option to allow users to quickly find & add classes without having to scroll through the cluster listings.

ePDP

Chemistry have launched an alternative ePDP system on SPIDER via the 13 151 Interpersonal Skills 1 class, the implemented by Fraser Murray. This means SPIDER is now providing ePDP for students studying Pharmacy, all Bioscience related degrees, Chemical & Process Engineering, Creative & Aesthetic Studies and Chemistry.

user info

Staff users can click on the "pawn" icon of any user (icon is green for students, red for academics etc) to see summary information about that user. This information has been extended to include user bans and their discussion filter.

Bug fixes

A number of minor bugs in EEL, the questionnaire system, the discussions and SWIMS have been fixed (see the link below to the "development diary" for details).

Staff tools

Databases

SPIDER provides a number of on-line departmental management databases, particularly in the School of Pharmacy. Two new systems have been introduced covering COSHH and radiation stock control & monitoring, and are currently undergoing evaluation in the department of Physiology and Pharmacology. The School "asset register" database has been updated with a vastly improved search interface. Anyone outwith these departments wont be able to view these databases, so contact me if you want a quick demo.

Questionnaires

The questionnaire export tool now gives the option of exporting results as a "series" as well as "combined" results. The former shows Q by Q response per user, latter totals all responses for each Q.

Messaging/news

The messaging system allows staff to post news items on SPIDER and email copies to class or mailing lists. The tool has been improved to filter out inactive users when messages are copied to email, which should reduce the amount of bounced messages due to out-of-date email accounts. Undergraduate Student users are now unable to edit their @strath.ac.uk email in the mySettings, which should reduce bounces from inactive alternative ISP accounts. Email copies are now also sent to a users "second email" if they have entered a second choice email in their mySettings.

Activities

Tim has created an activity tool that allows staff to create an "activity", which consists of a list of items. Students can view the activity and select one of the items, which then removes the items from further students view. Its currently being used to allow students to select essay titles from a list. Staff can then view which student has selected which item. It could also be used to setup and allow students to select lab groups, projects, teams etc. For further information, contact Tim directly (timothy.plumridge@strath.ac.uk)

Admin tools

Bump & ban

The admin tools have been extended and improved. The user ban tool, which allows admins to block user access to the chat, discussions or prevent users logging in has been improved to highlight students currently under ban. The addition of a "bump" tool now allows admins to force log-out users.

View all users

This tool allows admins to view all the users on the system, and now has added filters to limit the listings to the new alumni and postgraduate student groups as well as the pre-existing user groups and clusters.

Site stats

The site statistics have been updated so that the browser and OS views take account of the latest browsers in use. Top of the charts are still the Internet Explorer 6 browser, but windows XP has usurped windows 2000 as the favoured version of windows.

New Cluster

SPIDER has yet another new cluster "CAS", for which Charles Byrne in the Department of Creative and Aesthetic Studies is the cluster admin. Following a successful evaluation of SPIDER using the development server, SPIDER-CAS went live in early November. As with the new "chemeng" cluster, CAS is primarily being used to provide an ePDP solution, with around a dozen staff student users currently registered.

SPIDER Status

SPIDER now has over 7200 active users and around 430 classes in 11 clusters. For those interested in these things, below is the breakdown of usage (page visits) for Oct and November 2004 by cluster:

Cluster	October	%	November	%
Applied-phys	79,753	6	63,165	4
Bioscience	303,842	23	375,560	22
Business	32,548	2	29,530	2
CAS	0	0	568	0
Chemeng	23,136	2	53,901	3
Chemistry	179,314	14	376,283	22
Computing	138,806	10	158,747	9
Economics	42,351	3	30,972	2
Maths-Stams	146,718	11	166,568	10
Pharmacy	263,621	20	324,610	19
Physics	115,423	9	121,923	7
Total	1,325,512		1,701,827	

That's most things covered. If you want to see more information on SPIDER developments see the "development diary" link on SPIDER-DEV at <http://spider-dev.pharmacy.strath.ac.uk/>

As always, feel free to email me comments or suggestions,

best wishes,

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