Addendum to Course Management System Analysis

Costs
The DE Coordinator recently received an updated and "restructured/reduced" quote for 2013-2014 for Moodle (FN-1). The price quoted originally was above $35,000, but with the economies of sharing expenses with Trade, and Pierce and other LACCD colleges which use moodle, the hosting company, Remote Learner reduced our price to $16,441.76 which now is comparable to the Etudes quote of $16,750 for 2013-2014. Price for the CMS then becomes less of a factor than previously thought.

Surveys
The DE Committee surveyed both students and faculty with respect to their use of Etudes, Moodle and ECollege at LAMC. Those surveys assisted the committee in its final decision and recommendation. The Student Survey Results are located at http://lamission.edu/de/student-surveys.pdf and the Faculty Survey Results are located at http://lamission.edu/de/faculty-surveys.pdf.

LACCD email issue with moodle
LACCD has now adopted a new laccd email for all of its students (FN-2) Starting Fall 2013, if we continue with moodle, it will be synchroned with the LACCD database, and all emails uploaded into moodle for students will be their LACCD student email. Most students still do not know that all communications from the college will be through their LACCD student email. When students login to moodle, they will attempt to update their email to their home email account, but will not be able to do so, since every night, moodle will synchronize with the District which will continually reset the student email to the LACCD email. Thus, until students learn how to forward their email from laccd email or to login to their laccd student email, they will be in the "dark" and will not receive any class messages from their instructors. This will create substantial work for online/hybrid and web enhanced instructors, along with the LAMC moodle faculty administrator, and much confusion. On the other hand, Etudes allow students, upon logging in to customize their email to their home email account, and this remains their
account throughout the entire time they use etudes with no changes, or impact by synchronization with the LACCD District. It will probably take 2-3 semesters for all of our students at Mission to become familiar and to use the LACCD email system. By then, LACCD will roll out the Peoplesoft system which will allow students to easily set their home email as their preferred method of communications, and then when LACCD and LAMC send out emails through Peoplesoft it will go directly to the students' home email accounts with no interruptions. The LACCD in its eagerness to get all students to have a customized email through LACCD, probably implemented it too early, and prior to the implementation of Peoplesoft, thus creating a whole host of problems over the next few semesters or even more, until all of the bugs from Peoplesoft are resolved.

**Metacourses**
A meta course is the use of one shell to deliver materials, resources, content, etc. to two or more sections. This is an essential feature for many on campus faculty as they teach multiple sections of the same course. Etudes is quite simple in configuring a metacourse. At the start of the semester the DE Coordinator emails, one time, a "parser" file to the district telling the district to upload the rosters of two different sections into one etudes shell. (see sample at FN-3). Moodle on the other hand is much more complicated. First the DE Faculty Admin has to go to moodle docs, and find the correct version of moodle, and look for an answer (what is a metacourse (FN-4)), then that takes you to a metacourse plugin site for additional information. Moodle is notorious for having system configuration problems with plugins. This then takes one to a youtube video on the subject, which is a slide presentation of a few minutes. This is yet another example of special knowledge and customization that needs to be handled locally, while Etudes handles all of this with very simple solutions and no special knowledge or customization required by LAMC. Moodle is great for a "hobbyist" or "tech specialist guru" but it is unfriendly to most faculty, and DE Coordinators and moodle faculty admin.

**Loss of Data**
When faculty drop students in moodle 2.0 (moodle 1.9 was no problem), and then want to reinstate them, there are substantial problems in recovering data and grades for their previously submitted work. Most faculty would not know it, but they should "suspend" the student and not drop them. If they do drop them, then here are the steps that a faculty must take, or the DE faculty admin to recover the lost grades. This was obtained from moodle docs. This also shows that features are lost or changed between the various versions of moodle while etudes no such loss of features occurs.

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**Suggested resolution at moodle docs:**

I've been tackling this issue with database enrollment and commented at https://tracker.moodle.org/browse/MDL-36024 too. @Mack @Alan - try this (untested). I think it should work. after the global definitions (line 207 or so) add require_once($CFG-
In Etudes, when a student is "dropped", etudes just locks them out of the course, but does not delete their student data, submitted work and grades. Then if a faculty wants or needs to reinstate a student, the "suspension is removed" and all grades are recovered. This specialized feature and customization was taken care of by etudes programmers and thus no such problem exists for etudes faculty.

**Speed Issue**
Moodle has been very slow since version 2.0 has been adopted. Over 8 repair tickets have been submitted in Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 since LAMC moved to moodle 2.0. The Hosting Company, Remote Learner acknowledged the issue and changed servers for LAMC to "faster, more resilient servers". That did seem to speed the processing for a while, but the same problem has continually re-occurred. Recently the Moodle Faculty Admin (the DE Coordinator), put in a ticket addressing the same issue. The Hosting Company again attempted to fix the issue, reported that it was fixed on their end and it was not. Then the DE Coordinator for Trade Tech looked at the LAMC moodle site and reported the following, and that she had fixed it with resulting increase in speed and that the matter was resolved, and provided information on how to set up a metacourse (see above).

**LA Trade Tech DE Coordinator response to slow speeds of LAMC Moodle installation:**

I did not find your site to be slow when I went to assignments to grade them. However, here are some general rules on speeding up any Moodle 2 site you are using:

1. Scroll up all blocks you don't need to use right away.
2. Dock any blocks that are not going to be used for a while
3. restrict the course home page to the block you are currently working on
4. All of the above reduces the amount of content that needs to be refreshed every time you make a change to the page. You have an enormous number of Recent Activity entries that you don't need to see when you are grading, for example. scroll up all of the blocks on the right side except for maybe the activities block. Certainly scroll up the Navigation if you don't need to use it right away.
5. Lastly, change preferences to only show items needing to be graded.

Those items should be all you need now to really make things work fast for you. Your class just has the scroll of death to it and all that length is taking way too much time on your computer to refresh. That's not the server... but your personal computer that has to work to refresh all of that content.
Here are directions to set up a meta course link on your site:

1. Moodle admin - system change -> see attached image file to turn on meta course link to the site.
2. Go to Moodle shell where you want to bring in a class of students who are officially registered into another Moodle shell. In my case, I create one course in which no one gets registered and then add students from Moodle shells where the students are registered. However, you don't have to do it that way.
3. In the course admin, click on users -> and click ONE TIME ONLY on Enrollment methods -> see attached screen shot.
4. When the Enrollment methods screen comes up -> select from the drop down menu COURSE META LINK and add it. See third attached screen shot.
5. What comes up next is a menu screen that you can click on the right corner and it will list 100% of all Moodle courses you have offered. You scroll down the menu until you reach the ONE CLASS you want to connect to that Moodle site.
6. Repeat steps 4 and 5 to add each of the remaining section to the same Moodle course shell.

** special thanks to all of the time, efforts and persistence of the DE Coordinator at Trade in attempting to resolve the speed issues for moodle at Mission.

Once the changes were made to LAMC Moodle, the LAMC DE Coordinator checked the increased speed of the LAMC server. The same problem in accessing the GRADING features occurred. It took at least 16 seconds for the GRADING link to open, and then when the grade chart was clicked to open and post grades, it took a full 26 seconds to open. Such slow speeds make grading considerably burdensome when you add up all of the time waiting for moodle to access the data.

Etudes does not have the speed problems at all. We will have trained over 100 faculty in etudes during the Etudes Pilot Project over the last 5 months. We have at least 20 faculty with over 40 etudes classes, with no reports of "slow speeds" whatsoever.

**Down time for Moodle Server when District services are down**

Moodle is inextricably linked and synched to the LACCD database. Over the last two semesters, LACCD has had many interruptions in its services both due to maintenance and due to constructions projects throughout the District. Most recently, 3 weeks ago, the District notified faculty that certain services would not be available from Friday morning until Sunday morning. There was no indication that the LACCD student data base would be impacted. However, it was, and because it was down, and moodle synchronizes with it, moodle was also down. Many students contacted the Moodle Faculty Admin (DE Coordinator) and were panicked because assignments were due, requiring their accounts to be reset manually during this time to allow them access to moodle.
Etudes handles this very easily. It receives a data file twice a day from LACCD District and then it uploads that file itself, with no interruptions to service at all. Thus there is a simple and seamless handling by etudes programmers of the synchronization with the student data base to ensure students can only login with a secure login and password without any interruptions that are caused to moodle since it connects directly with the LACCD. This problem will only grow worse during the next two years as the LACCD works on implementing the new Peoplesoft Student Information System and Student Portal.

Training and Support

Etudes, has clearly provided excellent training and support under the Etudes Pilot Project as can be evidenced both by the number of faculty trained in etudes, and the lack of problems by faculty now using etudes in their classrooms. Etudes go "above and beyond" in making itself accessible for any problems, and resolving them very quickly. As an example, etudes has developed new "Courselets" which are free to etudes faculty to train in the various features of Etudes. (FN-5) which include - "Advanced Uses of Assignments, Tests and Surveys" and "Exploring Etudes Discussions: From Basics to Advanced Group Work"

Different Versions of Moodle

Moodle is constantly fixing bugs, and thus it revises its versions almost daily. This creates substantial disparities in features and applications. For instance, LA Trade Tech requested that its moodle site be updated to 2.4 and that it be placed on newer, more resilient "Virtual Machines". Mission had no idea that Remote Learner or Trade agreed to this, and thus did not have that specialized treatment. Each college in the LACCD is treated differently by the hosting company, and it is "catch as catch can" with certain colleges benefiting while others not enjoying the same resources. This disparity has caused the installation of moodle at Mission to lag behind LA Trade Tech, through no fault of its own.

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Footnotes

FN-1 - [Updated Moodle Contract Quote 2013-2014](#) $16,441.76 reduced from $35,000

FN-2 - [New Student Email - LACCD](#)

FN-3 - [Setting up an etudes metacourse](#)

FN-4 - [Setting up a moodle metacourse](#)

FN-5 - [Etudes Courselets](#)

updated: 5/1/13 @ 4:46 pm