



Blackboard Advisory Group Minutes: 9-22-2006

Perkins Library Room 226, 3:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Attending: Phillip Batton, Steven Grambow, Norman Keul (for Kay Singer), Wayne Miller, Greg Fitzmaurice, Kate Piva, Lenore Ramm (note taker), Neal Caidin (convener)

1. Blackboard at Duke Summary Report for Sept 2006

The Blackboard at Duke Summary Report was distributed to meeting attendees and promptly read. The report discusses the growth of Blackboard over a number of years, a summary of results of the student and faculty Blackboard surveys, completed activities and milestones and further enhancements that are currently under review.

* Surveys - Discussion concentrated primarily on the results of the surveys. There was interest in the “Customized notification alerts for new content”, which was rate highly by both students and faculty. ClearTxt provides these alerts by sending text messages to mobile phones. [They will be presenting at the October 17th Blackboard Advisory Group meeting.]

* Backpack and Intellectual Property - One potential enhancement not mentioned explicitly by the report is Blackboard Backpack. Licenses for Backpack are purchased by the student. There was brief discussion regarding intellectual property issues on campus and the ramifications of Backpack and DRM. Different schools have different needs with respect to these issues. Kevin L Smith, the new library Scholarly Communications Officer is available to consult on these matters.

* Future Enhancements – One improvement being considered is a building block to allow instructors to enroll students that have been disabled due to having dropped a section of their course. Another is to update the instructor of a course based on the feed that CIT gets from SISS, similar to how enrollments are already updated.

2. General discussion: Improvements to <http://blackboard.duke.edu>

New documentation on <http://blackboard.duke.edu>, Duke’s Blackboard support site, was highlighted. There is a now a New Releases Section. The What’s New in 6.3 link contains html and flash tutorials. There seemed to be a consensus that flash was the preferred type of tutorial. From a recent usability study, it was determined that almost no one uses the search box. It was thought that a large problem is that instructors don’t even know what’s possible, which makes searching difficult. Discussed separating the site into novice and advanced sections. Other suggestions include updating and changing the title of faculty profiles to make the profiles more inviting.

3. Blackboard Patent

Within the past year, Blackboard, Inc. acquired their most significant competitor, WebCT, such that they now have most of the market share. They have also been awarded a broad patent on many features within the scope of e-learning. They have subsequently filed a lawsuit against one of their few competitors, Desire2Learn, claiming patent infringement. Eliminating the competition has many implications, such as the potential for rate hikes and reducing their need for innovation. It has already been perceived by members of the group that Blackboard is lagging behind in this regard.

The group felt that we should explore alternatives in the open source Learning Management System (LMS) space. It would take 3 to 5 years to comfortably transition to a different system and it would take significant resources. The other available options include Sakai (based on the Open Knowledge Initiative (OKI) standard, Moodle, Desire2Learn and Angel. We would need people to make a commitment to determine our needs and where we want to go.