The missing link for online learning educators

Staff support & development for the adoption of new learning technologies in higher education

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Overview of talk

- Brief history of myUnisa
  - myUnisa Team: ICLD & ICT
- How myUnisa works for us
- Getting academic buy-in... or not
- Supporting the academics
- The way forward

Unisa new learning technologies

- myUnisa: online system → LMS
- Satellite broadcasts with DVD
- Multimedia: audio / visual & interactive
  - DVD & DVDrom
  - CD & CDrom
- Focus on myUnisa support here

Birth of myUnisa

- January 2004: Merger of 3 institutions & 2 online systems → Unisa
  - Each had legacy ‘home-made’ online systems
  - Student system, assignments, records, staff system
  - Online teaching & blended learning
- June 2005 → decided to join SAKAI community as partner
  - Open source platform with worldwide use
  - MIT, Indiana University, UCT & 700+ others
- 9 January 2006: roll-out date for myUnisa
- So now, 3rd year & 3rd update to platform
myUnisa infancy

- 2006: started on 9 January
  - by 15 February: over 50,000 students registered
  - By October 06: over 120,000 students & 7000 course website
- 2007: increased use by students
  - Lecturers still slow to adopt
  - New tools in June
- 2008: increased use by academics
  - New platform & new tools in May

myUnisa snapshot

- Tools on myUnisa for Teaching & Learning
  - Home & welcome page
  - Schedule: Calendar + time management
  - Discussion Forum
  - Resources: Official study materials + more
  - Announcements with email
  - FAQs, course email
- Newer tools: Blogs, wikis, online self-assessment
- Broad spectrum of current use → continuum dependent on various factors
  - Number of students
  - Support for various tool
  - Amount of admin help needed
  - Amount of technical know-how required

Support for myUnisa

- ICT Support Team
  - ICT members: technical
  - ICLD members: academic staff development
- Various strategies to support academics to use the systems
Getting academic buy-in

- Lecturers are reluctant to use new technologies
  - Implemented very quickly → “nobody asked me”
  - “Why didn’t we use WebCT / Blackboard / etc like they… did?”
  - My computer is too old, too slow…
- Old systems had limited buy-in,
  - but required limited academic input
  - Nearly no use
- Uncertainty about technology
  - “I don’t know how to do it!”
  - “Who will provide training?”
  - “Who will do it for me?”
- Distrust of the technology & systems
  - “We will wait & see if it works, first!”
  - “I’ll give it six months!”

Strategies for support: What we’ve tried, so far...

2005: Needs analysis phase
- Questionnaire of needs for online / blended components
- Student survey: n = 20 000

2006: Training needs → training
- Demonstration to all dept Heads
- Department-wide training sessions
- Information ‘road show’ to market
- Demo course for training: LMSCPL
  - Face-to-face
  - Then online support
Emphasis on teaching

- myUnisa Forums monthly
  - Basic tools & discussion forums
  - Follow-up hands-on training sessions
  - Introduce new tools & how to
- myUnisa newsletters
  - Announcements
  - Sent via email to academics
- myUnisa Showcase & Colloquium
  - Best / most creative use of myUnisa
- myUnisa Excellence Award
  - Won trip to SAKAI conference in Paris

Emphasis on innovation

- myUnisa Forums → new focus
  - Based on use, not tool know-how
  - Best practice examples from Unisa
- Help & Support site
  - For all academics
  - Tutorials & additional materials
- Project sites for special groups
  - Induction 2008 support new lecturers
  - Tutor support
- myUnisa Showcase
  - Academics show & tell about their courses & myUnisa
Demonstration course

- Purpose of Demo course:
  - to show myUnisa tools
  - to teach about online learning
- On same system as regular courses with same tools
- Hands-on training of small groups
  - 10 – 15 staff members in each
  - Lecturers remained linked for 1 year
- Lecturers could try things out, without student reactions
  - Then copy & paste into their courses
  - They could also ask me questions, using the course site
Welcome to the Demo course on using the Learner Management System, myLMS

This course has been designed for learners at UBC to help them to make full use of the various advantages available through technology-enhanced teaching and learning by distance. We will be concentrating on taking full advantage of the available components in the myLMS system. To ensure that we are making the best use of the system, you will be asked to complete a few tasks and activities. In myLMS you have access to electronic tutorial materials and resources. For example, tutorial letters are stored under the ‘Materials’ link on the navigation pane to the left of every subject site. For example, to see the tutorial letters for any course, click on ‘Materials’ then access the folder ‘Official Study Materials’ by clicking on it. If there are any tutorial letters for the course, they will be displayed here.

So, to get started:
- Go to the ‘Discussion Forum’ and read through all the topics there. Start with the ‘Introduction’ category where you can see a message by yourself and any other discussions from other students.
- Also, look at all the resources available for this course in the ‘Resources’ section and explore some of the links, etc.

Well, enough for now I look forward to working with you.

Farewell the course.
Wiki: how to create one
More support: 
Help & Support site

- Materials for lecturers to copy:
  - Help files for students
  - Help files for academics
  - Info ‘blurb’ examples to include in study materials
- Tutorials of how to use various tools
  - Examples from different depts
- Updates & news sent to all via email & newsletters
- Presentations from Forums, Showcases, colloquiums
Future support ideas

- Guest site for public display of myUnisa
- Staff development web site for everything! → CPL Web
  - Using myUnisa interface
  - Not only how to use myUnisa
    - SAQA & policy implications
    - Paradigm shifts
    - Rich environments for active learning
- Online Policy & implementation
  - Copyright issues
  - Plagiarism concerns
**More myUnisa support?**

- Hands-on myUnisa training? By appointment in computer labs
  - By consultation
- myUnisa Coffee Breaks
  - Every Wednesday, 8:30 – 10:00
  - TWW Computer Labs,
- myUnisa Road Shows
  - Department-wide training
  - Other Unisa staff; learner support & regions

**From Buy-in to demand for more**

- Why can’t I get the VOIP to work?
- We want to use podcasts!
- Where can I publish my students’ group projects?
- Can we make use of student web sites?
- When can myUnisa go on my mobile phone? PDA?
- “I want to use all the cool stuff like that one…”
- What next?
Thank you

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