

Issue Brief – Course Management System

UTAH EDUCATION NETWORK

NUMBER UEN-03

SUMMARY

Utah's system of higher education could absorb future enrollment growth and avoid building costs with increased use of Course Management Systems. Centralizing such systems would take advantage of economies of scale that reduce the price of on-line instruction. The Utah Education Network (UEN) has requested \$2.2 million in one-time funds and \$636,000 ongoing to provide such a centralized Course Management System. The analyst supports UEN's request.

BACKGROUND

Utah's colleges and universities use disparate course management systems to provide instruction over the Internet. In most cases, they offer lower division, required classes on-line. Most of these are taught by part-time, adjunct instructors.

Each institution is currently responsible for operating and supporting its own on-line instruction system. Many use the same commercially available product – WebCT – but the amount of available content and level of user support vary widely from school to school. On-line instructors often require technical knowledge to build web sites and related course content.

Utah's schools are doing a good job, but there are further benefits to be gained. By blending on-line instruction with face-to-face interaction, institutions could absorb part of expected future enrollment growth within their current facilities. But, in order to expand on-line instruction – especially to upper division classes – schools must provide better support to tenured professors.

With a centralized course management system, the Utah Education Network could provide rich content and excellent technical support to all of the state's colleges and universities, freeing-up institutional resources to address user support and training or other campus technology needs.

Course Management Systems are Internet applications that allow students and instructors to complete most

course tasks on-line from any location at any time. WebCT is the Course Management System preferred by most colleges and universities. It is currently used by the University of Utah, Salt Lake Community College, and Weber State University, among others.

The advantages of a centralized course management system include:

- Students access education anywhere and at any time via the Internet;
- Instructors extend current courses by sharing content and partnering to develop and deliver courses;
- Current buildings accommodate more classes by blending in-person instruction with on-line instruction, much like “labs” extend “lectures”;
- Institutions improve retention and graduation rates by increasing flexibility and enriching course content.

UEN has requested \$2.2 million in one-time state appropriations to purchase “perpetual” software licenses and computer hardware that will serve all of the state's colleges and universities. To operate and maintain a centralized course management system, UEN has further requested \$636,000 in ongoing state resources.

RECOMMENDATION

The Analyst recommends the following steps to implement a centralized Course Management System for all of Utah's colleges and universities:

1. Place on a priorities list a \$2.2 million one-time appropriation for upfront licensing and equipment costs;
2. Place on a priorities list a \$636,000 increase in ongoing appropriations for support contracts and personnel.