

Issue Brief – Course Management System

UTAH EDUCATION NETWORK

NUMBER UEN-04

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 \$480,000 in one-time funds and a \$630,000 ongoing appropriation to provide such a centralized Course Management System.

BACKGROUND

Utah's colleges and universities have in the past used 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 institutions 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 Vista is the Course Management System preferred by most colleges and universities. UEN currently hosts WebCT Vista for Dixie State College, College of Eastern Utah, Snow College, and the Utah College of Applied Technology.

Through such a centralized course management system:

- 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 \$480,000 in one-time state appropriations to purchase equipment and increase database capacity. It further requests \$630,000 in ongoing state resources for WebCT Vista licensing, personnel costs, and operating expenses. Such an appropriation would extend UEN's centralized Course Management System to the University of Utah, Utah State University, and Utah Valley State College.

RECOMMENDATION

Should the subcommittee support UEN's request for a centralized Course Management System, it could take the following steps:

1. Place on a priorities list for FY 2008 an ongoing increase of \$630,000 from the Education Fund;
2. Place on a priorities list a one-time FY 2008 appropriation of \$480,000 from the Education Fund.