

CHALKDUST

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Online teaching continues to grow: Bb Usage Statistics

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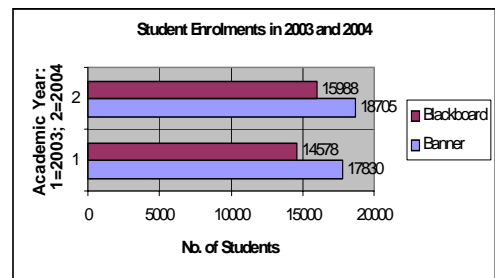
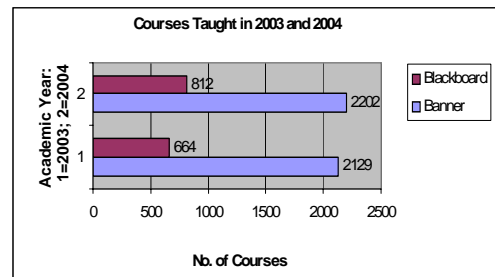
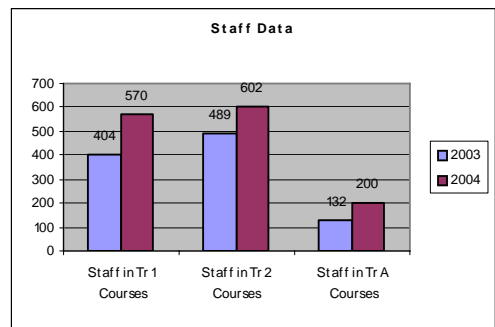
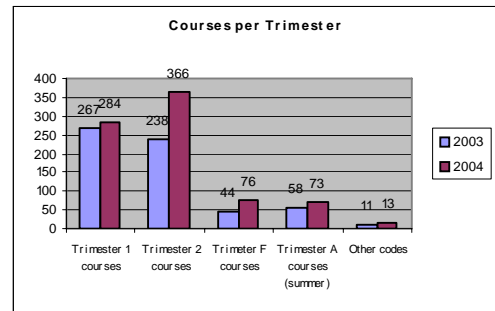
The Blackboard course management system was introduced at Victoria in 2002. In this first 2005 issue of ChalkDust we are providing an overview of the use of Blackboard over 2003 and 2004 academic years. The figures below show that the use of Blackboard increased from 2003 to 2004 in every aspect we explored, including the number of courses offered, and the number of staff and students using the environment. The fact that in 2004 37% of all VUW courses had a Blackboard website and 85.5% of all VUW students were enrolled in these courses indicates that Blackboard has become part and parcel of teaching and learning at VUW.

In 2004, 812 courses were taught in Blackboard, which is a 22% increase from 2003. The number of unique students taking at least one course in Blackboard increased from 14,547 in 2003 to 15,988 in 2004, while the number of teaching staff in courses increased from 839 in 2003 to 948 in 2004. The number of undergraduate courses offered in Blackboard increased by 26%, from 438 in 2003 to 555 in 2004. There has also been a significant increase in a number of active organisations, from 25 in 2003 to 40 in 2004 (60% increase).

Looking at the usage statistics per trimester, there was an increase of 6.4% in the number of courses taught in Blackboard in trimester 1 (267 in 2003 compared to 284 in 2004); 53.8% increase in trimester 2 courses (238 in 2003 and 366 in 2004), 72.7 % increase in full year courses (from 44 in 2003 to 76 in 2004), and a 25.7% increase in the summer trimester courses (from 58 in 2003 to 73 in 2004). The numbers of unique staff members teaching these courses per trimester also show a significant growth from 2003 to 2004: 41% growth for trimester 1, 23% for trimester 2 and 52% for trimester 3.

The proportion of courses offered in Blackboard compared to the overall number of courses taught in the current year (as indicated in Banner) is also growing steadily, as is the total number of unique students enrolled in these courses. In 2003, 31% of all courses taught were offered in Blackboard, while in 2004 this proportion was 37%. In regard to unique students enrolled in Blackboard, the percentage increased from 81.8% in 2003 to 85.5% in 2004.

The use of Blackboard is continuing to grow in 2005: at the beginning of March this year the number of first trimester courses increased by 30% compared to 2004, from 284 courses to 370 courses, while the number of unique staff involved in teaching these courses has grown from 570 in 2004 to 714 in 2005 (by 25%).



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Experience the Difference: Learning Objects Software

*Have you been looking for ways to give your students more opportunities to work collaboratively? Or maybe you wanted students to work on their ability to reflect on their own learning? If the answer to one of these questions is YES, then you may be interested in participating in a trial run by the UTDC in the second trimester 2005. The new software suite called **Campus Pack** allows lecturers to incorporate these innovative learning techniques into their Blackboard websites without having any prior knowledge of programming or web editing. Intrigued?.. then read on.*

Campus Pack is a suite of innovative Learning Extensions (LX) that foster active learning, facilitate collaboration and expand channels for student-instructor interaction. Here we will focus on two tools, which promote deep learning:

- **Teams LX** - a tool that enables *Group Learning through Wiki Sites*
- **Journal LX**, which supports the use of *Blogging as a Learning Tool*.

These tools are designed to following the following principles: easy to create, easy to use and easy to share.

With **Teams LX**, instructors can organize students into groups and assign each group to jointly author a dynamic website with multi-media content. When the Teams site is done, instructors can view each group member's contributions and grade them accordingly. The students use a straightforward

WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) editor to author site content, which can include rich text, images, external links, and uploaded files. Each student can add content, edit others' contributions, and reformat layout as she or he desires, but a full history of the revisions is maintained and accessible. Determining what and how much to add or revise is part of the group process.

Moreover, each Teams LX site can be exported from its home course area within the course management system, so sites can be retained and accessed after the course ends. For example, a site could be used as a resource in subsequent courses.

Teams LX's WYSIWYG text editor supports foreign language text and Macintosh with Mozilla based browsers.

With **Journal LX**, instructors can create blogs ('web logs') in which students can gather information and reflect on course-related topics and assignments. The use of blogs is known to encourage self-expression, critical thinking, and well-reasoned debate.

Using this tool students can present their analysis of or reflections on course-related topics, classroom discussions, and course assignments. Students can review and comment on their peers' postings, and instructors can participate with students in the evolving dialog.

Blogs can be structured in three different ways with Journal LX:

- **Course Blog** — The instructor posts course notes, creating an ongoing record and review of course material.
- **Course Assignment Blogs** — Groups of students collaborate in creating topic-specific posts, which other classmates can comment on.
- **Personal Journals** — Each student in a course creates a journal, either closed for private dialog or open for peer review.

Journal as a course diary

Instructors can use the course journal to review and comment on class discussions, present topics and assignments, and provide links to resources that are associated with upcoming lessons. Using a browser-based graphical editor, users can create journal entries, upload images and documents and link to external websites.

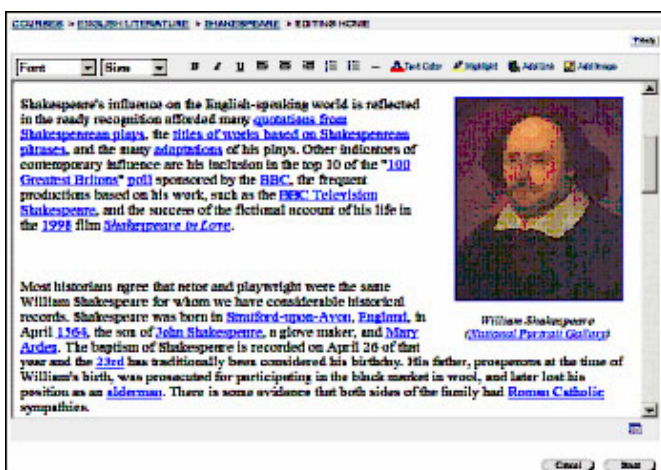
Journal for student reflection

Using the same WYSIWYG editor available with Teams LX, users can create an online journal that displays rich text, images, external links and uploaded files. Each entry is dated and displayed sequentially. Journal LX can also be used to promote student reflection on information provided in course lessons and discussed in class.

Journal as a collaborative writing space

Journal LX gives students a perfect tool for displaying their writing and allowing their peers the opportunity to provide feedback, suggestions and comments. Users can allow others to comment on individual journal entries as a way of gathering feedback and promoting community.

If you are interesting in participating in the Learning Objects trial, or for further information, please contact Irina Elgort at UTDC.



Distance and Flexible Learning at VUW

On 16 February 2005 SMT met and considered a number of papers on the future of flexible and distance (F&D) learning at VUW.

The recommendation was made that Victoria engages positively with distance education in a relatively small number of carefully-chosen areas where we could establish a market advantage, distinguishing our intentions from other providers, in particular, Massey University. Particularly now that the merger with the college of education has happened, VUW has a variety of flexible and distance (F&D) programmes and this is a good time to consider the best way of supporting and developing our F&D capability.

In the first instance this means the short-term appointment (full-time for approximately four months) of a researcher/consultant to identify relevant resources and models, analyse options, and provide advice to enable F&D learning initiatives to be among the mainstream options available at Victoria.

The person will be located within the University Teaching Development Centre (UTDC) and report to the UTDC Director. This person will be expected to consult widely throughout Victoria in formulating options and planning advice. We expect to appoint someone by the end of April and they will then be contacting groups throughout the University in order to address the following areas of work:

1. robust models for determining costs and benefits – financial, human, and opportunity – of strategically important F&D initiatives;
2. a process to determine which strategically important F&D initiatives and areas should be supported by additional University resources beyond the normal budget allocations of units and schools;

3. determination of the appropriate infrastructure required to support University-wide F&D initiatives, especially in the areas of synchronous and asynchronous distance delivery;
4. processes for ensuring the administrative, financial and pedagogical sustainability of University-wide F&D initiatives;
5. processes for ensuring that F&D initiatives at Victoria contribute to a research-led teaching approach, and are subject to quality evaluation in line with other offerings;
6. risk management principles, policies and processes to guide the University's F&D initiatives;
7. implications for staff workloads, support and training;
8. implications for student support;
9. alignment of F&D initiatives with a proposed National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence.

The researcher or consultant will provide a single, integrated report – including a budget and plan for the proposed F&D initiatives – in time for its consideration as part of the 2006 budget. It is important to emphasise that they will not be defining solutions to these areas, but rather scoping projects and identifying existing, successful approaches that can be adopted widely. The intention is to build on existing strengths and improve the robustness and support of the required infrastructure.

Any questions about the project can be sent to Stephen Marshall at the UTDC, when an appointment is made, this will be announced widely along with details about how to be involved in the consultation and planning processes.



News from ascilite

1. 2004 conference highlights

The recent ascilite conference in Perth was full of highlights, from a diverse program of keynotes, papers and posters, to a continuing gold standard of social activities. Papers are now available from <http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/perth04/procs/contents.html>

2. ascilite awards

The awards are designed to reward leaders in the use of electronic technologies in teaching and learning in tertiary education. The closing date for entries to the 2005 awards is August 30th 2005. You are welcome to borrow a CD with samples of the 2004 short listed entries.

3. Publication workshop

One particular highlight from the 2004 conference highlight program was a half-day ascilite-sponsored workshop for new researchers/authors. This was led by two authors with a great deal of experience – Carmel McNaught and Catherine McLoughlin. It was well attended and well received, with many participants staying back to discuss their own publication intentions. Ascilite hopes to extend this to a full-day workshop at this year's conference and to provide some follow-up support to participants.

4. 2005 conference

The announcement for ascilite 2005 conference has already been released, see <https://olt.qut.edu.au/udf/ascilite2005/>

Please speak to your campus rep - Irina Elgort, UTDC, for details of the above news items.

Students' Access to Blackboard



At the beginning of the first trimester ITS received many inquiries related to student access to Blackboard. This article explains this process.

Blackboard is set up in such a way that VUW staff and students use their university computing user names and passwords to login to Blackboard. To access Blackboard VUW users authenticate against one of the VUW domains: staff – against the staff domain, using their VUW staff computing user names and passwords, and students – against the student domain, similarly, using their VUW student computing user names and passwords. This means that if a user (staff or student) cannot login to Blackboard inquiries need to be made to ITS: by staff – to the ITS Service Group; and by students – to the SCS Group.

There are two main reasons why a student may be unable to login to Bb:

1. If a *new student*, who has not used his/her student computing (SCS) user name and password ever before, cannot log in, this student needs to **change the original password** before he/she can access Blackboard. This original password is the student ID number. At the start of the first trimester the following note was published on the Login Page of Blackboard:

Student Information: Before you can use Blackboard, you will need to change the original password that was provided to you when your account was created. Please visit http://www.vuw.ac.nz/scs/support/change_pw.aspx to change your password

This information is also included in the **Blackboard Student Brochure** which is sent to all students with their confirmation of study packs. The brochure is also available for downloading from the gateway page of Blackboard

(<http://blackboard.vuw.ac.nz>)

2. If a *returning student* experiences problems with logging in, it is likely that this student has forgotten his/her VUW student computing (SCS) user name and/or password. For these students the options are: visit an SCS help desks on one of the campuses, send an e-mail request to scs-help@vuw.ac.nz or call (04)463-5050. (*This information is provided in the Blackboard Student Brochure*).

Q & A

Q: *At the beginning of the trimester, some student complained that they could not change their passwords online. What was the problem?*

A: A higher than usual number of students wanted to reset their SCS passwords online this year. As this was not anticipated, ITS ran out of P-Synch licences and students couldn't log in. Additional licences were purchased as soon as the problem was identified and the situation was resolved by the end of week one of the trimester.

Tips and Tricks: Preparing PowerPoint Presentations for Online delivery

Microsoft PowerPoint (PP) is the most commonly used presentation software in the world. According to a New York Times article, in 2003 there were 400 million copies of the PP software in circulation, and almost no corporate decision today takes place without it. However, this powerful tool can easily become a powerful hazard, if not used wisely. Many articles have been written about how to create effective PP presentations, and the concept of 'death by PowerPoint' is now well known. Therefore, without going further into the issue of designing PPs, let us consider a more subtle aspect of using the software – *the delivery context*.

When you use PP presentations in your lectures, there is usually no need to worry too much about the file size of your presentations. It is general practice to copy a PP to a memory stick or CD, bring it to the lecture theatre before the lecture and copy it to the lectern computer. This is usually a painless process which doesn't take very long.

It's a different story altogether if you want to deliver your PowerPoint presentation online. If you are intending

to upload your lecture slides to Blackboard, for example, in order to make them available to students before or after lectures, you need to keep the file size down as much as possible, otherwise some students using a 56K modem at home may not be able to download and view your presentation.

Here are some tips on reducing the size of your PowerPoint:

- **Print to PDF**

If you need to keep the original images, the best way to reduce the size of your PowerPoint presentation is to print it to PDF. To do this you can either use Acrobat Distiller, if you have a full version of Adobe Acrobat, or contact ITS Service Desk and request a free PDF software (Macromedia FlashPaper) to be installed on your computer. If you are using Mac OS X this software comes standard with the system.

- **Save as Outline**

If the original images in your presentation are there mainly for aesthetic reasons to enhance your visual face-to-face presentation, you may want to save your PP as a text outline, which will considerably reduce

the size of your file. This solution will save only the text of your presentation. The resulting file will be in a MS Word compatible RTF format. To save a presentation as an outline, open it, click on the File menu, select Save As ..., choose Outline/RTF (*.rtf) under Save as type, and click Save.

- **Reduce the size of your images**

If you need to keep the images and do not want to save your PP as a PDF file, you need to reduce the size of images you are using in your presentation. In PowerPoint 2002 and later you can compress all images and remove unneeded data simultaneously by following a set of simple steps. If you use PowerPoint 2000 or earlier, you will need to repeat a set of steps for each image that you want to compress.

You will find detailed instructions on: <http://office.microsoft.com/en-au/assistance/HA011168821033.aspx>

For further help please contact the UTDC Educational Technology group.

Note: Remember to save a copy of your PP presentation before your start changing its format.