Moodle Development Advisory Committee Meeting

MINUTES
March 24, 2014

MEETING CALLED BY
Larry Rouse, Chair

TYPE OF MEETING
Spring MDAC Meeting

ATTENDEES
Larry Rouse, Ray Castle, Dave Elliott, Buddy Ethridge, Emily Frank, Barbara McManus (briefly), Pam Nicolle, Jason Peak, Phoebe Rouse, Liz Swoope, Elliott Thompson, Shannon Wall, Bill Wischusen

Staffing

- New Moodle developer Dave Elliott was introduced to the group. He is already making great contributions to the development effort.
- New instructional technologist Kristin Hernandez was introduced (in absentia). Her impact is already being felt in the Faculty Technology Center.
- Barbara McManus, of the Faculty Technology Center, has announced her retirement as of May 31, 2014. We will miss her presence and professionalism. We have no word on when/if we will be able to hire someone to fill Barbara’s position, but we will hire someone as soon as possible.
- The director of Academic Technology Services, the position formerly held by Pam Nicolle (who currently serves the role in addition to her new duties as Executive Director of USS), has been advertised. The goal is to have the position filled by June 1.

Moodle Development

Since the last meeting, the development team has been hard at work on several big issues and many smaller bug fixes.

- The largest portion of development time was spent working on the Universal Enrollment System (UES). This system is the underlying portion that interacts with the mainframe and controls events accessed by end-users through the Course Preferences System (CPS). There were several issues that needed to be addressed, including student drops not being processed properly, instructor enrollments breaking on occasion when assignments were changed on the mainframe, and courses not updating properly when instructors were changed on the mainframe. Jason mapped out the entire system and has corrected most issues. One outstanding issue remains, where instructors who have a course created and later decide that they no longer want the course. In this case, the system is supposed to remove them from the course when they “unwant” it, but that currently is not functioning properly. Since this is a minor issue and does not affect many users, we will address it as time permits.
- The new RollSheets/Photo Sheets were shown to the committee. These features are live in Moodle and can be accessed by adding the RollSheet block to any course.
- This led to further discussion later in the meeting about how to notify users when new features come online. We are going to refocus on only adding new features between semesters (this policy has slipped a little over the past few years) and we will send out an email to all faculty users of Moodle between the major semesters listing the new features, along with links to the appropriate articles in GROK.
- Quickmail has had several bugs exterminated and a new feature added. The new feature is the Additional Email Addresses field. This allows the sender to add email addresses for persons not enrolled in the course (including non-LSU email addresses) as well as allowing them to send a message directly to their own email address, which was not possible prior to this addition.
Updates were given on work done on several third party vendor integrations: McGraw-Hill, TurningPoint, TurnItIn, and MacMillan. Work done on these items was to better integrate them with Moodle or to correct issues with the current integrations.

The new EBSCO tool, called the LSU Libraries Reading List in Moodle, was mentioned and kudos were given to Emily Frank and Mike Waugh for the work done on their end to get this service up and running. Moodle integration is complete and required minimal work on the ITS side.

The Tigercard Photo ID system received an overhaul earlier this semester. We have been working with them to better synchronize our systems and believe that we will begin seeing increasing numbers of user profile images in the near future.

Several projects were completed for LSUOnline. These include:

- Sentinel – oversees and monitors users, ensuring that users are properly credentialed and vetted before accessing a course
- ProctorU – updates the users’ ProctorU status on a regular basis
- Student analytical data exporter (AP Report) – sends nightly information feed to our vendor, Academic Partnerships, containing updated student data
- Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) – We reported to the committee that the development team has met with the Office of Assessment and Evaluation (OAE) on several occasions regarding possible integration with Taskstream, the vended solution used by OAE for data gathering and analysis. There are no official requests for this currently. Should an official request be made, we will assess the time required for development and discuss with the committee before making any decisions.

Current Projects
(Projects currently in the development queue, previously approved by MDAC)

- Grade server (local) – This server will house semester backups and will be used to recreate courses in the event of a grade dispute or any other situations where user data is needed by the school administration. Work is almost complete on our side. We are awaiting word from MoodleRooms with how to best get the backups from their servers to our local one. Once this is done and we have the backups on site, we will be able to remove the old courses that have been on the Moodle 2 server since 2012.
  
  Note: LSUOnline and traditional courses will be stored together for this purpose. There is no need to segregate, as any restores on this server would be for faculty/administration access only.

- Moodle In-House (proposal only) – We have been working with the ITS server group to determine exactly what we would need to have on site to effectively and safely move Moodle to a locally hosted set of servers. This exercise is precautionary only at this point, but we want to ensure that, should the need arise to do this on short order, we are prepared to do so with minimal disruption.

- Quickmail / Administrative Email – We are working on adding some of the Quickmail features to Administrative Email so that we can more effectively use the system to communicate with the users and so that there will be a persistent log of such communications.

- Student Government election tool – We have begun work on a new election tool to be housed in Moodle for SGA elections. The tool will reside permanently in the system but will only be visible during election times. Also, much like Post Grades, the feature will only be visible to those users in roles eligible to vote. Content within the ballot will be specific to the user’s college/classification. Not only will Moodle serve as a central place for this tool to exist, it will also alleviate continued support from other units in ITS for the tool currently in use.

- TurnItIn V2 – We are testing the new version of TurnItIn, with plans to release it this Fall when we upgrade to Moodle 2.7. The new version appears to be incompatible with the previous version, so we will likely be running both versions in parallel. This will allow continued access to
assignments that already exist, but new assignments will need to be created using the latest version.

- Moodle 2.6/2.7 – This is our yearly update and will consume the majority of the Summer development time with testing and vetting. There is the possibility that a thematic update will be required. If this is the case, we will send mock-ups of the new design to the committee via email or the MDAC course and ask for your feedback. We will attempt to keep the look and feel as close to what we currently have as possible.

- Statistics generator – This project was put on hold while we awaited the latest versions. There are new events and logging systems in Moodle 2.7 which should make this project much easier to complete and to update with later releases. Depending on testing and other development projects, this may be included in the Fall update or it may have to wait until the Winter update.

New Requests
These development suggestions were presented at or are a result of the meeting. Unless noted, these items have not yet been prioritized, as summer development of new features is frozen due to upgrade testing. When possible, some of these projects may get completed as low-hanging fruits during the intermediary phases of the larger projects. Underlined sentences denote committee decisions.

- Topic ordering by number – The suggestion was to include a way to order topics by number, making it easier for instructors with large topics to reorder their course. The estimated development time was 40-80 hours. This was approved for development.

- SmartFile importer update – This request was to add functionality to the SmartFile importer to work with exports from WileyPlus. Estimated time was 40 hours (likely less), assuming we can get a file to work with. This item was approved for development.

- Hierarchical importer – This request is to alter the CSV importer so that multiple fields could be used for mapping purposes in a hierarchical manner. The issue brought up by multiple committee members was of using non-unique identifiers. The estimated development time was 80-120 hours. This was NOT approved for development.

- This discussion led to a new request from the committee, a way to export or save failure notifications that appear after grade imports. We are investigating this request. If it is an easy project, we will automatically add it to the queue. If it appears that such development would take significant time, we will consult with the committee before moving forward.

- CxC Plugin / Course Evaluation – This request was initially submitted several years ago by CxC. They would like a survey tool that could be injected automatically into courses flagged as Communication Intensive (C-I) on the mainframe. The students would complete the survey anonymously. Once the survey was complete, the instructor would be given a list of all students with confirmed participation, but would not have access to the content. Only CxC personal would have access to the content of the survey. Only CxC personal would have access to the content of the survey. This is a challenging project, and development estimates ran 320-400 hours conservatively. When looking at the scope of this project, it was determined that whatever tool was built could also function as a course evaluation tool. It was decided by the committee that, if OAE would like an evaluation tool built, they should be the ones to begin that conversation. Until such a time, this project is shelved. This was NOT approved for development.

- Automatic course total reduction – This request was for a gradebook feature that would allow instructors to set an automatic percentage or point reduction from the gradebook total when certain conditions were met (such as 3 unexcused absences). It is estimated that this project would take 160-200 hours to complete and yearly maintenance and testing would very likely require almost as much time annually. This was NOT approved for development.

- LSU Libraries widget – This request was for a plugin or module to be created that could be inserted into the side columns of any course. The block would contain the LSU Libraries "Ask a
Librarian” information. Concern over setting a precedent for other groups was raised. Final decision was to add a link to the top navigation menu at for a new type of resource to be investigated. This was NOT approved for development (see following).

- **Instead of the LSU Libraries widget, it was suggested by the committee that it would be nice to be able to inject this information directly into a course topic, next to a particular set of content. We are investigating a new resource type, temporarily called “Reusable content”. Once we determine development time, we will submit it to the committee for approval.**

- LSU Law reading list – The Law library would like a reading list very similar to the reading list added by LSU Libraries added to Moodle. Development time is minimal. This was approved for development.

- TurnItIn activation on Community – Student Advocacy and Accountability would like to use TurnItIn on the Community Moodle server. The committee approved activating the module on that server.

- Badges – A discussion about the possible uses of badges was held. No one saw an immediate educational use for badges in Academic Moodle, but it was agreed that their use could be beneficial on training sites on Community. The decision was made to activate badges on Community, but to not advertise it, thus seeing if anyone found and used the feature.

- Inactive Gradebook – This request came about through conversation at the committee meeting. Faculty would like to be able to view the grades of students who have dropped a course without having to re-add them to the course. The development team will assess this request for feasibility and determine how much time will be required. Once the assessment is complete, we will forward it on to the committee for consideration.