WebCT Tools – adding functionality to your web course

Agenda:
1) Questions about last week / past sessions

2) WebCT Communications and Maintenance Tools
   • an overview of the options for enhancing the usefulness of a WebCT course
   • Tools covered in this session:
     • Bulletin Board
     • Mail
     • Chat
     • Calendar
     • Security

3) Format of today's session
   • Overview of each tool
   • Using the tool - try it out
   • Building your own - putting the tools in place in your own WebCT course

Definitions:
Chat A "real-time" discussion on-line. Involves typing a message into a window and having it broadcast to every chat members' screen. Some sessions can be logged to a text file.

Threaded Discussion / Bulletin Board A threaded discussion refers to an exchange of messages that relate to a common theme - the "thread". Each new discussion topic constitutes a new thread; typically the relating messages are indented under each thread.

Tool Page Toolpages are identical in structure to the main homepage and provides the ability to link to other course components. Toolpages can be used to logically group common course elements onto one page. By using toolpages, you can keep the main homepage less cluttered, making it easier for students to find what they are looking for.

WebCT Tool These are tools which are built into the WebCT package to give course sites enhanced functionality. These tools help separate WebCT pages from typical, standard generated web pages, by providing much more than typical content. These "value added" services are items normally requiring services of a programmer/developer; with WebCT they are built in and easy for anyone to use.
Building Correspondence Tools

a) Bulletin Board

- Also could be called a threaded discussion group. These are discussions organized into instructor-designated forums
- Features:
  1. Students can launch or contribute threads; manage own messages
  2. Instructor can move messages among forums, remove messages
  3. Private forums can be created and managed
  4. Instructor can reply privately to posted messages
  5. Forum messages can be searched using several attributes
- why you’d want to use:
  1. Allows organization / grouping of messages with common themes, making it easier to consult at a future date
  2. Grouping can promote student / student interaction - often students will answer each / others' questions
- Why you might not want to use:
  1. If student's don't pay attention to what they are responding to, threads become easily disorganized
  2. Reorganizing the threads can take considerable time

Task A: Building a separate Correspondence Tool Page

Step A.1 Return to your course page.

Step A.2 From the home page, click on “Organize Icons”

Step A.3 Click on “Add”

Step A.4 Click on “Tool Page”. This will create a separate page for organizing several tools.

Step A.5 You now need to give the tool page a link title and icon. This will be what the user sees on the main page and uses to get to your tools page. For this example, create a link title "correspondence", and choose an appropriate icon from the WebCT icon collection. Click "Add" once you’ve made the selections.
Step A.6 You will be returned to your homepage, which should now have a new icon and title "Correspondence Area". Now you need to add tools to the new page.

Step A.7 With the icon for "Correspondence Area" selected (as shown above), click on the link for the new page (select either the icon or the "Correspondence Area" text). This will take you to a blank page - the new tool page "Correspondence Area." Your page should look similar to the one below - but only for a few moments.

Step A.8 Add the icon for the "Bulletin Board" tool. First, select the "organize Icons" button.

Step A.9 Select "Add"

Step A.10 Select "WebCT Tool"
Step A.11 Select the "bulletin" tool. Be sure to enter a title (suggestions: "Discussion Area" or "Announcement and Discussion"). Select "Add" when finished.

Result You now have a Correspondence Area page, with a bulletin board for threaded discussions.

Advanced Begin customizing your Correspondence Area page ("Customize Page"). Add a header, appropriate images and text descriptions (caption, footer, etc.) for your own course.

Advanced Begin inserting discussion topics and messages in the discussion area. Suggestions for content include: course policies (one professor has posted the course policies on the discussion board and required her students to acknowledge the policy by posting a response), reminders about assignments, clarifications for lecture material, soliciting student understanding/progress ("Did you understand the latest topic in lecture?"), etc.

Note: Why the extra tool page for the correspondence area?

Well, it’s a matter of design and ease of use. Cluttering up the home page of a site with all the tool links is certainly an option, but doing so might confuse the users. By separating out the pages into logical branches, you free up the main page for the important items (content, announcements, quizzes, etc.), and can move the supporting information to a different location. Logical information flow and grouping might suggest that you place Mail and Chat in the Correspondence area, perhaps along with Student Home Pages. The exact grouping depends upon the site map you created in Week 1.

When splitting up the tools into sub-pages, it is important to remember to create a need to go to the sub-page along with the logical grouping. If the correspondence area was populated with only Mail and chat, and you as the instructor rarely require the use of either one during your course, students will likely never visit the page. If you include something like Student Homepages in the correspondence area, and require participation in chats as part of the curriculum, interactions between students and use of your resources should be increased.
b) Mail
- an internal Mail system – Essentially, Intranet e-mail. users have to log into the WebCT system to get their mail
- Features:
  1. Communicate to individuals or multiple people
  2. Draft messages can be saved for later transmission
- why you’d want to use:
  1. help avoid email deluge. Would allow separation of class related discussion from personal boxes, providing some structure or organization
  2. Allows private class interaction without class email addresses having to be known by everyone
  3. Professor can communicate one message to many; will receive individual responses directly from each user (private responses)
- why you might not want to use:
  1. have to log in to get it (user may not visit as often as checking own email, depending on the type of course content you have. I can imagine statements like “I didn’t get the email because you posted it yesterday evening and I only check the class site once a day at noon”). Thus a separate system for messaging may be more work to keep track of for students and/or you.

Task B: Adding Mail to your Course Correspondence Page

Step B.1  Return to your Correspondence Area page.
Step B.2  Select "Organize Icons" (see step A.8 for diagram)
Step B.3  Select "Add" (see step A.9 for diagram)
Step B.4  Select "WebCT tool" (see step A.10 for diagram)
Step B.5  Select the "Mail" tool. Be sure to enter a title (suggestions: "Class Email" or "Class Messages"). Select "Add" when finished.

Result  You now have a Class Mail page, with an area for class, private, and group (TA’s, for example) email.
Advanced

Begin experimenting with messages in the Mail area. Suggestions for content and experiments include: creating a welcome message, creating a draft message and saving it for future use, exploring folder navigation and tool bar functions, and moving messages between folders.

c) Chat

- Features:
  1. Six chat rooms available from any one course
  2. Four chat rooms are "recorded" – logged to a file for later viewing, posting, course, etc.
  3. Students may chat with those from other courses - in a general chat area

- Why you’d want to use:
  1. allows for a synchronous component to a (potentially) asynchronous course
  2. can facilitate discussions - interactions and collaborative thought processes normally found in "live" classes

- Why you might not want to use:
  1. requires Java; may be a resource restriction depending on your audience (older machines may not function well with this).
  2. Often the use of chat rooms is high at the outset, but drops off as class continues – depends on the class format and context. Would have to "require" it in form of participation grade if you desired it to be utilized well/often.

Task C: Adding Chat to your Course Correspondence Page

Step C.1 Return to your Correspondence Area page.

Step C.2 Select "Organize Icons" (see step A.8 for diagram)

Step C.3 Select "Add" (see step A.9 for diagram)

Step C.4 Select "WebCT tool" (see step A.10 for diagram)

Step C.5 Select the "Chat" tool. Be sure to enter a title (suggestions: "Chat" or "Chat Room"). Select "Add" when finished.
Result
You now have a chat area, ready for you to schedule class discussions.

Advanced
Try out the chat area in your own site. Log in, enter a message and then view the chat log. Think how you’d incorporate the chat room into the curriculum.

Supplement
Example Chat Log:

->->--> Instructor connected at: Wed Oct 7 98 16:40:33
Instructor>>>This chat room is empty, so there is not much that could happen...
<-<--<-< Instructor disconnected at: Wed Oct 7 98 16:40:57
Everyone has logged out

->->--> Instructor connected at: Wed Oct 7 98 23:13:37
Instructor>>>All's quiet this late in the evening...
Everyone has logged out

->->--> Guest Student connected at: Thu Oct 8 98 0:00:34
Guest Student>>>Hello, This is Guest Student checking out what is happening here at midnight.
<-<--<-< Guest Student disconnected at: Thu Oct 8 98 0:00:56
Everyone has logged out

d) Course Calendar

- Features:
  1. Calendar entries can contain reference links
  2. Events can be added through the browser
  3. Events can be uploaded from a textfile
  4. Private entries can be made (by self for self, by students for selves)
  5. Dates of calendar entries can be edited
  6. Calendar can be compiled and searched by time window

- Why you'd want to use:
  1. More up-to-date than a syllabus
  2. Easier to update than paper calendars

- Why you might not want to use:
  1. ?? can you give a reason??

Task D: Creating and Using a Calendar

Step D.1 Return to your home page.

Step D.2 Select "Organize Icons" (see step A.8 for diagram)

Step D.3 Select "Add" (see step A.9 for diagram)

Step D.4 Select "WebCT tool" (see step A.10 for diagram)

Step D.5 Select the "calendar" tool. Be sure to enter a title (suggestion: "Course calendar"). Select "Add" when finished.
Step D.6  
Make some calendar entries. Select your newly added "course calendar" icon.  
Select a day by choosing one of the highlighted dates.

Step D.7  
Select "New Entry" to add an entry for the chosen day. (Follow any additional  
instructions at the top of your instructor view).

Step D.8  
Enter your text in the box provided. If you want the calendar to link to a URL,  
be sure to include the full path. When you are ready to post the entry, be sure to  
switch the access level to "Public".
Step D.9  
Be sure to select done when you are ready to publish.

Step D.10  
Agreeably, entering text into the calendar by this individual date method could get monotonous FAST. Fortunately, one can add entries by uploading a text file. In the calendar entries tool bar, select upload.

Step D.11  
One drawback to importing a file is that the file needs to be in a very specific format (see below or the top of the calendar tool page on your course). With some creative column maneuvering in your spreadsheet program, you should be able to generate a text file with comma separated fields in the order required by WebCT.

Hint  
One way to quickly get a file formatted in the correct WebCT syntax for uploading is to create a single entry into the calendar, download the calendar to you hard drive, and use simple modification (cut and paste) to add lines to the file. Then edit the new lines to reflect the new tasks and dates.
e) **Password modification Feature**

- Allows users to change their own password
- Why you’d want to use:
  1. Keep user management an individual responsibility - avoid emails such as "I want to change my password to (fill-in-the-blank)"
- Why you might not want to use:
  1. An unscrupulous person could change a user password without them knowing (this is not as hard to do as you might imagine. Browsers today authenticate once for the whole time the application is running, storing the authentication information in memory. If a user leaves a workstation with the browser application open, they are still "logged on" to the site).

**Task E: Adding Password modification**

Step E.1  
Return to your home page.

Step E.2  
Select "Organize Icons" (see step A.8 for diagram)

Step E.3  
Select "Add" (see step A.9 for diagram)

Step E.4  
Select "WebCT tool" (see step A.10 for diagram)

Step E.5  
Select the "Password" tool. Be sure to enter a title (suggestions: "Password" or "Change Password"). Select "Add" when finished.

**Result**  
Users can now change their own password through the link provided.

**Note:**  
You may wish to create an additional tool page for administrative tools such as changing password, grades, etc. The layout of your site would depend upon your site map created during week 1, and you are encouraged to follow this map.