



**ADHO**  
**Association for Digital Humanities Organization**

# **DIGITAL HUMANITIES 2006**

**The First ADHO International Conference**  
**Université Paris - Sorbonne**

**July 5th - July 9th**  
*5 juillet - 9 juillet*



**Conference Abstracts**  
*Résumé des communications*



**Centre de Recherche**  
**Cultures Anglophones et**  
**Technologies de l'Information**

## Delivering Course Management Technology: an English Department Evaluates Open Source and For-Profit Course Management Systems

---

Amy EARHART

*English Dept., Texas A&M University*

---

To meet the challenge of supporting our faculty who are interested in utilizing web based course management technology, we have tested four Course Management Systems (CMS), two open source and two for-profit. The poster will show results from a technology use survey conducted during Summer 2005 and our assessment results of four course management systems: WebCT, Turnitin.com, Moodle, and Sakai. The poster will argue for a “stair step,” open source, locally controlled approach to CMS. Further, a demonstration class housed on each CMS will be available for viewing.

### Background

As we ask our faculty members to incorporate technology into their teaching, we are faced with the challenge of delivering and supporting technologies that multilevel skilled users can manipulate. Further, faculty desire a wide variety of tools housed in a CMS, some simple and some complex. Given these concerns, Texas A&M University’s English Department tested four CMS:

1. WebCT (webct.com)
2. Turnitin.com (turnitin.com)
3. Moodle (moodle.org)
4. Sakai (sakaiproject.org)

Several criteria impacted our evaluation of each CMS.

We have three departmental teaching needs:

1. Traditional classroom,
2. Computer classroom, and
3. Web delivered (distance) courses.

We are working within a department and university that supports technology use. Our University’s Vision 2020 plan, the strategic plan of the University over the next years, includes 10 key goals, one of which is to “Increase Access to Knowledge Resources.” The charge is that “wedding of communications and computer technology will, no doubt, yield the most formidable change in academe by 2002. Texas A&M University must lead the adaptation” (5). Given this charge and our corresponding survey results that note that close to 100% of our faculty would like to either use technology in the classroom or improve their technology skills for this use.

We are working with faculty who have a variety of technology skill levels. While we know that our faculty would like to use technology, the other side of the coin is that we are working with a faculty population that is not particularly advanced in ability. In a technology survey our users rated themselves as follows: Novice (29%) Intermediate (54.8%) Advanced (16.1%). Given the diversity of skill levels, we believe that one CMS will not meet all users’ needs and plan to offer several choices. Because of our faculty skills, we have adopted a “stair step” approach to technology. We encourage faculty to use technology a bit at a time and, at the same time, help them to see the rewards of using technology in the classroom. Accordingly, we hope to introduce faculty to a simple CMS and, as their skills and usage grow, move them to more advanced CMS with additional tools.

We have the staff and facilities to support CMS. Our department is fortunate to have a developed technology center and staff. We have two full time computer staff, a Coordinator of Instructional Technology faculty position (myself), and two part time student technicians. Further, we have a number of servers housed in our server room on which to put a CMS. And, most importantly, we have a group that has the technological ability to mount, run and modify most open source CMS. Further, my position, Coordinator of Instructional Technology, is charged with developing and administering training

sessions, and one of our full time computer staff is charged with one on one, as needed support of faculty using technology in teaching. Therefore, we are able to provide a broader range of CMS than departments that must rely on the University for all support.

### Choosing a Course Management System

The poster will show the differences between each of the evaluated course management systems using the following criteria:

- Accessibility
- Complexity
- Control (local v. central)
- Cost
- Customizable
- Design
- Tools

### Findings

Our evaluations reveal the following:

1. Turnitin.com is an excellent introductory CMS. It is for-profit, but the license fee is low. Further, it has a simple interface and a small number of helpful tools, making it an excellent CMS for novice users.
2. Moodle is an open source, robust CMS of use to intermediate to advanced users. We are able to run Moodle on our server, provide training, add tools and customize the code. Further, the Moodle community continues to develop integrated tools that are beneficial to humanities users.
3. WebCT is offered to faculty through the University, but we have discouraged its use based on our test results.
4. Sakai remains an interesting CMS, but needs a bit more development before its tools are useful to most of our faculty users. TAMU is planning to enter the Sakai partnership, and we will continue to monitor the development of Sakai.

To illustrate the differences between the CMS, I will set up a sample course in each CMS for attendees to view.

### References

- Jadud, M. (2004). "Considering the Alternative." <<http://www.cs-ed.org/blogs/mjadud/archives/000556.html>>
- Katz, S. (2005). "Why technology matters: the humanities in the twenty-first century." *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews*. 30.2: 105-118.
- Palmquist, M. (2003). "A brief history of computer support for writing centers and writing-across-the-curriculum programs." *Computers and Composition*. 20.4 395-413.
- Texas A&M University. (2000). "Vision 2020: Creating a Culture of Excellence." College Station: Texas A&M University.
- Unsworth, J. (2004). "The Next Wave: Liberation Technology," *The Chronicle of Higher Education's Chronicle Review*.