

# **Proposal for Faculty Approval of Technological Teaching and Learning Tools and Systems**

## **Preamble**

At IUPUI, engagement and success in student learning rests in no small part on how faculty use technology. The implementation of a new course management system and other technologies not only affects the transaction of course "business," but also has a profound impact upon student-teacher interaction, research, instructional design, creative pedagogical approaches to course content, and assessment.

As technology encompasses more and more of our pedagogical and professional lives, it becomes ever more critical that faculty be actively involved early on in the decision-making process that results in the acquisition and implementation of new system-wide course management and teaching systems. Subsequent faculty input proved invaluable in the development of Original Oncourse and to a large extent contributed to its acceptance in IU courses, but, for reasons that are not entirely clear, UITS seemed to lose sight of its own tradition of careful attention to user needs during the process of deciding upon and implementing Oncourse CL.

The resultant widespread dissatisfaction with the new system—one that might well have been prevented by a well-structured system of faculty consultation built into the decision-making and implementation process—has turned Oncourse CL into a cautionary tale with a clear lesson for the future: It is imperative for faculty to be given a voice in deciding how, when, and to what purposes technological teaching systems will change. This proposal aims at reclaiming that voice and providing developers of course management systems with a more reasonably and effectively structured system of accountability to faculty. Such a system can only aid UITS in developing and improving the course management systems to serve the needs of students and teachers. Such accountability, by restoring a true "balance of power" between developers and end-users will also lead to more positive results in ensuring that the creators and consumers of our rapidly evolving technological systems are working together to provide the best educational environments possible.

## **Rationale**

### **Faculty Lack Confidence in Oncourse CL**

This proposal grows out of the problems faculty and students are experiencing with Oncourse CL. When faculty members were first informed about the introduction of and switch to Oncourse CL, they were told it would be "Oncourse, only better." However, most faculty members agree that Oncourse CL bears little resemblance to Original Oncourse. Even after repeatedly postponing its required implementation, the new Oncourse system still lacks functionalities present in the old or reproduces them with diminished capacity.

For example, the Gradebook function is still not ready, and by the fall 2007 changeover date, it may still not allow for simultaneous posting of a grade in a student's grade book and mailbox. In addition, the Forums do not allow for continuous "scroll down" readings of posted notices, and the new Resources tool makes the uploading and storing of files more labor-intensive and less efficient than the old File Manager. Moreover, the new system often seems to work at a far slower speed than the

old. Finally, the system does not seem to possess the same logical and "intuitive" organization as the old. This becomes readily apparent when comparing the Oncourse CL Message Center with the Original Oncourse Mail system. Even if these issues are resolved in a timely fashion, faculty are not confident that these tools will exhibit the intuitive and pedagogical characteristics faculty depend upon in a course management system and students need in an effective learning environment.

### **Faculty Lack Extensive Developmental Time**

Whether these problems are successfully addressed or not, the fact remains that many faculty, especially heavy users -- including those in the midst of developing online programs and curriculum materials -- have been forced to spend enormous amounts of time and energy to convince the developers to address the problems they encountered and include the functions they need.

Many IUPUI faculty have worked diligently to fully integrate Original Oncourse into their teaching. This process occurred over a period of several years, as many professors incorporated a new tool or function every semester, slowly building and improving their course sites in innovative ways as they learned how to fully take advantage of all the functions Original Oncourse offered. Once informed that Original Oncourse was being replaced, they have had to spend time continuously reevaluating the status of Oncourse CL as they have attempted to make informed decisions about if and when to move into the new environment. Although Oncourse CL was made available long before it was ready, some faculty who trusted the developers' urging to make the transition did try Oncourse CL -- in most instances with disastrous results.

In fact, faculty who tried CL in their classes also had to deal with negative reactions from students. A Spring 2006 semester survey of over 9,000 Liberal Arts students found that while 97% of students in courses using Original Oncourse found it "very" or "somewhat easy to use," just 50% of students using Oncourse CL found it "easy" to use; 50% found it "somewhat" or "very difficult." 1

The premature release of Oncourse CL undermined trust in the new system, diminished confidence in the usability of CL, and raised the unwelcome possibility of future fragmentation of IU. For instance, some IU schools have turned (or are considering turning) to other systems, meaning our students as well as our teachers could be forced to learn more than one system of course management.

Those faculty members who do decide to use Oncourse CL will have to adjust to the new application almost all at once. While it is true they can gain experience in a practice site, it takes managing a course in Oncourse CL to truly learn it. The transition means not only finding the time to learn Oncourse CL, but it also means revising course materials to make adjustments for the new terminology, the new procedures, and the new functions. In addition, this past year of false starts and questionable functionalities has delayed and negatively impacted the development of online courses and other curriculum materials for courses that rely heavily on Oncourse use. The instructional design of these courses and materials will almost certainly have to be reinvented to accommodate the new system. This will be no small task. For faculty whose main job it is to teach, such as lecturers who teach four classes a semester with large numbers of students, it's a daunting prospect.

Even for faculty members who are technologically literate, it is burdensome to switch to a system that requires a steep learning curve. Oncourse CL, being as unintuitive as it is, is not user-friendly and has created tremendous anxieties in faculty who are developing online and hybrid courses. Most heavy users still in Original Oncourse agree that despite innovations like Wikis and pod casting, they are not looking forward to working in Oncourse CL because it has proven to be cumbersome and complex. Even more frustrating is the awareness that many other course management systems are available that

would meet the faculty's needs in a much more user-friendly environment. However, faculty members were not given a choice in this critical matter.

### **Faculty and Students Lack Voice**

The fact that Oncourse CL will be functioning at any acceptable capacity by fall comes primarily from intense faculty lobbying (recently, with Stacy Morrone as our advocate) rather than the plans and efforts of those developing and implementing the system. Even the developers now recognize that the problems are the direct result of inadequate consultation with the end users of the system, namely, faculty and students. In the beginning, the SAKAI decision-makers seemingly worked in nearly complete isolation from the faculty and were often surprisingly unaware of what faculty and students wanted and needed.

While a well-structured and thought-out process of faculty consultation (as eventually occurred with Original Oncourse) might have prevented the current problems, experience has made it clear that without built in safeguards, faculty and other end-users again are likely to be left out of early and effective planning and consultations when other systems are considered for implementation in the future. It is best to include faculty in any process that leads to large-scale system changes.

### **Proposal**

Faculty members are experts in and responsible for course content and pedagogy, and their involvement is critical in the decision-making that results in the acquisition and/or implementation of new system-wide course management systems and other technological teaching and learning tools and systems.

**Therefore, whenever changes of technological systems are proposed that have an impact on teaching, it is imperative that faculty be involved in every stage of the decision-making process, from initial proposal to final implementation. The IUPUI Faculty Council is to set up a protocol of policies and procedures that assures appropriate consultation, review, and faculty approval of any new course management system or teaching and learning technology before its adoption by Indiana University.**

*Submitted to the IUPUI Faculty Council Technology Committee by Jennifer Cochrane, Julie Freeman, and Brian McDonald on behalf of the Ad-hoc Oncourse Committee representing faculty within the Schools of Education, Engineering, Liberal Arts, Nursing, and Social Work. Endorsed by the SLA Technology Committee, 12-05-06*

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<sup>1</sup> *Liberal Arts Oncourse Student Survey Spring 2006, Ford, David A.*