

D-Lib Magazine January/February 2007

Volume 13 Number 1/2

ISSN 1082-9873

In Brief

WebPA: Online Peer Moderated Marking System for UK Higher Education

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Current research has shown that peer assessment has been proven to have real educational benefits for students, however it is often very difficult for academics to engage with for logistical reasons, such as large student numbers. The JISC funded WebPA research and development project, that commenced in October 2006, will aim to address these and many more issues in the implementation and embedding of a viable online application, for Higher Education, to enable peer moderated marking of a student's performance within a group.

The project will release 'WebPA', an open source and multidisciplinary web based application, in September 2008. This will enable academics to engage fully with peer assessment and provide opportunities to enhance the student learning experience. WebPA has already been proven to offer benefits to both staff and students at Loughborough University, UK, where the application was created in 1998 in conjunction with engineering academics and the engCETL (Engineering Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning). During the two years of the project, the software will be piloted at the University of Hull (a project partner) and two additional UK Higher Education Institutions. The software will be released along with supporting documentation on how best to implement the application technically and how to embed the peer assessment application pedagogically within many subject areas and levels of study.

The Higher Education Academy National Subject Centres in Engineering and the Physical Sciences, who are also project partners, will enable the effective collaboration and dissemination for a national audience in support of the application and hopefully a growing community of users both during the project and after the release of the software.

For more information please visit the project website at <http://webpaproject.lboro.ac.uk> or contact Melanie Bates, m.r.bates@lboro.ac.uk for further details.

Web-based Construction and Sharing of Computer Models and Model Components

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Computer modelling is playing an increasingly important role in academic fields as varied as zoology, sociology, physics, epidemiology, and economics. While many researchers have acquired the necessary programming skills to build simulations, many students find programming too scary or difficult. Acquiring sufficient programming skill is a major investment that students are reluctant to make since it could entail a long period before they are able to build models in their domain of interest. The Constructing2Learn project is attempting to remedy this situation by building specialised simulation construction kits and integrating them into learning designs.

The Constructing2Learn Project is an 18-month project funded by Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) that began in May 2006. It is led by Ken Kahn with support from Howard Noble and Liz Masterman, all of the Oxford University Computing Services.

The project involves the construction of

- The BehaviourComposer, a tool for constructing models by composing pre-built fragments
- A web-based repository of *micro-behaviours* that provide high-level building blocks for computer modelling
- A web-based repository of models that can be inspected, edited, and experimented upon
- A collection of software-supported learning designs that guide students in the process of building, testing, validating, and analysing models in the life, social, or physical sciences.

The student created simulations can be extended to include game playing and more significantly *game making*. A computer game is a simulation with a game play component (either socially agreed upon goals or a software enhancement to the simulation). Those students who have a deep understanding of models will know what game actions are likely to produce the best effects.

The project uses a Wiki to record designs, milestones, meeting notes, and many other documents. It also uses the Wiki as a way to organise and document the micro-behaviours that learners compose to build their models. The Wiki can be visited at
<<http://dfi.cetis.ac.uk/wiki/index.php/Constructing2Learn>>.

The project faces the challenge of managing and organising the online repository of micro-behaviours, models, and learning designs. Individual micro-behaviours, for example, need to be accessible in multiple ways. A micro-behaviour for moving towards a goal might belong in a collection of other movement micro-behaviours as well as collections of micro-behaviours for building particular types of simulations such as ecological, economic, and urban models. Each micro-behaviour must link to variants and related micro-behaviours as well as sample models that rely upon them. We are exploring issues that arise in supporting multiple versions of the same model or model component. We support student web reports that include applets for running models in a browser. The set of shared micro-behaviours, models and learning designs will grow as students, teachers, and researchers add to our repository bringing new challenges of scaling and bottom-up growth.

JOSEPH: Joining up Organisations to Support new Engineering Pathways into Higher Education

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JOSEPH is one of 13 collaborative projects in JISC's Cross-institutional use of e-Learning to support Lifelong Learners programme. Led by the Centre for International ePortfolio Development at the University of Nottingham, partners in this 2-year project include Connexions Nottinghamshire and a local school and FE college which are centres of excellence in Engineering.

The project will explore the use of ePortfolios and ePortfolio-enabled services to support learners following Engineering pathways both during their course and at points of transition. The project will explore the needs of learners in order to build and implement ePortfolio-enabled services for Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG). This will include links to the region's 14-19 online prospectus and to UCAS course entry information, in specific relation to the needs of those studying for the new 14-19 Specialised Diplomas in Engineering (to be piloted from September 2007 and mainstreamed from September 2008).

Fourteen - nineteen Specialised Diplomas are key to UK government policies about strengthening vocational pathways into higher education and supporting personalised learning. Diploma courses will be complex, combining skills development, theoretical and technical understanding, practical application of knowledge and work-related learning. Study programmes will require interaction across a range of institutions and providers and will call for new developments in IAG to support the needs of learners. ePortfolio technology has the potential to help achieve this, providing ways of integrating learning processes and outcomes across multi-institutional provision, linked to multiple awarding bodies and supported by a variety of sources of IAG.

The key technological elements of JOSEPH are to support learners working in more than one location and to co-ordinate ePortfolio use (specifically the City of Nottingham Passportfolio system) with enhanced access to electronic IAG services for learners and advisers. This will allow both parties to make more effective use of time spent in face-to-face consultations. We aim to produce a scalable solution which can be easily adapted for use with other disciplines and can eventually be implemented across the whole Derbyshire/Nottinghamshire Lifelong Learning Network.

The project will test cross-institutional use of ePortfolio to support both personalised and integrative learning. Learners will be encouraged and enabled to take a holistic view of their learning which includes all aspects of their life and experience, both formal and informal.

For more information about JOSEPH contact the Project Manager, Sandra Kingston, at the University of Nottingham: <Sandra.kingston@nottingham.ac.uk> or visit the project website at <<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/eportfolio/JOSEPH/>>.

SIMPLE - Simulations for Professional Learning

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Project funders: JISC, UK Centre for Legal Education

Project centre: University of Strathclyde

The SIMPLE project is part of JISC's E-Learning Innovation programme. The project will create the second iteration of an environment for professional learning – an open-source, open-standards transactional learning environment – and will engage in large-scale evaluation of this environment. Professional and vocational courses are taken by well over 50% of the full-time undergraduate population in UK Higher Education: SIMPLE has the potential to enhance such courses, and deepen the professional experience of students through the use of simulations based on authentic professional

transactions. Our project will design and specify the open-source, open-standards version of an already-existing environment currently in use in the Glasgow Graduate School of Law (involving a fictional Scottish town on the web called Ardcalloch); implement it across several disciplines within the University of Strathclyde (Architecture, Social Work, Law), and across five law schools (at the universities of Glamorgan, Glasgow, Stirling, Warwick, and West of England); evaluate student learning and staff experience within the transactions and environments created by staff, and disseminate the results of the evaluations.

The project will contribute to the research and implementation base on educational simulations in a number of ways:

- it will provide a highly innovative learning environment for professional learning across a wide range of disciplines that will use the design and application of gaming technologies
- the evaluation of application design and implementation will enhance our knowledge of aspects of successful wireless and mobile learning
- the cross-institutional and interdisciplinary implementations within institutions will be a springboard for further and wider implementations across curricula and institutions in HE and FE, and give us a greater understanding of how different disciplines and learning communities use the environment.

The project will last for two years, from July 2006 – July 2008. Thereafter the SIMPLE applications toolset will be available free to all UK institutions of Further and Higher Education. In addition, the project team is developing a community of practice around the educational concepts of transactional learning, not only in the UK but internationally. We have, for instance, strong links with a sister project in the Netherlands, whose simulation environment is a fictional web town called Sieberdam. For further information, see our SIMPLE web page. For underlying educational theory, use of and analyses of the pre-existing simulation environment at the Glasgow Graduate School of Law, see the list of publications on the Zeugma blog.

References

Futurelab <<http://www.futurelab.org.uk>>.

UK Centre for Legal Education <<http://www.ukcle.ac.uk>>.

JISC project web page <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearning_innovation/eli_tle.aspx>.

SIMPLE web project page <<http://technologies.law.strath.ac.uk/tle2/>>.

Zeugma blog <<http://zeugma.typepad.com>>.

Sieberdam <<http://cps.q42.net/#/projects/14>>.

In the News

Excerpts from Recent Press Releases and Announcements

ARL Executive Director Duane E. Webster to Retire

January 12, 2007 - "Duane E. Webster has announced that he will retire from his position as Executive Director of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) no later than May 2008. By announcing his retirement plans now, Webster provides the ARL Board of Directors with ample time for a search and a seamless transition of leadership."

"Webster has led the Association for two decades, following his appointment in 1988 as Interim Executive Director and then in 1989 as Executive Director. Under Webster's leadership, ARL emerged as a significant agent for change in the world of research libraries and in scholarly

communication."

"The ARL Board of Directors is appointing a search committee that will be led by Brian E. C. Schottlaender, ARL Past President and University Librarian at the University of California, San Diego. The committee will conduct an open search for Webster's successor, starting with a formal announcement and position description posted on the ARL Web site following the winter meeting of the ARL Board in February 2007. The Board aims to conclude the search by the end of 2007 with an appointment early in 2008...."

For more information, please see the full press release at <http://www.arl.org/arl/pr/websterretirement.html>.

SDSC Releases Open-Source iRODS Data Management System

January 8, 2007 - "Immense collections of digital data are now ushering in a new era in science and engineering, with dramatic results:

- Astronomers are harvesting breathtaking images from high-tech telescopes, many depicting never-before-seen objects in the skies.
- Simulations of "virtual earthquakes" are yielding mountains of data stored in a digital library, giving scientists new insights to prepare for the impacts of massive earthquakes.
- The online National Science Digital Library exceeds 50 million files, putting rich new teaching resources at the fingertips of the nation's science teachers."

"Such digital data collections can exceed 100 terabytes in size (one terabyte is 1,000 gigabytes), many times larger than the digital text size of all the books in the Library of Congress. But managing and using this explosion of data is easier said than done."

"Long a leader in data technologies, the San Diego Supercomputer Center (SDSC) at UC San Diego has released version 0.5 of iRODS, the open-source Integrated Rule-Oriented Data System, which represents a new approach to distributed data management. The iRODS data grid system incorporates and goes beyond the experience gained during nearly 10 years of applying the SDSC Storage Resource Broker (SRB) technology in data grids, digital libraries, persistent archives, and real-time data systems. More information about iRODS, including software downloads, documentation, and support is available at <http://irods.sdsc.edu>."

For more information, please see the full press release at http://www.sdsc.edu/News%20Items/PR010807_irods.html.

UK PubMed Central launched

January 8, 2007 - "From today scientists will be able to access a vast collection of biomedical research and to submit their own published results for inclusion in a new online resource. Based on a model currently used by the US National Institute of Health, UK PubMed Central (UKPMC) will provide free access to a permanent online archive of peer-reviewed research papers in the medical and life sciences."

"A nine-strong group of UK research funders, including JISC and led by the Wellcome Trust, awarded the contract to develop UKPMC to a partnership between the British Library, The University of Manchester and the European Bioinformatics Institute (EBI) last July."

"Members of this group now require that articles describing the results of research they support are made available in UKPMC with the aim of maximising its impact. The UKPMC service will ensure that articles resulting from research paid for by any member of the funding consortium will be freely available, fully searchable and extensively linked to other online resources."

For more information, please see

<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/news/stories/2007/01/news_ukpubmedcentral.aspx>.

RUSA announces Best Free Reference Web Sites Combined Index 1999-2006

January 8, 2007 - "The Machine-Assisted Reference Section (MARS) of the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA), a division of the American Library Association (ALA), is pleased to announce the Best Free Reference Web Sites Combined Index from 1999-2006 created to recognize outstanding reference sites on the World Wide Web...."

"...The MARS Best Website Task Force meets during the ALA Annual Conference each year to create a new list of best free reference websites. The index was created by the task force to provide a valuable information resource for librarians of websites that are free or predominantly free, or no-fee sites."

For more information, please see the full press release at

<<http://www.ala.org/ala/pressreleases2007/january2007/RUSAWebsitesindex.htm>>.

Peter Brantley Appointed DLF Executive Director

January 3, 2007 - "The Digital Library Federation (DLF) has appointed Peter Brantley executive director, effective February 5, 2007."

"Mr. Brantley is currently director of strategic technology for academic information systems in the University of California's Office of the President. He has 20 years' experience in systems development and management, including academic computing services at UC Berkeley and academic information systems management and digital library development at UC San Francisco and New York University. He also served as director of technology for the California Digital Library."

"He has been active in the Digital Library Federation, participating in the Digital Library Federation Services Framework initiative and co-managing the Digital Library Federation Developers' Forum. An innovation leader, he was most recently recognized for conceiving and organizing the Reading 2.0 Conference in March 2006. The conference focused on how to encourage standards and protocols to support the development of new products and services for using massive collections of digitized texts."

"Mr. Brantley will succeed David Seaman, who left DLF in December 2006 to become associate librarian for information management at Dartmouth College Library, and Katherine Kott, DLF Aquifer director who is currently serving as interim director."

For more information, please see the full press release at

<<http://www.diglib.org/news/pressrelease/PeterBrantleyPressRelease.pdf>>.

The Best of Technology Writing 2006

January 3, 2007 (announced by Kevin Hawkins, University of Michigan) - "The University of Michigan Press and the Scholarly Publishing Office are proud to announce the publication of the first annual *The Best of Technology Writing 2006* and the opening of nominations for *The Best of Technology Writing 2007*."

"The Best of Technology Writing 2006 is a collection of 'sparkling and imaginative pieces of journalism' (James Fallows) that covers the world of technology from multiple angles. Whether touching on sushi prepared on an inkjet printer, the future of e-books, or the ups and downs of jetpacks, *The Best of Tech* serves up a broad array of issues and topics, from the odd to the everyday,

the playful to the profound, that illuminate the technological landscape of today and tomorrow."

"Taking our cue from the open source movement, the essays in *Best of Tech* were selected through an open, online nominating process. The nominations were then reviewed by a small panel of judges, and the final selections were made by this year's Guest Editor, Brendan I. Koerner. Koerner is a contributing editor for *Wired*, a columnist for both the *New York Times* and *Slate*, and a fellow at the New America Foundation. The result is a diverse collection of important, timely, and just plain readable writing from publications including *The New Yorker*, *Wired*, *Salon*, *Slate*, *The Columbia Journalism Review*, and *Japan Today*. It is published by digitalculturebooks, a new imprint of the University of Michigan Press and Library, which will officially launch in Fall 2007. In the meantime, the print version of *The Best of Technology Writing 2006* is available from retail stores and from the Press directly. And, the online version is available, FREE, at our website, <<http://www.digitalculture.org>>."

Erasmus Mundus-master programme in digital librarianship

December 22, 2006, announcement from Ragnar Audunson, Oslo University College - "Oslo University College, The University of Parma and Tallinn University are starting up a joint Erasmus Mundus-master programme in digital librarianship in August 2007. 30 students can be admitted, and 20 of them are supposed to come from countries outside the European Union, included the countries candidating for membership, and the European Economic Area. Students from these non-European countries are eligible for applying for scholarships. More information about the master programme in digital librarianship can be found at: <<http://dill.hio.no/>>".

Library of Congress Launches RSS Feeds: New Service Offers Bulletins on News, Events, Additions to Web Site

December 18, 2006 - "The Library of Congress today launched a series of news feeds using the RSS (Really Simple Syndication) technology."

"Since its launch in 1994, the Library's award-winning Web site has been the destination of Web users seeking authoritative information and unparalleled collections, with more than 22 million digital objects available in 186 terabytes of content, including photographs, maps, music, film, books and reference information on topics ranging from American history to science and technology to popular culture. The RSS service was launched in response to public requests for alerts on additions to the Library's digital collections, updates of events at the Library's public venues in Washington and news of the institution."

"RSS (Really Simple Syndication) is a technology that allows organizations to deliver news to a desktop computer or other Internet device. By subscribing to RSS feeds, users can easily stay up-to-date with areas of interest on the Library's Web site. The Library of Congress offers several RSS feeds for use in an RSS reader or RSS-enabled Web browser. Library feeds consist of a headline, a brief summary and a link that leads back to the Library's Web site for more information."

For more information, please see <<http://www.loc.gov/today/pr/2006/06-223.html>>.

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doi:10.1045/january2007-inbrief