SPIDER Newsletter

November 2005

SPIDER

http://spider.science.strath.ac.uk
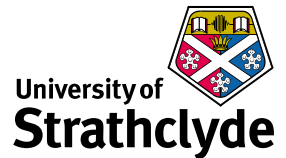
SPIDER is a bespoke VLE delivering learning material, providing online support and departmental management tools to a wide sector of the university community.

This newsletter outlines recent innovations, updates and changes made to the system

More information on current SPIDER development is available via the "development diary" link on SPIDER-DEV at spider-dev.pharmacy.strath.ac.uk/

Feel free to email comments or suggestions about SPIDER or this newsletter.

Contact
Ian Thompson
e:ian.thompson@strath.ac.uk

SPIDER cluster admins

applied phys
Phil Riches

bioscience
Ian Thompson/ Irene McKay

business
Jane Brittin

CAS
Charles Byrne

chemeng
Linda Campbell

chemistry
Fraser Murray

computing
Paul Woolfries

economics
Roger Perman

education
Ian Thompson [temp]

LASS
Tricia Barton

maths-stams
Iain Thurlbeck/ Fraser Murray

pharmacy
Ian Thompson/ Tim Plumridge

physics
Ricky Martin

*SCA*
Eric Norris/ Glen Coutts

SPIDER newsletter Oct 2005

Extras and Updates

November has seen a number of minor changes to SPIDER, updating or adding new features to existing tools.
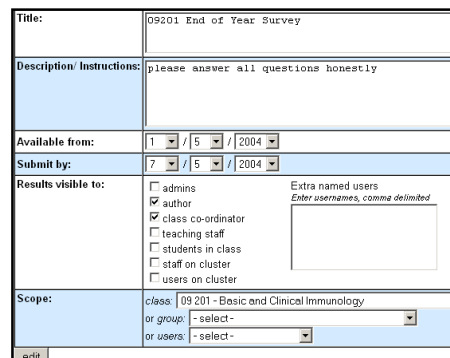
Questionnaire update

The questionnaire tools on SPIDER allow staff to create questionnaire "forms" to quickly and easily get opinions and feedback from users. The layout of the tools have been updated to use the new "tab" format now common in other SPIDER tools.
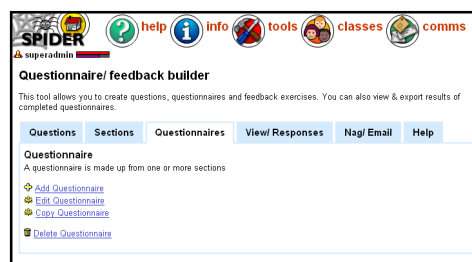
The new questionnaire layout uses tabs for quick access to each of the tools it provides

The major change is the addition of a "nag" option (see box out), which allows the author of the questionnaire to send a "nag" email to those students in a class who have yet to complete the questionnaire. Early reports from Chemistry indicate that the reminder email can have a significant impact on user returns.

The users who can see the results of questionnaires has been extended. The questionnaire author can now add a "user list" which can include any users - previously the list could only be a selection of admin, author, class co-ordinator, staff and/or students in class. Users allowed to
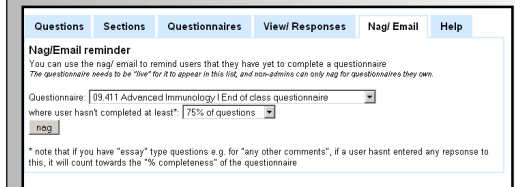

"Results visible to" can now have a custom list of users, giving questionnaire authors greater flexibility in who can access results
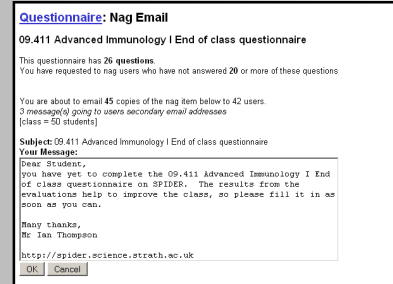
view results on SPIDER have the option to export them in "csv" format for further analysis in addition to the on-screen view.

ePDP extensions

The core SPIDER ePDP has the ability to accept "extension modules" to add further capabilities and functionality. A "strengths & weaknesses" extension, allowing the owner of the ePDP to create a series of strength and weakness entries has been created, and is undergoing testing on the SPIDER development server. Post-testing, this will be rolled out for use by the Pharmacy year 3 students.
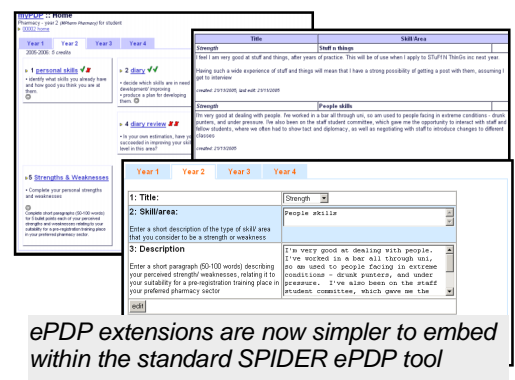
ePDP extensions are now simpler to embed within the standard SPIDER ePDP tool

The code behind the extension feature has been modified to allow the alternative ePDPs used by Chemistry and Mathematics to be better integrated with SPIDER.

Assignments

SPIDER provides an electronic assignment returns system. The staff view of

SPIDER Status

Page visits
November 2005   1,641,738

Monthly 2005

January	1,109,057
February	1,012,323
March	1,110,545
April	1,026,083
May	1,028,573
June	280,072
July	169,710
August	202,628
September	486,100
October	1,455,483

Monthly 2004

January	670,745
February	700,745
March	921,142
April	702,324
May	638,881
June	167,310
July	124,638
August	167,754
September	285,340
October	1,325,512
November	1,701,827
December	1,194,879

Monthly 2003

July*	25,593
August	111,082
September	147,304
October	822,565
November	910,088
December	897,199

Busiest day
Dec 13th 2004:   95,221 visits

*SPIDER went live mid-July 2003

Users

Total registered	11,672
Staff	726
Students	10,143
Alumni	803

Classes
Total: 735

applied-phys	39
bioscience	143
business	26
CAS	10
chemeng	1
chemistry	85
computing	16
economics	30
education	60
maths-stams	76
pharmacy*	62
physics	93
SCA	91

*includes 8 duplicate classes for IMU twin programme

SPIDER uses Linux, Apache, MySQL and PHP aka "LAMP"

all code developed in house by Ian Thompson, Tim Plumridge, Ian Thurlbeck and Fraser Murray

SPIDER newsletter Nov 2005

---

returned assignments now compares the returns with the class list relating to the assignment, to allow staff to quickly see who hasn't submitted an assignment.

There is now also an option for staff to provide a model answer to any assignment, uploaded at the same time the assignment is set. Once a student has returned their assignment, they can view the model answer file. The student can also add comments to their uploaded assignment, e.g. to indicate how well they think they have covered the points in the model answer.

a model answer is shown below the student's

As before, staff can assign a mark to the returned assignment and post comments on the students work.

Add student to classes

Although SPIDER is successfully integrated into the Oracle registry database for access to student data and class lists information, a small proportion of students still find they don't appear on some of their classes lists. The ability to add all a students classes was made available to admin users last month and has now been extended to staff users.

Focus on....

The Focus on... Section is a regular monthly feature used to highlight some of SPIDER's many tools. This month...

Discussions part 1

SPIDER has an extremely active discussion environment, with 3-400 messages posted every day on weekdays during term time. There are a number of different "boards" or "forums". Some are open to a whole cluster, such as the "general", "year 1" and "year 2" discussion, where topics range from the latest cinema releases and organising 5-aside football matches to selling old textbooks, where to find the cheapest student deals on

computers and where the cheapest pint in Glasgow can be found. As well as these general boards, each class on SPIDER has its own forum where discussions take a more academic flavour, covering anything from questions about the last lecture topic and where the class test is to be held, through to staff-lead debate on the pros/cons of the Hubble space telescope and its huge annual

The "new in" list on the home page and a discussion abut the Hubble telescope budget

budget. Users can keep up with hottest discussion topics via the "new in" list on the SPIDER home page which shows which forums have had postings since the user last hit their "mark discussions read" button. Adding to the discussion is simply a case of hitting the "reply" button to continue a conversation, or selecting "start new thread" to begin a new topic. Users can create a discussion filter, so only discussions in which they have an interest appear in their "new in" list. In class discussion groups, eager students are able to copy their postings to staff via email to alert them to their question or input to the discussion forum.

More on discussions next month, but in the meantime, why not get more involved and start reading and posting on the different boards?

In Development

As part of the SHEFC re-engineering assessment (REAP) project, a "script tutor" is under development which will test Pharmacy students by presenting them with a scan of a prescription which they have to check, selecting any errors they identify from a drop-down list. The technology could be adapted to other disciplines where students need to study an image and select errors or other features.

As always, anyone wishing to suggest new features/ improvements to SPIDER, or to submit anything for publication in the newsletter, just contact us at:
e: spider-vle@strath.ac.uk   t: x2969