

Planning your Course Web Site

(for UDrive, Blog, SPARK, or Web-Hosted sites)

June 2007

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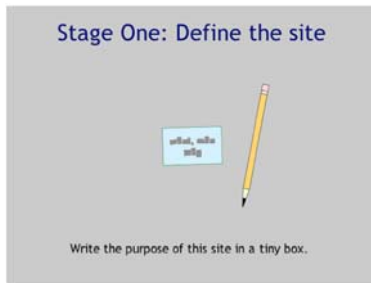
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This handout is about what you should consider and decide about your course Web site before you touch the computer. The basic information here can be applied to any kind of site, from the simplest UDrive directory to a fully-online SPARK-based class.

Academic Computing
Office of Information Technology
University of Massachusetts Amherst
www.oit.umass.edu/academic/

Stages of Site Development

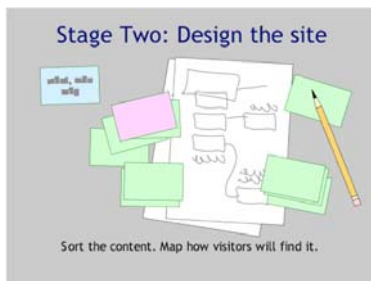
Definition (stage one)



Before you touch a computer, be certain you have clearly defined what you want this site to do for you and your students.

1. What role do you want the site to play?
2. Who are your student and what do they need?
3. What tool is best suited to your purpose?

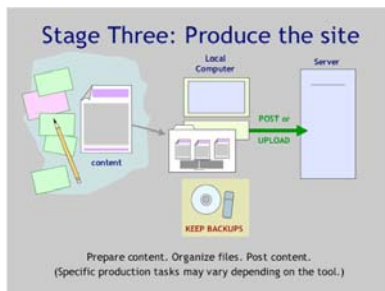
Design (stage two)



Planning will produce a design. Design decisions will become obvious if the needs of your visitors and the purpose of your site are clearly defined.

1. Map how your students will use the site.
2. Collect, sort and label your content.
3. Select appropriate visuals.

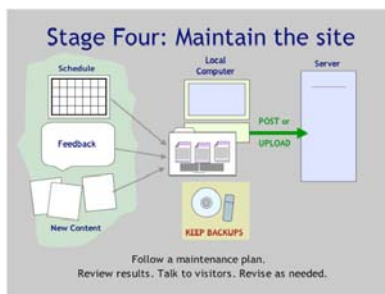
Production (stage three)



Review the site framework (or create your own). Develop the content separately and post or paste it into the framework once it is perfect.

1. Review (or create) the framework of the site.
2. Edit and proofread content.
3. Insert the content into the framework.

Maintenance (stage four)



Before you begin to design, make certain that your plans include the time necessary to keep the site as up-to-date as it needs to be. Be honest with yourself about the time you have to work on this during the semester!

Schedule specific deadlines for updates.

Once the site has been up for a while. Review how well it worked with your students. Make revisions as needed.

Stage One: Define the purpose of your site

Who is the audience?

Your site will be most effective if you know who your students are and how they relate to the content you are presenting. Are they new to the topic? New to the university? In these cases you will need to spend more time and space explaining the basics. Experienced students on the other hand will appreciate shorthand and short cuts to essential information about the topic.

Some questions about your audience:

- Who are your students? (Undergrads? Majors? Seniors? Grad students?)
- Why are they taking this course?
- What questions do you answer over and over?
- How do you want them to use the site?

How will this site help you?

Having a clear image of what students will do as a result of using your site will help keep the design on track. Do you want students to hand in assignments on time? Do further research on topics related to the class? Not bother you every class for a copy of the syllabus?

In a tiny box, write the one thing this site must do.

Be clear and concise.

Pick the one thing that your site must do to help you and your students. This clear statement of purpose will help keep you on track and focused.

Start simple. You can always add on to your site as you have time (as you gain confidence and skills, certain tasks will take less time.)

On a large piece of paper, write everything this site could do.

Write down every idea - especially the weird ones.

After the precise exercise of narrowing the purpose to a single sentence, take a few minutes to write down every possible thing the site could do. Some of these ideas can be practical and related to the purpose, others should be far-fetched and weird. The point is to be creative and fill the page (you will sort the grain from the goofy in the next stage).

Stage One: Choosing the Right Tool

Map the most important tasks your students will perform on this site (e.g. looking for basic information, reading articles, taking quizzes, posting comments, etc.) Then consider what features are most important for you to build and maintain a site (e.g. easy posting of files, easy editing of on-screen information, a variety of tools, gradebook functions, full control over the visuals, etc.).

Consider how these tasks are best handled by the available tools. Once you choose the tool that you think is best suited to your tasks, refer to the OIT Web site for further documentation or make an appointment in the Instructional Media Lab to get a demonstration.

Online tutorials and handouts:

<http://www.oit.umass.edu/workshops/tutorials>

Instructional Media Lab

545-2823, instruct@oit.umass.edu

UDrive: for simple file sharing

The UDrive service gives you (and your students) online file storage. By default, this space is private, but files and directories can be shared with individuals, groups, or the public. If all you need is a no-frills space to post handouts and assignment files, UDrive is a good option.

UMass Blogs: for simple course sites

Blogging software makes it easy to maintain a simple site. You choose from a set of customizable designs and post announcements using an online form. You can also post static pages (such as a syllabus), links, files and images. Additional tools let you allow students to comment on posts or contribute their own. A blog gives you everything you need for a simple course site, plus extra features, without much effort.

SPARK: for active online learning activities

SPARK courses are based on the Blackboard Vista Learning Management System (formerly known as WebCT). A Learning Management System (LMS) provides an easy way to post course content on a site, but also provides a collection of tools that allow for a variety of learning activities to be performed in an online environment. Such activities include written “discussions”, online quizzes, drop boxes for assignments, and live chats.

An added benefit (or limitation) of SPARK is that access to courses in SPARK is limited to students who are currently registered for the course in SPIRE. This makes legal issues such as FERPA privacy protection and copyright easier to deal with because only the students in the class can see posted course materials and student work.

Web Hosting: for customized course sites

Web hosting gives you an empty space and lets you build a site from scratch. The URL will be <http://courses.umass.edu/course###>. You can write HTML code yourself or use software such as *SeaMonkey* (free) or *Dreamweaver* (commercial) to build, post, and maintain your site. This process requires attention to detail and technical proficiency, and is not for everyone. For a starting template and instructions on how to build a site from scratch see the OIT site.

Stage Two: Designing the Site (Content)

This first part of designing a site is to map out the essential activities on the site and organize the content so that the site makes sense to your students. This is also a good place to give a hard look at everything you would like the site to do and set your priorities.

Transcribe all possible site content on to index cards

Take each of the best ideas from the brainstorm in stage one and write them on index cards. Break ideas down into the smallest possible bits of information so that they can be sorted separately if necessary. Using index cards gives you the most flexible way to sort your content. They can be sorted and rearranged easily—allowing you to try several options quickly. Index cards can also be revised or discarded without losing much work.

Prioritize the cards based on your purpose

Look at each card and ask yourself how it relates to the one thing the site must do.

A = Must included for the site to work. Directly related to the purpose.

B = Should be included. Related to secondary purposes.

C = Sprinkles on the icing on the cake. No one will notice if it is missing.

Prioritize cards based on how easy it will be to produce

Look at each card and ask yourself close you are to being able to post it on your site.

A = Already exists in a file on a computer.

B = Needs minor editing or converting.

C = Needs to be created from scratch, requires extensive research.

(start with AA, AB, AC ... leave the Cs alone)

Sort cards into categories, then add clear, concise labels.

Sort the content into stacks of related information. Find words that describe each stack clearly. This will lay the groundwork for your site navigation. If you are tempted to label a pile with a mushy term like “Other” or “Miscellaneous”, break it up into smaller piles.

Try sorting from different viewpoints

Organize content based on calendar dates, or course content topics, or assignments. Some may work better than others. Make sure that the organization system you choose matches the way you will speak about the content (don't label it “assignments” if you always say “projects”) and the way the students think about the content.

Stage Two: Design the Site (Navigation)

Depending on the tool you use, what you need to think about for navigation will be different. In the case of a hosted site that you build yourself, you will need to build all the navigation from scratch. In the case of a Blog or SPARK site, the overall framework of the site is built into the tool, so all you need to pay attention to is the specific labels for links or tools.

In any case, it pays to think carefully about how the students will move around the site to make sure that the essential activities are highlighted and easy to perform.

Design your navigation from the shoes of your visitors

The people visiting your site are looking for something (what it is should be outlined in the purpose you defined in stage one). The navigation of your site puts a framework around your content that makes it easy for these visitors to find what they need.

When you are deciding what to put on which page and where links should go, play the part of a visitor (or ask a real one). Focus on tasks, not pages. Some pages (such as the home page) will serve multiple tasks. The most important tasks for this site should be emphasized over all others, do not allow them to get lost in a flurry of secondary links.

Questions for your (inner) visitor:

1. What do they want to check quickly?
2. Under what words or icons would they expect to find these things listed?

Make sure the simple things are easy to find. For more complex tasks, make sure you have roughed out the process in detail.

What should appear on the Home Page

The home page should give out the easy answers to FAQs and provide easy access to all the other content of the site (even if it takes a few clicks to get there).

- Contact information (phone, email, office hours).
- News and announcements (not just a link).
- Shortcuts to important pages.
- A clear indication of what your site has to offer (through link names, text and images).

What should appear on every other page

Every other page can also be an entry point for your site. Search engines and links on other sites enable your visitors to enter anywhere. Make sure each page includes the following:

- The name of your course.
- The university where the course is offered.
- A title that describes the page content.
- A link to the Home page (at least).
- Contact information.

Different approaches to links

Links to important pages should be on their own line

If you have a link to a reading, assignment, site or other document, it is best to put the link to that document on its own line using text that clearly describes the document. If there is a sentence or paragraph that describes the link, add it below (or above) the link. Keeping the link on its own line makes it easy to spot later (links within the text are harder to spot.)

Links to side topics can be within the text.

Links that appear within a block of text are the essence of “hypertext”. They can be useful for links to additional information or a side topic. However, they can be hard to spot unless they are underlined and given a distinct link color. Make sure that the words you highlight are related to the topic of the following page and would be what someone would look for, not generic link actions such as “click here”.

Links to non-HTML documents should be labeled

If you are linking to a PDF, PPT or other special format, make the link text include a reference to the format and the size of the file (e.g. “PDF 160k”) . This way visitors on slow connections or who do not have a reader for the file can skip over the link until they are in a place with a faster connection and the appropriate software.

If you are designing the whole site yourself

When you use tools such as SPARK or Blogs, most of the navigation within the site is handled for you. However, if you are building a site from scratch, you need to make sure the links from page to page make it easy for the visitor to find what they need.

Link to major sections of the site from every page.

The links that appear on every page should provide access to the top-level sections of the site. If well labeled, these will give a complete overview of the site from anywhere in the site. These links can be across the top or in a column on the left. Avoid placing links to off-site locations in the same grouping as site section links. Also avoid “hiding” the link to the page the visitor is on, this only creates confusion about the sections of the site.

If there are many levels of content on the site, offer “breadcrumb” links.

Breadcrumbs are a series of links that display the categories and subcategories that a visitor clicks on to reach a specific page (such as: *USA > Massachusetts > Universities > UMass > UMass Amherst*). This helps visitors who want to backtrack through their choices or who come in at the middle or end of a set of branches.

For a linear sequence of pages, use *back*, *next*, and offer a table of contents.

For articles, forms, and processes that require multiple pages, make sure your visitors know where they are, and what to expect next. Provide a table of contents on the initial page (extra credit if you place it on every page). Put back and next links at the top & bottom of each page.

Make sure you deactivate and highlight the link to the current page.

Organizing Content

If your site contains significant collections of online content, the following tips will help make it easy for you and your students to locate specific files and pages (especially important if you are building a hosted site from scratch).

Divide content so that distinct topics appear on distinct pages

No matter if it is a page uploaded to SPARK or a page on a site you built yourself, a single Web page should contain a single topic. Short pages are best for “quick reference” information (about one screen high). Long, scrolling pages are OK as long as it is all one topic (like an alphabetic list of terms).

If a long page contains several individual topics (such as project descriptions) it should be broken into separate pages. In this case, use many pages linked to a “table of contents” page instead of a single long page with many topics and “anchor” links. This kind of site is easy to create in SPARK with the Learning Module tool.

List all names for files and directories

Writing out names for files and directories ahead of time helps you plan carefully and avoid making hasty choices later. A few guidelines:

- Use whole words (such as the most significant word in the title of the page.)
- Use only letters, numbers, dashes and underscores in names.
Avoid spaces and special characters (@#%\$%^&*) in names.
- Keep everything lowercase. Uppercase and lowercase mean different things.
- Use directories to group related files.
- On a hosted site, “index.html” is the name of the default page in any directory.

Watch for when file and directory names become part of the URL

When someone types a URL, they are tracing a path to a specific file. The directories and file names make up the URL. When naming, make sure the URL that will result will be short and easy to remember (or say over the phone). This is harder to control with tools such as SPARK, or a blog, but especially important in UDrive or when creating your own site.

- Use whole words.
- Use keywords that could be searched.
- Does the URL sound easy to remember and transcribe? (such as over the phone.)
- Don’t let URLs get too long. 72 characters will fit on one line in an email.

Develop an outline with page titles and descriptions.

Page titles are important for a hosted site. Search engines such as Google use the title as a primary method for ranking your site; they are also added to the browser’s bookmark menu when a visitor bookmarks your site. Titles should be concise labels that tell what can be found on the page. (Think of them as file folder tabs or book spines.)

Preparing Content for the Web

When you have something you want to post on the Web, you need to convert it to the appropriate file type. In most cases, this means converting the content file to a Web-compatible format such as .html, .gif or .jpg.

Text with simple formatting - paste into HTML

If you have simple text with subheads, you can copy it from any word processor and paste it into your Web-design software (such as Dreamweaver). Note that some formatting will not translate into HTML: tabs, spacing with spaces, and some other kinds of formatting will disappear and will have to be re-created using other methods in HTML.

Text with tables and some special formatting - save as HTML

If you have content that is tabbed, space-formatted, or in tables, it is easiest to “Save As HTML” from your word processor and open the file in your Web-design software. If you cut and paste this type of content you will have to fix it using HTML.

Multi-page documents with graphics - save as PDF

If you have multi-page documents with extensive layouts, formatting, images and special fonts it is best to create a PDF file. Visitors can download the file and print it exactly as it appeared on your computer. Note that this is best for long reading documents, not for quick reference information such as schedules and contact information.

Pictures - simple graphics in GIF, photos in JPG

If you have images you want to display on the Web, they need to be saved in a format that can be read on a browser. Using Photoshop (or other image editing software) you save pictures in a format that is best for what it looks like: GIF for simple drawings or graphics; JPG for images with subtle colors, such as photos or photo-realistic artwork.

Copyright and “Fair Use” on the Web

The general rule is: “you need permission to use anything that is not yours”. Using intellectual property without permission is protected in very narrow situations by the concept of “Fair Use”. “Fair Use” protects uses of copyrighted material that pass the following four tests:

Purpose of the copy

Nonprofit, scholarly, journalistic, or satiric purposes tend to be protected; especially if such use is commenting on the original, produces new ideas, or leads to further scholarship on a subject.

Nature of work being copied

Use of a creative work is less likely to be protected. Ideas of how to present something can’t be copyrighted, only the actual presentation (although such ideas can be trademarked or patented.)

Amount of the work being copied

Copying the entire work is less protected than copying a portion of it. Copying the “heart” of the work is also less protected. Specific guidelines exist for different kinds of works.

Effect of the copies

If the use of the work will harm the creator’s ability to sell or license the work, it is less protected. Uses that violate this test include: making too many copies of a work (as determined by the copyright holder), copying works that students are expected to purchase (books, worksheets, movies, CDs) and posting materials on a public Web site.

If Possible, Post Links, Not Copies

If you can find an accessible online version of an image, article, or other file, post the link instead of making your own copy of the file. This gives your students access to the materials without you needing to worry about copyright. The Library subscribes to millions of dollars worth of journals, databases, and other resources that are not available to the general public.

Don’t Post Copies of Copyrighted Materials on Public Sites

Fair use protection of educational use applies only in a limited classroom context. Because public sites are available to everyone (including search engines) posting copyrighted materials on them will typically fail the fair use tests of amount and effect. Public postings are also more likely to come to the attention of the copyright holder (or his/her lawyers).

This includes course work posted by students. If student work is being posted on a site, the site must be limited-access, or the students must follow fair use in their own work.

Post Copies of Copyrighted Materials behind a Password

If you want to post materials without permission, but within the limits of fair use, it is best if they are posted behind a password. SPARK is best for this because student access is carefully linked to registration. Using password access in blogs, UDrive or on hosted sites is helpful in these cases, but not foolproof. Note that even behind a password, fair use tests still apply that restrict

Writing for the Web

Especially when dealing with Blogs or on-screen content in SPARK, it is helpful to edit your text to make it more readable in an online environment. A few tips:

Visitors skim Web pages (what they want to read, they print)

Reading on screen is slow and exhausting. People tend to skim Web pages quickly for what they need and then leave. If your student is looking for a single piece of information (“What chapters does the next exam cover?”), they will skim down the screen until they find the information.

Anything that they want to read more carefully, they will print. This allows them to read it anywhere and take notes if necessary. When you are providing long texts, consider providing a PDF version that is easy to download and print.

How to write Web pages for easy skimming

- Break documents into bite-sized chunks.
- Use short paragraphs (2-3 sentences) with only one idea per paragraph.
- Use headlines and sub-heads liberally. Summarize paragraphs in their headers.
- Use numbered and bulleted lists to organize information visually.

Pay attention to the “micro-content” on your pages.

Micro-content is the information on your pages associated with the labeling and navigation of content. Micro-content sets the context for the content and helps visitors understand the structure of the page and your site.

- URL - how visitors get to your site. Make them easy to remember and type.
- Title - what viewers see when they bookmark a page and what search engines use for ranking. Make titles a clear summary of the page content.
- Links - visitors follow links that clearly describe what lies beyond; they don't like mysteries. Make the link text the significant words—avoid linking from generic text such as “click here”.
- Page and paragraph headers – Use these to summarize the content--clear words will help visitors skim and assist search engines catalog.

Stage Two: Design the Site (Visuals)

Good visual design enhances your purpose (it's not just about making things pretty). The colors, layouts and pictures on the page instantly communicate meaning to your visitors. When choosing a visual design, select everything based on the impression it gives about your content. The visuals should reinforce your content and your attitude towards it.

Keep the design simple and clean

If you don't know much about graphic design, go for a simple design without complex color schemes and decorations. Too many gradations, colored lines, and 3D drop shadow effects tend to clash and make the page look less professional.

Choosing Colors

The simplest, most elegant choice is a single color with different "shades". As you add more colors, you have to be more careful to choose colors that work together and convey the right message. Pick one subtle color as the overall color and then choose additional, brighter colors to use in small amounts for emphasis. Above all, avoid using too many saturated colors in large areas or on important text; this will create a clownish or childlike atmosphere on the page.

Choosing Fonts

On a screen, sans-serif fonts are easier to read. "Sans-serif" modern fonts like Arial, Helvetica, and Verdana lack the "feet" of more classical fonts like Times, Palatino, and Georgia. Only use serif fonts if it helps you set the tone for a "classical" topic (and then use them primarily in the headers, not the body).

Choosing Pictures

Pictures are not necessary to make the page interesting. Only add pictures that directly relate to your content. If you want to use clip art, use it sparingly or use images taken from the same "set" that match. Mis-matched clip art gives a disorganized look to the page. Above all, avoid "cartoony" images if your content is not.

Keep the visual design consistent from page to page

If the visual structure of every page is the same, it will hold the site together and make it easy for visitors to move around to find what they want. This consistency highlights the content that changes on the page; making it easier for visitors to focus on the task at hand. Drastic changes on every page can be disorienting for visitors.

Fortunately, tools such as blogs and SPARK handle this for you by placing all your content within the framework of a consistent design.

Making your site accessible to everyone

Accessibility means everyone can see and use your course content. Especially in large classes there are likely to be students with limitations on how they use technology or process information. Making sure they have access is easy and required by law.

Simple ways to make sites more accessible

- Use plain text. It is accessible to the most users.
- Use simple layouts and plain backgrounds to improve readability of text. Make sure that text and background contrast sufficiently.
- Avoid unnecessary graphics. Always provide alternative descriptions with the “ALT attribute”.
- Avoid movement on pages, especially in text.
- If using time-based media (audio, video, slideshows) provide controls and/or alternative access to the content.

Visitors with Limited Vision

Visitors who are blind will need alternative access to visual content. Most can have plain text read to them with a screen reader or converted into Braille. Use ALT tags that describe the image being replaced or that contain the text in the image.

Visitors with limited vision will need to be able to control the size of the text (plain text in a flexible layout is best for this). Visitors with color blindness will need additional visual cues for anything that is color-coded. For both groups, high-contrast colors are best for text, avoid using photographs or complex patterns in the background.

Visitors with Limited Hearing

Visitors who are deaf or with limited hearing will need captions or transcripts of audio content. Avoid any interface that requires an audio cue to use (such as “click the mouse when you hear the beep”).

Visitors with Limited Mobility

Visitors who can't use or control a mouse will need to navigate the site using keyboard controls. Make sure that all links can be easily accessed using the tab key. If there are commonly used features, consider adding keyboard shortcuts. Avoid drop down menus, tiny icons, or other interfaces that require fine control of a mouse.

Visitors with Limited or Different Cognitive Processes

Visitors with dyslexia, ADHD, learning disabilities, or other cognitive limitations need the site to be simple to use and easy to understand (which benefits everyone). Keep navigation clear and simple. Make sure all link names are clear and in the same location from page to page.

Avoid unnecessary movement and distractions on the page (or make sure it can be stopped). If text moves, it will not be readable.

Next Steps for Preparing Content (DRAFT)

Review Student's Technology Access

- **Access to Computers:** Do students have laptops, home desktop coputers, or do they have to travel to a library or a public access lab? How does this affect the frequency of their access to course materials.
- **Access to Printers:** do students have access to free printing, personal printing, or do they have to pay per page? Do they have access to color printing? (Note: OIT Computer Classroom B&W printers cost 5 cents/page and students are granted 100 free pages each semester.)
- **Access to the Internet:** high-speed or dialup? All students on campus have access to wired or wireless high-speed connections. Two thirds of off campus students purchase high-speed connections. Students without high-speed access (such as in rural areas) will still use modems. Modems deliver content at a rate of 2MB/second – too slow for large files (such as video or audio) and highly interactive sites.
- **Operating system and browsers:** if the tools you choose require special plug-ins or specific browsers, be sure that these are common among the students in your class. List such technical specifications in your syllabus.
- **Specialized Software:** do students have copies of the software you used to create files you want them to view? Programs such as Microsoft Office does not come on every computer, so if you want your students to use special features of Excel, Word or PowerPoint, you will need to be sure that they have access to the software. If these files are just for reading, and none of the special features are needed (such as tracking changes) consider using more compatible formats such as PDF, HTML, or RTF.

Choose the Best File Types

- For quick reference: post the information as a Web page (HTML)
- For formatted, multi-page documents: convert files to PDF
- For short clips of audio or video: save as MP3, Quicktime or Windows Media Files (Review student access to players and the speed of their Internet connections.)
- For longer segments of audio or video: consider streaming server
- For documents that you want to mark or track changes: Microsoft Word (Review student access to Microsoft Word.)

Next Steps for UDrive (DRAFT)

Setting up the site

- Decide how best to distribute the links (email, postings on sites, UDrive shortcuts)
- Create a directory in your UDrive for the files (keep the folder name simple)
- Develop a naming convention for your files so that they make sense on someone else's system (course name + date, or course name + topic) just don't be too cryptic.
- Save files in a format that your audience can view (PDF is most compatible).
- Set the sharing controls in UDrive, either by file or by directory, depending on the process that works best for you and your students.
- If you want to restrict access with groups or passwords, set those up ahead of time and test what the process "feels" like to the students.

Additional steps for a shared directory:

- Develop and document naming conventions and processes for contributors.
- Set permissions for the directory that allows students to save files.
- Set any versioning or tracking controls you need to manage the use of the directory.

Maintenance issues

- Set a schedule for updates

Next Steps for Blogs (DRAFT)

Setting up the site:

- Write out a posting schedule and maintenance plan.
- Prepare content for a few weeks worth of postings (if not the whole semester)
- Select the presentation theme that has the functions you need (columns, tabs, links).
- Plan for any static pages, produce the content.
- Consider and configure the widgets that will be most useful.

Additional steps to consider

- If allowing comments, review moderation controls.
- If allowing comments, write out an “expectations” document to guide posters.
- Configure any access for collaborators and contributors.

Maintenance issues:

- Follow a set schedule for updates and moderation tasks.
- Be sure to mention blog activity in class to reinforce its use.
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Next Steps for SPARK (DRAFT)

Setting up the site

- Import any content from previous sites.
- Review your students' technical access (see page on preparing content). Some tools in SPARK require specific browsers and versions of Java to work properly.
- Write out an outline of the major sections of the site. Content can be grouped in different ways: resources for reference can be grouped in folders, sequential information (such as processes or weekly postings of lecture notes) are best grouped within a learning module.
- Make a rough sketch of what the home page will have on it. Links to tools (or specific activities within a tool) can be listed here, organized within sub pages (folders), or listed on the course tools menu.
- Set expectations for SPARK use in the syllabus (e.g. frequency and quality of contributions to discussions).
- If you will need to reach students outside of SPARK via email, consider creating a MailMan list for your course through SPIRE.

Think about the tools you will use

- Start small if this is your first semester, add more tools as you get comfortable with SPARK and the online environment.
- If your goal is to promote student interaction:
 - o For peer review and critique –blogs or journals
 - o For asynchronous exchange of ideas – threaded discussions
 - o For live, synchronous discussions – chat tool
 - o For collaborations on group assignments – combination of the above
- If your goal is to simplify administrative functions:
 - o Collecting homework and papers – assignments tool
 - o Giving self-tests, quizzes, exams, or surveys – assessments tool
 - o Distributing handouts, lecture notes, presentations, etc. – learning modules

Maintenance issues

- Set specific limits to your availability online and write it out in the syllabus. Address issues such as email addresses to use, how quickly you will respond to emails, and when (or if) you will be available for live online access.
- Set a specific schedule for checking and updating content on SPARK.
- If encouraging online community and a regular exchange of ideas, be sure to mention activity on the SPARK site in class to reinforce its use.

Resources for Building Course Sites :

For one-on-one training and consultation:

Instructional Media Lab
A212 LGRC
instruct@oit.umass.edu
545-2823

UDrive

<http://udrive.oit.umass.edu/>

Login page for UDrive (login with NetID and UMail password to create UDrive space)

<http://www.oit.umass.edu/udrive/>

Online OIT documentation for UDrive

UMass Blogs

<http://blogs.umass.edu/>

Login page for UMass Blogs (login with NetID and UMail password to create a blog)

NOTE: this service is in beta until Fall 2007 – login for documentation and FAQ.

SPARK Course Sites:

<http://spark.oit.umass.edu/>

Login page for SPARK (request course, then login with NetID and UMail password).
Students can login when they are enrolled in a course that uses SPARK.

<http://www.oit.umass.edu/webct/campus-vista/>

Contains documentation for faculty and students using SPARK at UMass Amherst.

Course Sites Hosted on WebAdmin:

http://www.oit.umass.edu/academic/course_sites/

Information about creating course accounts hosted on the Webadmin server.

<http://courses.umass.edu/courseid>

URL for open course sites on *webadmin* server.

<http://www.oit.umass.edu/workshops/tutorials/>

List of online tutorials and handouts for Web development and other topics.