SPIDER Newsletter

April-May 2006

University of
Strathclyde

SPIDER

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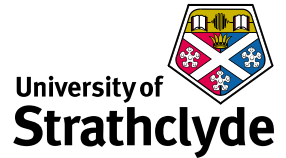
SPIDER is a bespoke VLE delivering learning material, providing online support and departmental management tools to a wide sector of the university community.

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.

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The SPIDEEs 2005-06

The last 3 weeks have seen a flurry of activity on SPIDER as students and staff nominate and vote on who receive the coveted Virtual SPIDER awards (the SPIDEEs). This year two new categories were introduced - the SPIDEE *genius award* for the user making the most valuable academic contributions to the discussions and the *best nickname* SPIDEE for the user voted to have the most clever or amusing nickname. The only award not nominated and voted for by the users are the staff and student Babel awards, given to the most prolific discussion poster over the academic session. The system logs are checked to determine who earned these awards.
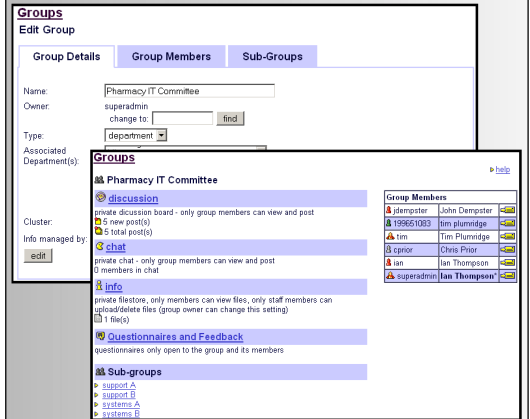
This years Best Avatar award went to ÐÛRnîÇüs - The Dark Destroyer, for a light hearted animated alphabet. BB102 took the Best Class award, its variety of class materials, web resources, assignments and lively discussion forum making it a winner with the voters. Dr. John Liggat just pipped Dr. Val Ferro for the Best Staff User award, his frequent mailings and news postings winning him praise from the student body.   The Best Nickname award went to the surreal 'one by one the penguins steal my sanity' and the Jester award for the most humorous poster was awarded to Captain Circle-Jack, who kept us entertained throughout the session with tales of pirates, the SPIDER dance, bizarre competitions, surreal story making and the oddity that is the "My Birthday" thread.

The Babel awards were retained by last years winners - Madskull and Val Ferro out-posting all other users yet again. Madskull was also awarded the Golden SPIDEE for valuable contributions to the SPIDER environment - his input of a mixture of light hearted and informative postings in many of the discussions won over the voters. The winner of the new SPIDEE Genius award was Benjamin MPharm for his frequent and well constructed posts on topics as varied as computers, immunology, pharmacy and even Martian physiology. Well done all the winners, and better luck next year for those that came so close.

Group update
The class and departmental groups have been updated to include sub-groups and the interface to man-

age these aspects have been streamlined. In addition, each group home page now has a clearer layout

Updates & New Features
Groups

The groups tool has had a facelift and a few under the bonnet improvements. The layout of the group home page has been improved to define the various tools (discussion, chat, "info" [file share]) more clearly, and to give easy access to a new feature - sub-groups. Class and department groups can now have sub-groups - groups within groups, which have their own discussion, chat and info areas. You can even create sub-groups of sub-groups. Only group owners and members of the sub-group can access these.

The standard group creation tool has also been updated so that when creating class groups, the groups can be generated alphabetically, reverse alphabetically or at random from the class list.

News email copy (again...)

In the last SPIDER newsletter we reported on an update to the news tool that auto-sent a copy of class news to staff with any email copied to the class list. A number of
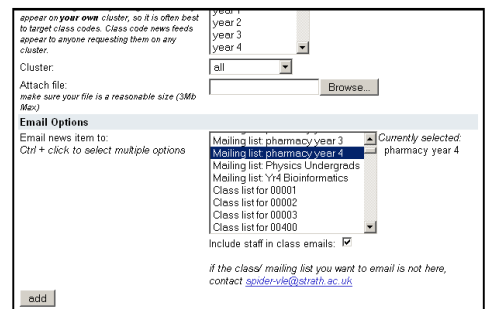
News email copy to staff is now user selected

SPIDER Status

Page visits

May 2006	1,125,300
April 2006	949,394

Monthly 2006

January	1,185,389
February	1,132,823
March	1,359,610

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
November	1,641,738
December	1,016,651

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	12,640
Staff	814
Students	11,023
Alumni	803

Classes

Total: 762

applied-phys	32
bioscience	144
business	26
CAS	15
chemeng	2
chemistry	94
computing	17
economics	30
education	60
LASS	2
maths-stams	79
pharmacy*	65
physics	94
SCA	102

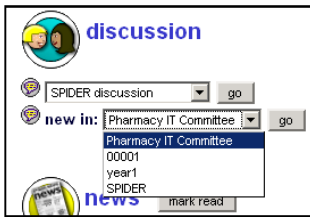**includes 8 duplicate IMU classes*

SPIDER uses Linux, Apache, MySQL and PHP aka "LAMP". All code developed in house by Ian Thompson, Tim Plumridge, Ian Thurlbeck and Fraser Murray

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users requested this to be removed, as not all messages are relevant to staff, so we've changed the set-up. Copying emails to staff is now an option - just un-tick the box if you don't want staff associated with the class to get an email copy of the news sent to students.

Discussion changes & bug fixes

A couple of minor fixes to the discussions have been made. The "new in" section, listing which boards have had new posts in them, was mis-reporting - some threads without new posts were being listed. This is now working correctly. A number of users reported double entries in their discussion filter, which has also been fixed. The "general" discussion board has been changed so that all users post to the same board. This allows users to have cross cluster discussions. Year boards remain cluster specific.

The 'new in' lists discussions with new postings

Quiz questions

SPIDER quiz questions can be imported/ exported using SPIDER's own format (an extended version of the IMS QTI XML format). The quiz question uploading tool has had a minor addition - you can now optionally assign a category/ filter when
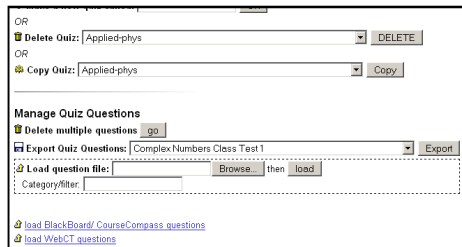
Importing quiz questions now has a category/ filter option

you upload a question bank which will replace any existing category applied to the questions. More improvements are planned for the management of questions and quizzes, time allowing.

Focus on....

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

Class lists

Each class on SPIDER has a class list, containing the students who are in the class for the current academic session. Class editor and admin level users can

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populate this list in two ways - by "pulling" data directly from a "view" of the Registry Oracle database, or using manual input within SPIDER. This latter option can be a cut/paste operation or users can actually add students by keying in their details directly.
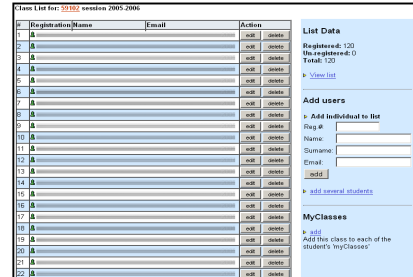
Class editors and admins manage class lists using a combination of manual entry (above) or by pulling registry data directly (below)

The staff view of the class list indicates whether the entry has come from registry or via SPIDER. All staff can view and export class lists on their cluster. Student users are able to see if they are on a class list - shown on each class home page by a tick (or cross if they aren't on
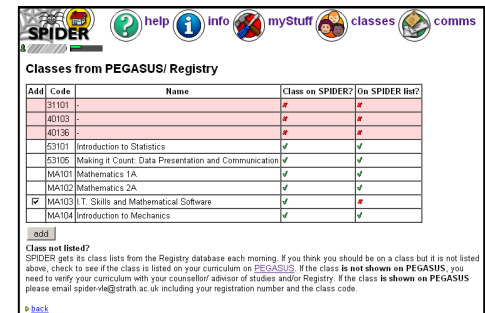
Students can check they are on SPIDER class lists and add themselves if they should be listed

the list). If a student isn't appearing on the class list, but they are appearing on the registry list (student view in PEGASUS), then they can use the "check you are on class lists" option on their myClasses page to auto-add themselves to any class list they should be on.

In Development

A new student information system for departmental administration, additions to the ePDP, pharmacy Rx tutor, peer assignment marking, plus others...

Want 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