Hack/Doc Fest at Reed College: Post Event Report

Summary

Hack/Doc Fest III was held at Reed College, January 7-9, 2009. The big issues tackled at the event were the Gradebook and Moodle usability (with the two colliding more often than not). In the Gradebook, we've created documentation explaining how to simplify and streamline it using existing Moodle options and one or two easy-to-apply patches.

We've also created a rough draft of a "simple grade report" that will be polishing into shape after Hack/Doc Fest. We engaged the Moodle community on how to assign weights to all assignments on a single page (MDL-15680) as well as the just-forged movement to introduce the much-easier-to-use Louisiana State University gradebook variant into Moodle core (MDL-17807). Both are major initiatives scheduled to be included in 1.9.4, and would have a huge impact in Gradebook usability on our campuses.

On the usability side, we've created scripts to test how faculty and students handle certain tasks within Moodle. The goal is to assess what works and what doesn't, create our own patches and fixes to address these issues, and report our findings (and patches) back to the Moodle community.

Addressing a long standing need to keep track of all the enhancements and patches we create, both at Hack/Doc Fest and on our own, we've created a "Moodle: Liberal Arts Edition" package that incorporates the third-party modules that NITLE schools use most (Feedback, Scheduler, Quickmail), fixed versions of broken files, and home-grown solutions like the "Filtered Courses Block" and the new "Census" report. We're also setting up a web site to allow for individual downloads of the various fixes.

The Census report builds on the work of Earlham and Carleton Colleges, and allows schools to instantly see how many active courses they have, how many students are in one or more courses, and much more. It also includes an optional reporting option that sends summary data about what how many courses the school is running as well as what blocks, modules and reports it is using, back to a central database. This will greatly help with our collective support of Moodle, as we'll no longer need to gather this data through one-off surveys of the NME community.

Participants

- **Kenneth Newquist,** Lafayette College, newquisk@lafayette.edu
- **Jason Meinzer,** Reed College, meinzerj@reed.edu
- **Bob Puffer,** Luther College, puffro01@luther.edu
- **Courtney Bentley,** Lafayette College, bentleyc@lafayette.edu
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- **Trina Marmarelli,** Reed College, marmaret@reed.edu
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Hack/Doc Fest IV at Smith College

Hack/Doc Fest IV will be held at Smith College from June 3-5. It is being in held immediately after the NITLE Moodle Camp at Smith earlier that week in the hopes that we can increase attendance from developers and instructional technologists.

The Gradebook

MDL-17807: LSU Gradebook
http://tracker.moodle.org/browse/MDL-17807

As we arrived at Reed for Hack/Doc Fest, Moodle Core posted MDL-17807, which talks about incorporating the LSU Gradebook into Moodle 1.9.4/2.0. The LSU gradebook offers a number of important usability enhancements into the Moodle gradebook, including:

- A stationary "student name" column that does not move as the user scrolls horizontally to look at grades.
- The ability to edit student entries for a single grade item, instead of having to look at all of the entries in the entire gradebook.

We tested this revised gradebook and wrote up a critique of it. Discussions of LSU gradebook integrations, including to what extent these changes will be incorporated into Moodle core, are on going on the forums.

Follow-up Tasks:

- Post LSU Gradebook Critique to Tracker
- Keep up with Gradebook discussions in the official Moodle forums.

Simple Grader View
One of our goals was to experiment with Moodle Grade Reports to see if we could create a simpler, more streamlined version. To that end, we experimented with modifying the existing LSU "simple grader" report:

- http://docs.moodle.org/en/grade/report/simple_grader/index

We moved the various show/hide icons to the upper-left-hand corner of the screen, to hide the "edit this cell" option from the gradebook edit screen (these icons can now be shown using the hide/show interface; as is they clutter the gradebook tremendously).

Follow-up Tasks:

MDL-15680: Assign Category Weights on One Page

http://tracker.moodle.org/browse/MDL-15680

A heated Moodle Tracker discussion about feature request we made as part of the Kenyon Hack/Doc Fest (MDL-15680: Assign Category Weights on One Page) took place while we were at Reed. The ability to assign category weights on a single page (rather than having to go into a number of different pages) is a major usability issue with faculty on our campuses.

We discussed this issue at length, and posted our thoughts on the proposed user interface for this design, including feedback from faculty at Lafayette College, to the tracker thread.

Follow-up Tasks:

- Keep up with the conversation regarding this interface in Tracker and the forums:
  - http://tracker.moodle.org/browse/MDL-15680
  - http://moodle.org/mod/forum/discuss.php?d=109444

Streamlining Gradebook through Existing Options

Gradebook can be too complicated for its own good; this document -- created by Bob Puffer at Luther College -- seeks to help with that by reducing the number of interface options that faculty need to deal with by tweaking Moodle's configurations. The finished document is available through the NITLE Moodle Exchange.

Resources

- Making the Moodle 1.9 Gradebook Easier to Use
  http://moodle.nitle.org/mod/resource/view.php?id=3183

Usability Testing

The primary goal for the Moodle Collaborative Development grant is to identify usability problem areas in Moodle and to propose/develop solutions to those problems. To that end, we created two simple usability test scripts for faculty and students. Schools participating in the grant, as well as other volunteers, will conduct these tests. The steering committee for the grant will then evaluate the responses, and use them to guide development efforts at the June 2009 Hack/Doc Fest at Smith College.

Resources

- Resource: Usability Test Script for Spring 2009
  http://moodle.nitle.org/mod/resource/view.php?id=3184
- Reed faculty response in the NME
  http://moodle.nitle.org/mod/forum/discuss.php?d=2708

Follow-up tasks
- Ken Newquist & Courtney Bentley at Lafayette College volunteered to conduct additional test runs of the usability test script, and come up with instructions for those who will be conducting the usability tests at the various participating colleges.
- Evaluate screen capture: We need to determine which screen capture program we want to use to capture users actions/voices during the test.

Census

Development of the Census Report – which generates a list of active courses in a Moodle install, as well as number of classes per student and modules used – continued. The original program, which used to be run via a simple web page load and configured via inline PHP, has been turned into a report with basic configuration options.

This report includes the ability to "phone home", reporting per-institution information about # of courses and modules used to a central database. We hope this opt-in reporting option will help us keep track of who's using what within our group, and thus help guide development of Moodle.

Resources
- Moodle 1.9.3 "Liberal Arts" Edition @ Google Code
  http://nitle-moodle-xtns.googlecode.com/files/census.tar.gz

Follow-up Tasks:
- Write-up an announcement about Census and approach NME schools about a) using it and b) turning on the opt-in reporting tool.

Packaged Moodle

In order for our Moodle community to make better use of the resources created at Hack/Doc Fest (including hacks, patches, approved modules), we've created a packaged version of Moodle that includes all of these items rolled into one-easy-to-download bundle.

Manifest
The packaged "Liberal Arts" edition of Moodle includes the following items:

- Anonymous Forums
- LSU Gradebook
- Suppress grader report (#22)

- Single page weighting
- Suppress profile courses (FERPA)

Items to be included:

Modules
- Quickmail
- Feedback
- Scheduler
- *Questionnaire?*

Blocks
- Filtered Courses Block

Hacks
- MDL-7946: SimplePie Integration (Google)
- Simple file upload (Google)
- Anonymous forum patch
- Quickmail Limit-by-role patch.
- LDAP Enrollment category mapping
- Increase max grade beyond 100.

Bug Fixes
- MDL-15678: Online Assignment Truncates text at 64k (fixed in 2.0)
- MDL-12922: Course restores for non-admin users appear ~7 years early (fixed in 1.9.3, but verify)
- MDL-16431, MDL-15926 Custom scales displaying as site-wide scales when creating Grade Items (fixed in 1.9.4)
- MDL-8848 Summaries don't get imported from the source course to the destination course. (fixed in 1.9.4)

Reports
- CLAMP Census

Other
- **Recommended configuration file**
  - Course Block Configuration
  - File cache lifetime set to 0
- **Command Line Scripts**
  - Bulk Restore: Restore many course backup files in bulk to new courses (Google)
  - Bulk Delete: Delete all courses in a category (Google)

Works in Progress (to be added at a future date)
- Assignment Zip (Google)
- Show/Hide Profile Courses (Google)

Follow up tasks
- Finish adding all fixes/patches/modules to Moodle 1.9.3 package.
- Test Moodle 1.9.4 and then roll new package.

Resources
- Moodle 1.9.3 "Liberal Arts" Edition @ Google Code
  http://nitle-moodle-xtns.googlecode.com/files/moodle-1.9.3-la.tar.gz

Research

Online Assignment vs. Journal vs. OUBlog

The Journal activity in Moodle has been deprecated since the 1.4 release, but has still been hanging on. The Journal will be removed from the 2.0 release, and there's been a good deal of debate in the Moodle community about whether Online Assignment adequately mirrors Journal's functionality.

After checking out the most recent version of Online Assignment in 1.9.3, we've concluded that it does not replicate the functionality because it does not display the full contents of the journal on a single page; instead it displays links to the individual journal entries

We've documented the differences in the Moodle tracker.
http://tracker.moodle.org/browse/MDL-14045

Follow-up Tasks
- Submit new tracker item "Replicate the 'Journal View' in Online Assignment.

Collaborative Tools

We want to launch a web site that will make use of the following tools:

- Redmine
- WordPress (news)
- Mediawiki (documentation)
- Subversion (version control, code repository)

The web site will be located at http://www.clamp-it.org. We will use OpenID for authentication to all of the sub-sites.

Follow-up Tasks
- Create the web site at http://www.clamp-it.org
- Create domain and install software.
- Create "CLAMP" blog.

Bugs

Fixed Bugs

- MDL-17814 bug in online assignment -- when the tool is set up to try to mimic journal
  http://tracker.moodle.org/browse/MDL-17814
- MDL-11266 Show/hide courses on student profiles page
  (for FERPA compliance, taken from 1.9.4, included in package.
  http://tracker.moodle.org/browse/MDL-11266
- MDL-17258 Custom non-numeric scales to have assigned numeric value in gradebook
  Possible solution in Redmine
  http://tracker.moodle.org/browse/MDL-17258

Won't Fix

- MDL-17237 Wiki doesn't allow articles with # (decided this isn't worth fixing; people should warn their users not to do it).
  http://tracker.moodle.org/browse/MDL-17237

Unresolved Bugs

- MDL-16553 Student cannot see response file for Advanced uploading of assignment with No Grade
  http://tracker.moodle.org/browse/MDL-16553
- MDL-16217 Ghost resources created on import when source course has more visible sections than target course
  http://tracker.moodle.org/browse/MDL-16217
- MDL-16883 Teacher can not view student replies in QandA forum on the user's profile Forum posts tab
   (confirmed)
  http://tracker.moodle.org/browse/MDL-16883
- MDL-12922 Course restores for non-admin users appear ~7 years early
  http://tracker.moodle.org/browse/MDL-12922