Frequently Asked Questions About WebCT Vista in the Connecticut Community Colleges System

The following questions and answers emerged during the February 2006 meeting of the Connecticut Community Colleges WebCT Vista Faculty Mentors, in response to a question about the most common inquiries they received from their college's faculty.

This document is available online at http://www.commnet.edu/academics/webct/faqs.asp. The online version contains hyperlinks to a variety of resources referenced in the answers below.

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Why should I use WebCT Vista?

Each instructor has to consider the pros and cons of making use of a course management system such as WebCT Vista individually. Instructors who are teaching classroom-based courses and are interested in potentially using online instructional tools can discuss it with one of their college's faculty mentors or Distance Learning staff, and learn more about online pedagogy related to their particular discipline. They can then decide for themselves whether they feel that incorporating online instructional tools and communication opportunities in their course would enable them to enhance the teaching and learning in their own classes.

Are faculty going to get paid for attending WebCT Vista training?

The question of paying faculty (fulltime and/or adjuncts) for attending Vista training (as was done in Summer 2005) was discussed recently by the Academic Deans. However, no decisions have been made at this point. However, to date, more than 700 faculty (most of whom were not paid for attending classes) have attended Vista training sessions, and approximately that many faculty are currently using Vista. Most faculty are using it to "web-enhance" their classroom-based courses, while others are using it in hybrid* or fully online* courses.

How do I use Grade Book?

The new Using Grade Book with Excel training class introduced during the Spring '06 training schedule, should assist local DL support staff and faculty mentors with providing this type of information to their faculty.

Faculty can also refer to the information in the Vista Faculty Training manual (participants all receive a bound copy at all "Getting Started with Vista" training classes), as well as the online Grade Book links.

* Web-Enhanced Course
These are classes consisting of predominately classroom instruction, but the instructor uses the Web to enhance communications with the student. Students may be asked to participate in online discussions, submit homework via the Web, view grades online, etc.

Hybrid Course
This is a course that has a mixture of both online instruction and in-class (on-ground) instruction. Students are required to participate both online and in class.

Online Course
All instruction for this type of course is delivered via the Web. No in-person, in-class (on-ground) instruction is provided with the exception of possibly proctored exams that might occur at various times throughout the semester.
o How do I upload a file or files into Vista?

Information about this is provided in the Vista Faculty Training manual (participants all receive a bound copy at all "Getting Started with Vista" training classes), plus additional documents and tutorials on this topic are available online on the Vista documentation webpage. This page also includes a link to instructions on how faculty outside our intranet can access any of the materials that might be licensed, such as the training manual contents, from their homes.

o What is the difference between the "File Manager" tool and the "Content Import" tool?

As discussed in the Vista training manual, the "File Manager" tool is used to upload individual files, zipped files, and to obtain the WebDAV path enabling users to establish a connection between their PC's and their Vista course section(s).

The "Content Import" tool is used to import WebCT content packages that have been created using Vista (such as Assessments, questions from the Question Database, or Learning Modules), or in some other IMS-compliant package (such as Camtasia, which can create SCORM modules).

One particular use for the Content Import tool in our system is to import the "Vista Student Orientation learning module" into class sections. Step by step instructions as well as a multimedia tutorial are available online.

o What is WebDAV and how do I use it?

Both a tutorial as well as step-by-step instructions on this topic are available online on the Vista documentation webpage.

o Students are having Java issues and/or they are bringing in their laptops to have our IT staff "configure" them to work with Vista.

Students should be directed to CTDLC (the CT Distance Learning Consortium) for tech support questions related to java and/or browser issues. More information is available online at http://www.ctdlc.org/help/index.cfm. Faculty are also encouraged to remember to remind their students at the beginning of each term to that students should contact CTDLC directly for tech support.

o How do I request a "development" section in Vista, so I have a place to work on a new course that I have not yet been assigned to teach?

Any of the "Vista Group Administrators" at each college are able to create such sections, and have been trained in how to do so. Contact any of your Distance Learning staff at your college to find out who your local Vista administrator is.
o How can I control which sections show in the MyWebCT Course List?

This functionality is not available in Vista 3.x, but will be available once we upgrade to Service Pack 6, which will be in place for Fall 2006. This will enable WebCT Vista users to "turn off" courses that they do not wish to have appear in their MyWebCT Course List.

o I have questions about intellectual property issues related to the courses I have developed and teach.

Questions related to intellectual property ownership should be addressed to your college's collective bargaining unit representative. This has been a subject of discussion that the Distance Learning Re-Opener meetings and your rep can provide you with an update of the decisions that have been made to date. There is currently information on a "tentative" agreement on distance learning and intellectual property on the 4C's website: http://www.the4cs.org/docUploads/DL%20Agreement.pdf.

o Are there any plans to conduct (mandatory) pre-screening of students who enroll in fully online classes, to be certain that they are technically proficient enough to be able to succeed in that learning environment?

There is no plan to do this at the system level, but strategies to pro-actively address ways in which students' success in fully online courses can be supported local can be addressed in discussions between faculty and each college's Academic Dean.

o How can I incorporate parts of an e-pack into my course?

First, be sure to request your college's Vista Group Administrator to install the e-pack for your textbook into your class section(s) before you begin doing any other custom work in that section, because the installation of the e-pack will overwrite any content or activities that already exist in a section.

Next, from within Vista, you simply remove (or de-link) the components or activities in the e-pack that you do not wish your students to use. For more information on e-packs, you can point faculty to the "Digital Content & E-Pack Adoption Guidelines for Faculty" document, available from the WebCT Documentation page.

o How do I use Selective Release?

New documentation on how to use the Selective Release too, with a focus on how faculty can use it to control student access to course content during the two weeks prior to the Start Date of classes (when students are able to access their courses in Vista) is in production, and will be available from the WebCT Documentation page.
We need PIN reset information reminders to be sent out to students at the beginning of each term, because many students have trouble getting into Vista.

System Office staff will put together a notice about this and send out a reminder to Registrars and anyone else who is involved in PIN reset, including DL Council members, at the beginning of the term. This memo could also be distributed locally to students at each college.

Faculty need guidelines on best practices and principles of online course organization and design, as well as effective online teaching practices. Where can we find this kind of information?

The Vista Teaching & Learning Team is in the final stages of developing a document that will provide concrete guidelines for faculty on best practices related to online pedagogy and the creation of effective online learning environments. This document will be reviewed by the Academic Deans and will be used as the basis for pedagogically-oriented events and training for faculty. In the meantime, you can also check out the Best Practices in Online Instruction page listed under the Pedagogical Resources for Online Instruction category on our WebCT Resources for Faculty website.