

Paper Proposal  
Instructional Technology Conference  
Middle Tennessee State University  
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Name and Affiliation:

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Type of Session: Lecture/Presentation

Title of Proposed Session: "Open Source: A Curriculum Model for an Empowerment Culture"

Abstract: This presentation contrasts the two dominant curriculum models (the syllabus and the module) in use in institutions of higher learning, and proposes a third model (open source curriculum) as most appropriate for students in a culture of empowerment, as it provides greater ownership by curriculum "users" (both faculty and students) and permits continuous quality improvement. Advances in instructional technology, particularly unfettered access to curriculum housed in a virtual environment, make this model both possible and attractive.

Description:

This paper identifies the two dominant curriculum models in use in institutions of higher learning. The first of these is the "syllabus" model, in which the faculty member creates a learning plan for each class. This is typical in traditional educational settings. The second is the "modular" model, in which a course designer creates a one-size-fits-all learning plan for all classes that take a particular course. This model has become popular in accelerated adult higher education. Other models are typically variations on these.

The primary difficulty with both of these models is that they do not give students much control over their own learning experiences. Unfortunately, these same students live in what is increasingly an empowerment culture. There will be greater demands by students to "own" their curriculum, to adapt it to their own needs and to answer their own questions. Other models must be created that will provide parameters for the learning experience while still permitting more freedom than at present to pursue alternate learning goals.

One such model, which is here called "open source curriculum," is derived from the phenomenon of open source software, such as Linux. Open source software has an original creator and a distinct function, yet its users are free to modify and improve the

software to suit their own needs. These improvements are then shared with the greater community of users, so others may profit from the adaptations made by a single user.

One way in which the concept of open source curriculum is being explored at the author's institution is the "curriculum toolkit." An original toolkit for each course is created by an instructional designer in conjunction with content experts. Learning objectives are clearly identified, and learning activities are developed and offered to support the attainment of the objectives. However, all users (faculty and students) are empowered to add, delete, modify the learning activities, the learning environment, and even the delivery system in order to best accomplish the identified learning objectives in their own environment. In short, each user contributes to the public toolkit for that course and chooses from it according to his or her own needs.

The utilization of the open source model for curriculum creates some tremendous opportunities, particularly in program design, instructional design, and instructional technology. For instance, a toolkit that is housed in a virtual environment to which both faculty and students have immediate and unfettered access--and the ability to add tools of their own--could be a powerful mechanism for intentional learning.

The open source model also raises some serious challenges, particularly in the areas of intellectual capital and proprietary offerings. Who "owns" a particular course? How does one institution prevent another from using its curriculum? Would this model eventually result in "shareware" curriculum, accessible for free to the public at large? And how would that concept apply to a very competitive marketplace where proprietary institutions are setting the agenda?

The paper identifies some of these opportunities and challenges, suggest some possible outcomes, and invites others to participate in an ongoing discussion about how this model or others could be creatively utilized in an empowerment culture.

Audience: Faculty, instructional technology specialists, instructional designers, deans

Audience Level: All.

On-site Equipment Requirements: Data video projector

Length: One hour, including presentation and discussion.