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How can I make my course site easier for students to use?

Maggie McVay Lynch, Director of Statewide Teaching and Learning Services at the OHSU School of Nursing, recently posted the following helpful suggestions to the Sakai Pedagogy DG mailing list. She wrote:

"Course look and feel and web usability is much more than the Sakai application provides. There are a number of ways that an instructional designer or professor can make navigation and clarity better in a course. I've listed just a few below:

- Limit the number of navigational tools on the left bar to only those used.
- Use of color cues in documents/HTML pages to assist students in knowing where they are. For example, all main heads are bolded and RED. All sections that require student input are boxed with a pale yellow background to draw attention to the page. [Ed. note: Maggie has since revised these suggestions to take colorblind users into account. Choosing a color other than red or green is preferable.]
- Consistent presentation of a structure within the lessons. Example, every week a student is expected to do some reading, participate in an online discussion, do an assessment, and write in a journal. This structure can be reinforced within the course through use of internal navigation (separate from Sakai), or through use of colors suggested in #2 above, or through simply separating out these four parts within a module and presenting them in a consistent order each week.
- Web usability relates to common usability standards such as always using Alt tags for all images, providing options for viewing that are learner-centered. Example, if a great deal of text information is presented over several HTML pages it might be helpful to also provide a single concatenated PDF version the student can print.

These are just a few of the things that have nothing to do with the Sakai app but can make a difference in the functionality, usability, user experience of a course.

In terms of learner support, again I believe the rubric is fairly clear. What we are specifically looking for is how the learner gets questions answered when they have them. Who do they call? If there is no helpdesk availability or a person where do they turn? Are there self-help tutorials? Perhaps an FAQ page? Does the course itself provide a mechanism for support? Contact information for the professor or a TA? Perhaps a discussion forum dedicated to resolving problems or troubleshooting.

[Ed. note: For more suggestions, see [How can I help students get started with the CLE?](#)]

Was this answer helpful? yes or no

Related Topics

In the Discussion Forums tool, what do I have to do to export topics?

Where can I find presentation materials and recordings from the 9th Sakai Conference in Paris (July 2008)?

Why can't I weight grades in my grade book?

Topic Information

Topic #: 3986-556
Date Created: 3/18/2008
Modified: 7/3/2008
Times Viewed: 8

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How can I help students get started with the CLE?

Because many students have worked with computers for years, they often dive into the CLE and find their way around with greater ease than their instructors do. Even so, you'll probably want to consider following a few guidelines to ensure that your students get off to a smooth start. Here are some suggestions.

- At the start of a course, enable only the tools students need at the time. This approach minimizes the possibility of overwhelming your students unnecessarily. It takes only a moment to add one or more tools to your site, so you can easily add each tool as it's needed.
- Be sure to teach students how to navigate at the outset. Feel free to link to rSmart's short [navigation tutorial](#) from your site home page.
- Link to other helpful tutorials on using various tools from your site home page.
- Keep your first assignment simple from a technological standpoint.
- Be sure students understand the fundamentals of uploading, downloading, etc. *The rSmart Sakai CLE User Guide* includes a chapter covering these fundamentals. You can easily make part or all of that chapter available to your students via the Resources tool.
- Remind students how to access online help and provide a link to your institution's student help desk, if you have one. Your site home page is a good place for this information.
- Provide a discussion forum or wiki that students can use to talk to and support each other.

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Was this answer helpful? yes or no

Related Topics

In the Discussion Forums tool, what do I have to do to export topics?

What support does rSmart Sakai CLE have for foreign languages (i.e., tildes, other accent marks, etc.)? (2.4, 2.5)

Sample chat room guidelines (for CLE v. 2.4 and 2.5)

Topic Information

Topic #: 3986-414
Date Created: 10/22/2007
Modified: 7/3/2008
Times Viewed: 8

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