

## **CREATING A CUSTOM COURSE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM: THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND LESSONS LEARNED**

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### **Summary:**

In 2005, UNC School of Medicine developed a customized online course management system to enable course directors to manage their course materials with minimal assistance from the school's IT staff. With a little more than a year and a half since the system's inception, we are ready to share our experiences with other schools who may be thinking about embarking on similar projects.

### **Project Details:**

In 2004 the Office of Information Systems (OIS) identified the need for a content management system to better manage course materials for first and second year MD students. For over a decade, OIS staff manually created and maintained courses online. Ten years ago students relied heavily on a paper-based syllabus for each course and a majority of professors were still using slide projectors to present materials. The staff's job was to create and maintain a few simple pages; adding information to the course sites after the initial creation was rare. As paper-syllabi costs increased and professors began presenting their information via PowerPoint, OIS became more heavily involved in maintaining the online courses. By 2003/04, it was clear that OIS needed to step out of the picture as content managers and let the content experts manage their own materials.

After extensive research of content management systems available, OIS decided to create a custom course management system based upon Zope/Plone, an open-source technology. OIS enlisted the help of Cignex, a California based company that specializes in Zope/Plone development, to build and customize a system to fit our needs. OIS staff spent 4 months creating requirement and design documents to layout our needs for Cignex. Cignex began development in April 2005 and by Aug 2005; the system was created, tested, and deployed – just in time for the fall semester.

Overall, OIS' custom system has been a big hit among faculty and students alike. The system has enabled faculty to post materials promptly from any web browser. Although OIS is still involved with facilitating online courses, the content experts are managing their own materials. We have continued to solicit feedback about the system from faculty and students since its inception. Based on this feedback, we believe we created a successful system. In retrospect, there are a few things we would do differently if tasked with building such a system again. This presentation will go over our experiences including the good, bad, and lessons learned. Our hope is that our experiences will help other schools who are looking into a similar development project.

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