



# PARTNER UPDATE

KEEPING YOU UP-TO-DATE WITH INFORMATION AND DEVELOPMENTS

FEBRUARY 2010 SPECIAL EDITION



Happy New Year! I hope this new decade is beginning with many great things happening at your institution. I would like to share some exciting news with you. IPD assists colleges and universities with operating in a competitive adult market by leveraging the synergies created through IPD's partnerships with multiple institutions. In keeping with this tradition, IPD has introduced its Fully Hosted Online Solution, which is designed to help your institution do the following:

- Expand your reach from commuter, onground students to students within a 90-mile radius of your onground locations
- Bring a competitive edge in attracting adult students
- Provide a cost-effective learning platform solution for both shared and nonshared programs

I invite you to review this special edition of the *Partner Update* newsletter, which contains specific information about the elements of the Fully Hosted Online Solution, all of which are available to your institution. Please let us know what you think! As always, I thank you for the great partnerships we have developed and continue to enjoy.

Ronald E. King  
President

## IPD Offers Fully Hosted Online Solution

For over 36 years, IPD has worked to change the face of higher education. No other organization provides the depth and scope of services IPD offers to its partner institutions. The company understands that service to its partner institutions and ultimately to adult students is paramount to overall success.

Six years ago, IPD began working with its partner institutions to take their onground programs to the online world. Because the partner institutions use different course management systems, the company gained crucial understanding of multiple systems, including Blackboard, Moodle, and Angel. This experience proved invaluable as IPD launched its own hosting solution.

In 2009, IPD evaluated partner institutions' progress to select course management systems and move online. Many partner institutions had made some progress in moving online and experienced associated growth in enrollment. However, only four had moved a significant amount of their course offerings online. Thus, there was an opportunity for IPD to explore ways to help partner institutions in this area. From speaking with faculty coordinators, provosts, and presidents, IPD identified the following three areas that needed to be addressed:

- Many institutions were not confident with their learning management systems and their abilities to develop courses and degrees online.
- Students and faculty members would require extensive technical support during and after regular business hours, and this need would continue to grow with the increase in online enrollments.

- Some institutions desired a high-tech, high-touch environment that would allow video conferencing for presentations, enhancing collaboration capabilities among students, faculty, and administrators.

It was apparent that a turnkey online solution was needed. As a result, IPD assembled a cross-functional team composed of experts in instructional design, information technology, project management, and online curriculum development. This team began developing the Fully Hosted Online Solution (FHOS). Throughout the development process, the team kept three ideas at the core of its mission:

- Online education is more than technology; it is an ongoing commitment to the student.
- Commitment to faculty development at all levels is the foundation of success.
- Resources and economies of scale can be leveraged to improve the educational experience for students and at the same time reduce costs.

IPD already had substantial experience and skill in curriculum development and faculty training. Its online-specific skills in these areas were refined through six years of helping partner institutions implement online programs. As a result, the team focused primarily on the technical aspects of FHOS. The team moved quickly to evaluate service providers, assemble technologies, and develop processes to enable partner institutions to take online instruction to an entirely different level.

The end result was a turnkey solution that allows partner institutions to focus on the students and instruction, instead of developing

and managing a complex set of technologies, processes, and services.

In August 2009, FHOS was ready to implement for institutions who want a turnkey solution to move into the online environment. The FHOS learning platform is designed to offer courses and degree programs in fully online and blended formats or to augment traditional classroom instruction. The virtual classroom environment is enhanced with video streaming and archiving options. Additionally, live technical support is provided for faculty and students 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

FHOS is provided without cost for shared programs covered under the master agreement between IPD and the partner institution. FHOS is also available as a fee for service for nonshared programs at partner institutions and at other higher education institutions.

## The FHOS Team

The FHOS team is headed by Dr. Sue Dietrich, Vice President of Academic and Institutional Services. The FHOS team is the glue that binds the elements of the FHOS learning platform together because the team has expertise in all technical components, six years of experience with Moodle, several years of experience teaching online courses, and experience integrating the FHOS into the university environment. FHOS reduces costs by leveraging robust technical resources across partner institutions and by providing each institution with a team experienced in training and integrating the system into the institution's operations. IPD does the majority of the integration work; therefore, the institution only needs to designate an IT staff member as a point of contact. The FHOS team provides two days of onsite training for "super users" at the partner institution, providing them with the tools needed to conduct training themselves. The onsite training is followed by live, online workshops as needed for faculty and staff. IPD can help migrate content from the partner institution's current course management system to the FHOS system and help

convert courses previously taught onground to the online learning environment. These services are negotiated separately from FHOS and can also be provided to institutions that are not using FHOS.

Partner institutions may avoid using a new learning management platform because the costs, risks, and disruption can be substantial. FHOS removes these barriers. For example, FHOS's economies of scale ease financial and staffing limitations to make a high-end online learning environment achievable by even smaller institutions. As a result, partner institutions can focus on students and instruction—their core competencies.

## Course Management System

The core of any online educational learning environment is undoubtedly the course management system. IPD conducted a study of course management systems five years ago and as a result switched from using Blackboard to using Moodle. The results of the company's most current research confirm that Moodle is still the best solution. Therefore, Moodle was selected as the course management system for FHOS.



Moodle's linear layout is one reason IPD chose this course management system for FHOS.

Moodle is open source software. There are several advantages in using open source software rather than closed source or proprietary software. Open source software is developed by a global community of programmers who contribute their time or are paid by companies who contribute to the development of the software. This large collaborative effort tends to produce software that

is based on widely accepted software standards, has better interoperability with other software, and is easier to customize. Also, developers often create add-on technology resources to address specific needs at their institutions and then contribute these resources to the community. Much of the support comes from the global community of users and developers, who share knowledge and ideas with each other. Currently, there are no licensing fees for Moodle or fees for add-on features. The main costs are hosting and administration.

Designed by educators, Moodle keeps education at the core of its design. Moodle is designed with a linear layout rather than a folder-based layout. Students can see the entire course, including assignments and activities, in chronological progression from the course's front page. In a folder-based system, such as Blackboard, students must go into a course folder to see a syllabus, to the quiz area to access a quiz, and so forth. As a result, it is difficult for the students to manage their activity for a course. Moodle benefits faculty with an intuitive editing interface. Faculty do not need to go into the back end of the system into folders to manage the course; instead, they can update, edit, and add assignments and resources by using buttons to easily switch between student, faculty, and editing views. Further, Moodle is designed with a constructivist learning philosophy that advocates classroom interaction as a vehicle to achieve educational objectives. Accordingly, the system includes many interactive features, such as discussion forums, wikis, and polls.

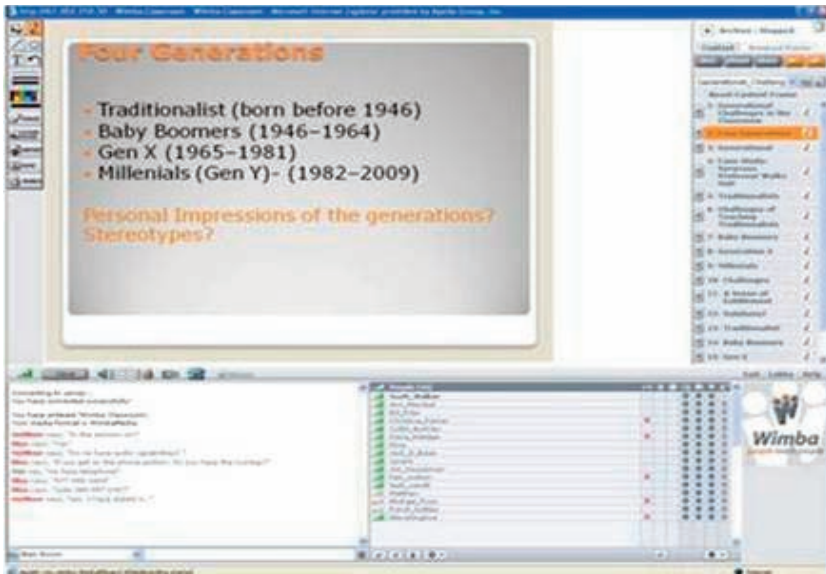
Important to IPD's choice of a course management system was that the system is an accepted enterprise-level solution for institutions of all sizes. Moodle is widely used and scalable. The total number of "Moodlers" has grown rapidly to 32 million, with numbers increasing every day. Large universities across the United States, such as the University of California–Los Angeles, Cornell University, and Louisiana State University, have begun using Moodle. Multiple studies on the benefits of switching to Moodle have been released within the last few years, and many more institutions will likely begin to use Moodle.

### **Live Online Classroom**

The Moodle course management system allows for an asynchronous learning environment, enabling students and faculty to use the system at any time, independent of each others' schedules. This convenience and flexibility is a key benefit of online education. However, some communication and learning are more effective when they are synchronous, just as sometimes a phone call is more effective than an e-mail. Therefore, a key technical component of FHOS is augmenting the asynchronous course management system by adding a live, collaborative component to the online classroom. Before selecting a solution, the FHOS team looked at many products that offered live video and audio presentation capabilities. The team selected Wimba Classroom because it has key features specifically for educational use. Loaded with robust educational tools, Wimba goes beyond simple Web conferencing features to truly provide a virtual classroom environment. Also, Wimba integrates directly with Moodle, allowing users to enter Wimba seamlessly from their Moodle courses.

Wimba comes with a user-friendly content board that easily imports Microsoft PowerPoint presentations and other content before or during the class session. Multiway video and audio and follow-the-speaker video (a feature that automatically focuses video streaming on the individual beginning to speak) provide personal and group interaction similar to face-to-face meetings. Students who do not have microphones can participate in audio sessions via the integrated phone conferencing line. In addition, Wimba has easy-to-use archiving and replay features for students who cannot attend a live tutoring session or presentation. Other features include polls, quizzes, surveys, whiteboards, and application sharing, which help create an interactive classroom environment. Students can chat as a class, or they can chat individually with the faculty member or other students. In addition, the faculty member can allow students to temporarily become presenters in a session.

Students also have many options for interaction, discussion, and collaboration in Wimba. Faculty have the option to drag and drop students from the participant list into breakout rooms. Once in a breakout room, a group of students can



Wimba's capabilities include using Microsoft PowerPoint presentations, streaming video, and archiving audio and video for asynchronous learning.

communicate by video and audio if the students have microphones and cameras. The students can also use the chat feature in the room to talk via text, either to the entire group or privately to one another.

If the students in the breakout room are collaborating on a report, the designated group leader could start application sharing to display a word-processed document for the whole group to see. The leader could then grant application control to another group member, who could then edit the document. Application control could be passed around to each group member until each student has contributed. The entire group could view the document as it is being created so all members could contribute suggestions and feedback via chat and audio.

Students can also collaborate directly in Wimba by using the whiteboard, which allows them to create their own content in Wimba and save it in the system.

IPD is fully certified in using Wimba and provides comprehensive training and implementation support to faculty. IPD's demonstration of best practices for using this tool, combined with always-available technical support, ensures that users will be comfortable and competent using Wimba.

### **Support for Students, Staff, and Faculty**

The technology involved in online learning includes each student's and faculty member's computer and

network, the Internet, and the course management system. All these components must be working for students and faculty to access the course management system. Therefore, students and faculty need fast access to high-quality technical support for all technology components, not just the course management system. Moreover, adult students, who do much of their work after business hours, need this support on nights and weekends.

IPD has responded to these needs by providing a single point of contact for all support issues via telephone and the Internet. This support removes from partner institutions the burden of handling student issues and is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Most important for partner institutions and FHOS, the technical support staff focus solely on higher education institutions. The highly trained staff members, located in two call centers, support multiple colleges and universities and understand the needs of faculty, staff, and students. As an example, all staff members are FERPA trained. Further, a high level of service is guaranteed. For instance, at least 75% of all incoming calls will be resolved in the call center and will not be escalated to the institution. Achievement of the service standards is transparent through continuous data reporting to the institution. Administrators can see a variety of graphs showing how well their students and faculty are being supported.

### **Enterprise Class Reliability**

The FHOS team considered system availability and performance to be critical criteria for an online learning environment. The course management system is capable of handling one million concurrent users without performance degradation. Reliability and scalability are also essential criteria. Thus, IPD operates Moodle in an advanced hosting architecture that is fully redundant. The system is designed with fail-over protections that dramatically reduce the possibility of losing data or experiencing downtime. In addition, each night all data needed to replicate Moodle are copied from the data center to another geographic location. Idle instances of Moodle are maintained in a third data center. With these Moodle instances and the nightly copies of Moodle data, IPD would be able to restore Moodle service in the event of the worst case scenario: the sudden loss of the primary data center.

For more information about IPD's FHOS, please contact Dr. Sue Dietrich, Vice President of Academic and Institutional Services, at [sue.dietrich@ipd.org](mailto:sue.dietrich@ipd.org) or 602-557-1153.