

**DIVISION OF INSTRUCTIONAL INNOVATION AND ASSESSMENT (DIIA)  
AND  
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES (ITS)**

**JOINT PROPOSAL • 2009–2010**

**Title: Class Blogs and Wikis in Blackboard**

**Purpose and Scope**

To enhance the functionality of the Blackboard course management system on campus, Information Technology Services (ITS) and the Division of Instructional Innovation and Assessment (DIIA) recommend that ITAC fund the purchase of the Campus Pack from Learning Objects (<http://www.learningobjects.com/campuspack.jsp>). The Campus Pack includes tools such as wikis, blogs, podcasts, and community space that foster learning, sharing, and collaborating inside Blackboard. Because Campus Pack is tightly integrated with Blackboard's software it also makes it easier to control access to these features, use them in class assessments, and retain student privacy. This service would be available to every class that uses Blackboard.

**Student Learning and Benefits**

As part of their University experience, students must develop critical thinking, and teamwork skills. The tools available from Learning Objects, Inc.'s Campus Pack provide a framework for students to develop these skills inside Blackboard. Students gain critical thinking skills through the process of creating Web sites rich with content, images, and embedded audio and video files. Students use tools such as wikis and blogs as a basis for deep learning and interaction. The student-developed Web sites can be open to other students within the class for sharing and constructing knowledge. Students can benefit from peer review and peer mentoring by commenting or even editing each other's work if the instructor allows. This tool mimics many of the Web 2.0 features that the millennial students currently use to collaborate, share, and interact with each other outside of the classroom.

Instructors can easily track, review, and assess individual contributions to group projects. Journals can provide a resource for self-reflection and an opportunity for personalized and private interaction between an instructor and student.

Most importantly, the Learning Objects software offers this functionality in a secure, integrated environment that preserves student privacy, capitalizes on Blackboard's authentication and authorization systems, and integrates with the Blackboard assessment suite.

**Demand**

Faculty and students have been asking for several years for an easy and integrated way for students to develop course content in a collaborative environment. Blackboard is designed so

that the instructor uploads content and controls the site. Student-to-student interaction is limited to the discussion board area. In late 2006, UT Austin students responded to an informal poll on Blackboard that over 20% were maintaining their own blogs or contributing regularly to wikis. These figures are similar to those obtained in the 2006 ITS Survey. Campus webmasters also rated blogs very highly on a list of services they wanted provided centrally.

In 2007-2008, ITS and DIIA conducted a pilot on the use of blogs and wikis in the classroom. One thing we learned from the classroom wiki pilot is that faculty want to include student participation in classroom blogs or wikis as part of the student's grade. A comment from Amon Burton about his Plan II Honors course's use of wikis/blogs appears below:

“The wiki page [DIIA and ITS] designed for my seminar is much more interactive and collaborative than Blackboard... It allows students to do collaborative work on group projects from separate locations and share research information related to their term papers. It also allows each student to post writing assignments so everyone in the seminar can read prior to the weekly class what others wrote on the topic. Since the writing assignment will be a topic of discussion in the class session, it should stimulate more discussion.”

### **Units Involved**

Both DIIA and ITS will be responsible for implementing and supporting the Learning Objects, Inc.'s Campus Pack. ITS will be the lead technical unit for the Campus Pack and DIIA the lead unit responsible for training.

### **Cost**

The cost of the Campus Pack license is \$24,625 annually. There are less expensive blog and wiki software available and some are already used at UT Austin, but these do not integrate with Blackboard. Extensive staff development time would be required to integrate external tools with Blackboard to work like the Learning Objects tools. Even after such development, they would not offer the same assessment functionality that the Campus Pack tools possess.

This proposal seeks funding for three years for of the Learning Objects software license. Total cost over three years is estimated at \$75,000.