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*From the Editor:*

*'Learning Matters at Lingnan' are short papers that aim to promote a dialogue on teaching and learning. I encourage all staff to consider this as a vehicle for sharing thoughts on educational issues as they might affect us at the University. If you feel you have something which might be appropriate for inclusion in an issue of this publication, then please forward it to the TLC. I would be delighted if staff (and not only academic staff) from outside the Teaching and Learning Centre were to be prominent or even occasional contributors.*



## Launching a University-wide Web-based Teaching and Learning Network (TLWeb)

Technology can take classroom instruction beyond the classroom, delivering information about student learning to the instructor while simultaneously providing students with feedback on their learning, and helping to shape the instructional moment in ways not previously possible. At Lingnan the Teaching and Learning Centre has developed and recently made available a local Web-based teaching and learning network for instructional use that has capitalised on the benefits presented by the latest advances in technology, in particular the Web, for teaching and learning.

While ordinary e-mail has enhanced the student-instructor relationship by providing more opportunities for communication, the Web-based instructional network (TLWeb) has gone several steps further. It is more than just setting up homepages and posting course materials on the Web. It is a university-wide platform for course delivery and management, based on a tight integration of study materials, course assessment, student feedback and communications among students and instructor, with an emphasis on interactivity. The goal is to provide both the instructor and the student with access to a net-worked application system that supports teaching and learning in real time.

While this is still a prototype system, the TLWeb network has potentials for building a close-knit Web-based teaching and learning community at Lingnan. When designing the network, the following criteria have been adopted to guide the development.

- *The system must be user-friendly which requires minimal computer knowledge and skills.*

Students and instructors alike have varying levels of computer literacy. In order to promote the utilisation of this facility by the majority of Lingnan instructors and students, no references were made in the initial stages to the very complicated and technical aspects or capabilities of the system. On account of the diverse experiences about Web-based teaching and learning on this campus, the system should be able to support various levels of application, which can range from deve

entire on-line courses to simply publishing materials that supplement existing Lingnan courses.

- *The system must not replace any existing form of instruction or interaction between the students and the instructor, and among the students.*

The 'bulletin board' and 'chat room' facilities on the TLWeb network were planned as additional means to enhance interaction between the students and the instructor, and among the students. They are by no means intended to replace any face-to-face communication or discussion that takes place on campus. Discussion online can be held at a specified time (e.g. in a 'chat room' on TLWeb for real-time interaction) or can continue indefinitely on the 'bulletin board' as long as interest lasts and sustains. Participants can contribute to discussions whenever they feel they want to, without waiting their turn or interrupting others. Contributions can be made at any time of the day or night, seven days a week. There is also a permanent record of the discussions which can be manipulated like a database.

- *The system should provide feedback about student learning.*

One of the goals of the TLWeb network is to provide both the instructor and the student with a quick assessment of the student's understanding of course material. Assessment tabulation is automatic, with results calculated and summary information provided in real time. Thus, the system gives students immediate feedback, encouraging them to revisit material that was not well understood. Instructors, on the other hand, receive information about students' understanding of the course material for revisions of course content and teaching as needed.

- *The system must not be too costly and difficult for the University to set up.*

To support the initial set-up of the TLWeb system at the University, a UGC teaching development grant of HK\$2.6m was obtained to cover the costs involved in the purchase of a computer server and the necessary hardware and software. Some funds were earmarked to pay for the technical computer support team which is essential to achieve a functioning system. Using a reasonably-priced software called WebCT available on the marketplace helped to keep the initial development costs to a minimum. Although there were initial capital set-up costs and recurring costs for the University to run TLWeb, in the long run these will be paid off by better teaching and learning and more active student involvement in an interactive learning environment.

Colleagues who are interested in the Web-based teaching and learning network can visit the TLWeb site at <http://tlweb.ln.edu.hk> for more information. Do sign up for a course account and attend the necessary briefing workshops if you intend to use TLWeb for the new academic year starting this September. It is envisaged that the TLWeb network will soon become a fully-fledged system to be used by the majority of Lingnan instructors and students for teaching and learning on the Web.

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N.B. TLWeb can support Chinese course materials to be placed on the Web. So, colleagues teaching Chinese or Translation courses can also use TLWeb for providing instruction.