Distance learning at SBA SU (School of Business Administration Silesian University)

František Koliba, Petr Korviny

Abstract: The contribution deals with the first experience and practical knowledge acquired within the framework of distance learning in the form of e-learning. Distance learning in this form passed the first school year at SBA SU in Karviná, and the following lines are the summary of the participants' experience. Knowledge of tutors, students and administrators of the teaching environment CMS Moodle, which is used at SBA for distance learning, will be mentioned in the contribution. The article touches some aspects of technical and organizational character that are specific for the form of learning mentioned above.

Key words: distance learning, Moodle, e-learning, ICT, on-line learning

1 Introduction

At School of Business Administration in Karviná the second semester of distance learning in the form of e-learning is coming to an end in the school year 2004/2005. In the course of summer months the past school year will be evaluated, however, some knowledge is available already now and the article deals mainly with this.

2 ORGANIZATION A STRUCTURE OF ON-LINE LEARNING

2.1 Study programmes and fields for e-learning

After accrediting distance learning in June 2004, it was decided to start teaching in three fields of study for bachelor's degree from 2004/2005:

- Study programme Economics and management
  - subject Marketing a management
  - subject Economics of business and services
- Study programme Economy policy and administration
  - subject Public economy and administration

Due to late accrediting, the entrance exams were advertised in the second round and about 40 students enrolled in the first year. A small group of students turned out to be an advantage, which we appreciated because of easier organisation of schedule and its adjustments.

2.2 Study supports

Before starting teaching the particular courses, it was necessary to create study supports. The authors of these supports were generally future tutors of e-learning courses and they prepared their learning materials according to the rules of creating distance learning texts.

Study supports for each course were available to the students both in the form of printed textbooks and in the electronic form (PDF file format).

2.3 Establishing the Department of Distance Learning (DDL)

Efforts to establish an independent workplace for e-learning and implementing on-line learning at SBA date back to past [3]. To simplify the transfer from traditional form of learning towards on-line learning using the Internet technologies, an e-learning department had been established, at first as part of the Department of Informatics and later as an independent body with all-faculty range.

The main workload of the department is providing technical and methodological support to tutors and the part-time study students. Five professional employees also provide a backup for hardware and software operation used in connection with learning. The concept „methodological support of tutors" encompasses creation of on-line courses in teaching environment Moodle, assistance in creating study supports, etc.

2.4 Technical backup of distance learning

Concerning the technical aspect, the department is equipped with sufficiently effective server to operate learning environment CMS Moodle. The basic parameters of the server are: CPU 2x XEON 2.8GHz, 2GB RAM, 400GB HDD. This configuration is sufficient in operating the system Moodle in the expected range of e-learning study at SBA.

3 CMS MOODLE

Moodle is OpenSource system for learning management with wide user base, in the present there are more than 3,500 registered organizations that are using the system. In spite of the fact that Moodle was created in Australia and was primarily aimed at *universities*, it is used also at lower grades, at *secondary* and *primary schools*, but also in *companies* that decided to educate their employees by means of on-line learning.

Moodle is freeware with open source. It is functional under various operational systems and it is therefore independent of platform, it works in the same way under OS Unix, Linux, Windows, Mac OS X, Netware or any other system that supports script language PHP. Data are saved in one database (the best support for MySQL and PostgreSQL, nevertheless it is possible to use Oracle, Access, Interbase, ODBC etc.)

3.1 Why Moodle?

Its quality of being open, user-friendliness and easy maintenance were the main reasons for selecting CMS Moodle as a system for on-line learning at SBA SU. Since the middle of the 1990s we have been using our own information system Athos at SBA, to which we could link the learning system Moodle having no major problems.

Due to open code and licence GNU General Public Licence (http://moodle.org/doc/?frame=licence.html), under which CMS Moodle is distributed, we can carry out adjustments of the source code so that we can customize the new system to our

conditions. See picture 1, which shows an adjustment of the source code MS Moodle, the result is more clearly arranged student point assessment.

Body

	Stáhnout ve formátu Excel			Ct-WX	Cvičný test - Windows XP
	Stáhnout v textovém formátu			Ct-IE	Cvičný test - Internet Explorer
				Ct-ms	Cvičný test - mailové služby

Název	Příjmení	☑ Ct-WX Máx: 10	☑ Ct-IE Máx: 10	☑ Ct-ms Máx: 10	Celkem
Kamila	ADAMCOVÁ		6		6
Ivana	AMBROŽOVÁ	10	10	10	30
Andrea	BAJGAROVÁ	8	10	9	27

Obr. 1 Point assessment clearly presented

3.2 The most frequent activities in Moodle

CMS Moodle offers its users wide range of various activities: surveys, forums for discussion, workshops, …, in the present version (1.4.4) there are sixteen of them. However, as a result of our experience, the most preferred activities involve tests, forums for discussion and assignments. All these activities are known in our conditions and on the contrary to the activities such as workshop or wiki, having been examined, and easily usable for the most of users.

3.3 Support of synchronic communication

Various modules are available for communication within CMS Moodle: chat, forum for discussion, news, emails, however, besides chatting, the system lacks the possibility of immediate on-line communication as audio or video conference. This drawback can be replaced with independent programmes. What is available is quickly developing software for IP telephony in the form of Skype programme, or a number of further communication systems such as Ventrilo.

Some tutors require installing software for audio-conference, which would serve as a support of on-line learning, primarily in language courses, but also in other subjects that require quick exchange of opinions among participants.

4 FURTHER OBSERVATIONS

4.1 Let's not overtax students

Continuous communication is frequently mentioned in connection with e-learning, as well as keeping attention and active approach of students in the course of semester. Nevertheless, keeping students' attention by means of a number of compulsory tests (e.g. 2 tests per week)

and allocating „penalty" points for incomplete assignments can become counter-productive. On the contrary, being as clear as possible, the opportunity of doing trial-tests, etc. are necessary in this form of learning.

4.2 Technical support changes into the support of teachers

After the implementation of Moodle and on-line learning generally we were concerned about technical demands of the new form of study. However, apart from minute problems, the transfer caused difficulties neither to tutors nor the students. In the course of time more attention was refocused from the field of technology of e-learning to on-line teaching itself and we suppose that this trend will continue in future.

CONCLUSION

Although evaluation of the past school year has not finished yet, some of the proposals and methods of solving the problems that we applied in implementation of e-learning at SBA SU in Karviná, have been mentioned in the previous paragraphs.

However, we can claim that distance learning by means of a computer is sufficiently attractive to students and tutors (260 applications for the school year 2005/2006). It represents an alternative and viable solution for those interested in studies who cannot attend school in person on grounds of health, work or others.

LITERATURE

1. KOLIBA, F., KORVINY, P. *CMS Moodle v kombinované formě studia na OPF Karviná*. Informatika XVI./2005
2. KOLIBA, F., KORVINY, P. *On-line learning at school of business administration Karvina*. ICTE 2004, ISBN 80-7042-993-3
3. *Historie ÚDiV na OPF*, http://www.opf.slu.cz/news/news.php?id=clanek_detail&clanek_id=300&kodStranky=UDIV

Associate Professor RNDr. František Koliba CSc.
Silesian University in Opava
School of Business Administration in Karviná
Department of Informatics
tel.: 59 6398 243
e-mail: koliba@opf.slu.cz

Ing. Petr Korviny Ph.D.
Silesian University in Opava
School of Business Administration in Karviná
Department of Distance learning
tel.: 59 6398 299
e-mail: korviny@opf.slu.cz