Next Generation OWLs: Customized Solutions and the Move Toward Open-Sourcing

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Panel Description

This session identifies technologies for next generation online writing centers, describing customized solutions for online tutoring and the potential for making these into open-source technologies for other centers. Presenters will discuss new OWL technologies, definitions for changing technologies, and OWL pedagogy and praxis, as well as usability, development, and sharing/open-sourcing of online tutoring technologies. The issues raised in this panel are the result of an OWL Technology Summit held in 2007 where representatives from eleven institutions met to explore trends in online tutoring technology development. This panel brings forward key concepts articulated during work groups formed at the Summit.

Customized, open-source online tutoring systems are timely additions to writing center technologies because they offer low-cost solutions that fit the unique needs of a particular campus, allowing writing center directors to use technology to support diverse student populations. These technologies address distance, time constraints, mobility issues, accessibility, and millennial students’ interest in computer-mediated instruction. Furthermore, as the 2008 CCCC Resolution on open-source technologies suggests, open-source software fosters academic knowledge creation and prevents dependence on one software or vendor. Because of the collaborative nature of open-source technology development, writing centers are well-positioned to follow CCCC’s lead in supporting these technologies for online tutoring.

Institutional context affects the latitude of how and by what means a writing center will implement online tutoring. As writing programs look toward open source solutions for online course management and content delivery, writing centers may offer similar resources--technologies built specifically by writing centers and for writing centers and customizable for institutional needs. As Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch states, “New technology invites us to reconsider our previous conceptual models” for online writing centers; conceptual models are defined as “a mental map of sorts for understanding how to use a product or to interact with an interface” (33, 23).

While this panel does not privilege one design or conceptual model of OWL, speakers will describe the process of creating customized OWLs on their own campuses and how these solutions, with the potential for open-source sharing, will impact online tutoring technology, theory, and practice.
Bibliography and Resources


