Open Source for Online Education

Description: Music plays while OTAN, Outreach and Technical Assistance Network is displayed on the screen.

On Screen: Open Source for Online Education, Justin Loh, Instructional Technologist, Simpson University

Description: Justin Loh, Simpson University, is standing in a classroom in front of a whiteboard.

Justin Loh, Simpson University: Well welcome. Good morning. Thank you so much for taking time out today to come listen to me talk. My name is Justin Loh. I'm the Instructional Technology Specialist at Simpson University. Simpson is in Redding California, just about a couple hours North and the objective here today is to share with you our journey in using some very popular Open Source platforms for education. Not only online as we think of online, we probably most likely think 100% online, maybe some hybrid, but also these technologies can be used in the classroom as well in face-to-face learning.

Real quickly, a little bit about my background. I'm a very proud TIMAC alumni. I would through the academy a few years ago I think, almost five years or so. So it's a pleasure to come back and be able to share some of the things we've learned along the way. I do have, gosh, about eight years of experience in education from the K through 12 environment all the way to higher ed. Adult ed. along the way and during that time I managed to get my masters in Educational/Instructional Technology. Reason why I'm sharing all that with you is not to bore you, I promise, but I just have this passion for specifically using technology in education and that's really why we're here today, is to see how these great technologies, a lot of them on the consumer level, how they can be applied in education and hopefully create that engagement for our learners. Ultimately at the end of the day that's what we're here to do, is to create and foster engagement.

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Justin: So, with that said, so our agenda: gonna talk to you a little about us as a university. I realize, how many people here come from actual adult schools or representing adult schools? Okay. So I want to know my audience and not, hopefully not talk in a matter that, again, may not be applicable to you. So realizing a lot of these challenges probably may not be applicable, but hopefully you'll just be able to take away something from our journey and again using these technologies. I think we have a lot of shared challenges as educational institutions, whether you're higher education, whether your adult education and so hopefully you'll be able to take something away as we explore these technologies and these challenges and opportunities as well.

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Justin: Give you some context and background as to why we've undertaken this journey. Talk to you specifically about Moodle 2, Mahara, which was mentioned in the last presentation. And so

for those of you who heard Mahara but may want to actually take a further look, we'll take a little bit closer look at Mahara. And BigBlueButton is the third piece of these platforms that we've been using.

Talk to you about our journey and again some opportunities that these platforms present for us, challenges along the way and again, wanted to take time for any questions that you may have as well as a demonstration of these platforms as well.

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Justin: So without further ado, little bit about Simpson. Simpson's actually been around for a very long time. Actually does have some roots here in the Bay Area, believe it or not. That was kind of news to me. I did not know that either when I started working at Simpson. But founded in 1921 is Simpson Bible Institute in Seattle, moved down to San Francisco, and currently resides in Redding California.

Simpson's university is a Christ-Centered University; a liberal arts college. We do have a variety of programs that range from traditional undergraduate all the way through continuing education. Of particular interest to you might be our Aspire program, which is what I'll really try and speak as much as I can from that prospective. We have a degree completion program for adult learners who in many cases, have no college education, haven't gone to community college, and so they have a chance to get everything in one intensive, about a year and half, two year program in programs such as a Bachelors in Organizational Leadership, as an example.

Our total enrollment is 1,100. Our graduate, and that's mainly undergrads, our continuing studies like the Aspire program I mentioned is about 183 students. About 19% of undergrad students indentified as an ethnic minority. So in Redding we really don't have a large minority base of students. Maybe unlike the Bay Area, you have ESL programs. We really don't have a whole lot of that in Redding. Traditionally, socio-economically it's a very Caucasian centered community.

And then there are senior classes offered to ages 50 and over and WASC Accredited for all degree programs.

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Justin: So our faculty makeup; we have approximately 121 faculty members. You can see the vast majority of those are part time, a.k.a. adjunct faculty and I'll kind of talk in terms of challenges. One of our weak points is keeping track of our adjunct faculty. Full time faculty, numbers about 39 and our student to faculty ratio is about 16 to 1. Total staff, about 142, large full-time compliment relatively smaller part-time compliment and a staff to student ratio of about 9 to 1.

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Justin: So, with that said, providing you some context, where we're at. How many people have ever used Moodle 1.9? How many people are using Moodle 2? How many people just know it as Moodle?

(Laughter from Classroom)

Justin: Fair enough, fair enough, I know. I promise I will keep the geek talk to a minimum. I'll do my best.

So Moodle 1.9 is actually, well, I'll have a demonstration of Moodle 1.9 but I want to try to keep that toward the end so I have time to go through everything.

For several years, about five years, Simpson's been using Moodle 1.9. I've worked at Simpson now for about two years and come to find out there's a wide variety of use cases. We have faculty that just thrive on it and depend on it for everything; whether it's 100% online offering, whether it's a hybrid or face-to-face learning.

Then you have on the other side, faculty that get Moodle confused with Google. And if I bring it up to them it's kind of like bringing up a very sore subject in their past, like you're not supposed to bring up my mother's disease and it's like I'm just talking about Moodle. So Moodle does have a negative connotation with some faculty. So the point is, is that there are some that use it, some that don't. It's a very inconsistent offering across the programs. I'll get back to that in a second.

Last year I pulled our faculty and I don't have the exact statistic but the majority responders were from our full-time faculty, not our adjunct faculty. So in that context, 78% report very positive comfort in using Moodle. Well what does that mean? Well in the range of responses there was a, you know, selection of not comfortable at all or not so comfortable. Well know people by and large said I am extremely comfortable, I am very comfortable, I'm somewhat comfortable with using Moodle. So very positive regard.

28% report that Moodle is an essential part of their course. So we're talking the, you know who I'm talking about, those pioneering professors where it's like "hey, I'm gonna go invent technologies to solve my problems." So those professors, they're out there, they're using it, we don't have to tell them what to do, they took it and ran with it.

An additional 38% report regular usage. So it's not the be-all end-all solution for their pedagogy but they are using it in some capacity. So specifically how they're using it, and I'm, this is probably going to be familiar to a lot of you, the vast majority of usage with Moodle is assignments and a document repository. So you put up your syllabus, you share your presentation notes, and that's about it. And there's nothing wrong with that inherently. I mean there is a use case for collectioning, you know collecting artifacts for collecting and sharing of information, but if anybody's used Moodle, I know there's been several presentations about Moodle over the last couple of days here, today and yesterday, but Moodle can do a whole lot more. There's a lot more capability to it. But right now, that's really the very limited use case

that it's being used right now. So things like creating custom lessons, things like creating quizzes are much underutilized.

However 97% do report to intend using Moodle in the future so based on their experience, that's great. They want to be repeat customers. They want to come back and use it. However one of the things that will help, more trainings, more self-help resources desired so in order to increase that usage, that's on the things that they do want. But you're going to start to see that there is a weird sort of disconnect here because even though the faculty wants this, the majority of the faculty are not talking with IT. And even though I'm an Instructional Technologist, I don't come and fix your computer or do anything of the like, but these faculty that are asking for these resources that want to improve their pedagogy, they're not talking to us. We find that they're talking to other faculty members, meaning, you know, and I have a teaching credential, I have several, I understand, I'm not trying to point fingers or throw anybody under the bus but if you go and gossip with another faculty member about "hey you know that Moodle program, it really stinks." Well okay, I mean you're venting, but what is that doing to address your concern? What is that doing to address your problem? So there's definitely a dialog weakness that does exist. It's getting better but it does exist.

But probably the most promising statistic is that 100% of these responders do say that Moodle plays an essential role in a 21st century education. So that's very, very promising.

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Justin: Furthermore, since it just underwent a very lengthy strategic planning session, took almost a year or so, starting last year, just finished and identifying key areas for the university to improve and one of those strategic themes is technology. So in essence we're putting our money where our mouth is. We know that we need to improve how we use technology in the classroom and especially to compete in the 21st century when there's so many options out there to get degree's, to do online classes, I mean we need to ask ourselves the hard questions - what are we trying to achieve with something like Moodle, or again, how do we better serve our students? For example, we do know that in Moodle 2 there's a better way to integrate all these different services together. I mean I don't know how many people here love having five or six log-ins for like five or six different, you know, resources that you use on site? I know I love it.

(Laughter from Classroom)

Justin: But you know honestly, it sometimes can't be helped. You know I mean obviously with limited resources, limited capabilities, limited budget, you gotta go where the software's gonna be to fulfill those needs. However if it's within our capability to try and get these services to talk to each other, it's of course going to provide a much better experience, much better experience. And so one of the reasons why we decided to upgrade to Moodle 2 is because we can begin to get these disparate systems to talk to each other. So for example, our student information system for transcripts, for report cards, for financial aid, we can get that to talk to Moodle. So in theory when a student logs in to Moodle, they're logged in to that system. Or if a student has a document in Google Drive, talk about Google Drive a lot in the last session, the student wants to share that document with their professor or submit that as homework, they can just pull that right

from Google Drive within their Moodle account. They don't need to go outside the Google Drive and do that, log in and do that.

So now those capabilities do exist. That's how we can better serve our students. And along the way define best practices. Got a lot of people I mentioned earlier about the pioneers that go out and kind of solve their own problems and do all sorts of new, cool new things, well those professors need an opportunity to share those with their fellow faculty, number one; number two some of those professors do need to maybe work with us to make sure that in IT we can support their vision because more often than not, you try and go solve a problem that may not, in the long run, be compatible with maybe a solution that we're trying to do with Google Drive or Gmail. For example I have a professor that is gung ho about Lecture Capture and so he's, you know he went out and bought this expensive software. He's got Dropbox, he's got a second Dropbox, he's got 2 Gmail accounts, just for storage, just for storage. Now he went and did all this without talking to IT and I'm not going to get into some of the political history about the IT that I came into, we've gotten a lot better. Getting better, getting better.

But there's a reason why these faculty members have gone and said "you know I'm going to solve my own problem. I can't rely on you." So anyways so he went and set up this whole infrastructure, come to find out we're going to roll out Moodle 2 and I'm just finding this out for the first time that you have all this software, you use these, this random program that no one's ever heard of to create these podcasts, oh and they're not compatible on YouTube and we're using YouTube for video storage instead of using Moodle, and I'll get to that in a second. So challenges like that, that it's like, you went and you did this and that's great, but now what? I mean it's just not going to work as we develop this new infrastructure. So communication we definitely need to foster, we definitely need to develop best practices to maybe say "okay this is what you're trying to do, here's how it's going to best interface with the new system."

And new procedures is so, so vital. Everybody needs to be on the same page for "here's how you request a new course or here's how if you have a TA, you want a TA to be assigned to your Moodle course, this is the procedure to do that." It's a little sloppy right now. And so with this new system we have an opportunity to go back and try to reign in a lot of this chaos.

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Justin: So just again, just expand on some of the opportunities. I already talked about defining best practices and efficient procedures. So making sure that there's detailed documentation about if you want to share a document using Google Drive, so instead of having to upload a document to Moodle, you can have your syllabus on Google Drive. I should mention that we, at Simpson, has adopted Google Apps as our standard office productivity so we don't use Microsoft Office anymore, we don't use exchange server, we use Gmail for our email and Google Drive and that whole shebang.

So but if you as a professor, you want to share your syllabus with your students, well instead of having to upload that to Moodle you can just put it on Google Drive, embed it in your course, and then if you ever want to make a change just go in Google Drive and make that change. Your students will always see the latest version of that document and right now the experience that our

faculty have is if you make a change to your syllabus, well you gotta re-upload it again and oh it might be pointing to the old one and it is a little bit of a mess. So there's great ways to develop new procedures to do old business.

And of course utilizing the tools for the 21st century, especially in the realm of online education. We have in Aspire, Aspire uses Skype. Has anybody ever used Skype before for video calls, video conferencing? So right now that's what they use and Skype is a great product, I'm not knocking it, but there is some challenges to supporting a platform such as that. Number one, every single student has to download that and if you've ever done a video conferencing session, they all start out the same way, like static feedback, you know somebody's talking and they don't have their headphones on so you hear yourself. It sounds like a rock concert gone wrong. Really.

(Laughter in Classroom)

Justin: And it's like the first 10 minutes of that every time. Okay? And so, so when you have kind of issues like that, how do you solve those challenges, how do you provide better support without students having to worry about downloading software that they may or may not have to have?

And not to say that we need to run to every new trend, but we owe it to ourselves to investigate the implications of these pieces of software like Google. That's awesome that I'm hearing more and more institutions are looking at Google for solving a lot of these challenges cause Google is consumer software and the fact that they are kind of expanding and courting businesses and education means that we can do our business a lot more effectively using these tools. And so it doesn't mean we always have to run to them but we should investigate, hey, what are the implications?

New retention data; retention is always a key issue for us at Simpson and I'm sure for everywhere else, making sure that our students don't fall behind. Making sure that they get the services that they need to succeed and one of the great ways in Moodle 2 is an activity completion tracker. And I know, I'm trying to remember, there was a government agency that came out, I don't know if it was the Secretary of Education, but the U.S. Government says you know when you take attendance for online classes, it's not about showing up for an online meeting, it's about actually completing work. So we're starting to see new standards come out about how you define attendance and how you define accountability in online education and so that's one of the great areas that Moodle 2 provides, a lot of great new analytic data where you can track all kinds of engagement. How many times has a user been to a specific page, how many times have they clicked on this activity, have they gone and well, actually, how about I just run a report to tell me who hasn't responded to my discussion question? All those analytics exist in the newest versions of Moodle which is really, really cool.

And as I mentioned at the very end, the key is we're trying to create engagement. And I don't need to preach that. I know everybody here knows what I mean by that. That's what we're here to do and again we owe it ourselves to say hey how can these tools help?

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Justin: So enough about the general stuff. Let's start talking specifics. So Moodle 2, it may not need any introduction but I'll briefly say that it is a learning, very popular learning management system, course management system. Between Moodle 1.9 and Moodle 2, one of the biggest areas of improvement not just across the board but especially at Simpson, it's a much more modern look and feel. Before in Moodle 1.9, if you know what I'm talking about, very, very blah, for lack of better term. Kind of look and feel. A lot of that depended on the theme that you use, but one of the great things that I love about Moodle 2 is just the dynamic themes that exist when you're using Moodle 2. So, the user can customize the experience to however they want. If they want to dock a menu to the side and believe me I know this sounds esoteric, I will show this, so I know it sounds boring right now, but a user can put a menu on the side and get it out of the way if that's inhibiting their learning experience. And professors can create courses that are much more visual, much more interesting. So instead of what has affectionately been called the scroll of death, if you've ever used Moodle 1.9 and you just have a course, I don't mean to have you choke on our coffee, I apologize, but you know what I'm talking about, you can have content and you can just scroll forever and not get to anything.

Well there's some great new ways to present courses using graphics to display for your weeks or your topics. Awesome, awesome stuff!

Again, I mentioned new analytics, like course completion. A lot of plug-ins. Man there's some cool plug-ins out there for Moodle 2. We're actually exploring plug-ins that range from, we have a academic success center that will help students find internships and create resumes and there's actually a plug-in, a free plug-in from Urntern, unrntern? Internships.com that you can plug into Moodle and that's your whole career system right there, for resume completion, for finding/locating internships, and that works right with Moodle. Very, very cool. Yes?

Female Participant in Class: I'm sorry I missed about two sentences back you said something at the end you said "Oh, now that's key…" and then I forgot the thing.

(Inaudible)

Female Participant in Class: Can you just go back like three sentences?

(Laughter from Classroom)

Justin: My wife wishes I had a rewind button, like a DVR.

(Laughter from Classroom)

Justin: Particularly the delete. No, I'm kidding.

Female Participant in Class: No you said that your college has a, something about resources or….

Justin: Academic Success Center?

Female Participant in Class: What's it called?

Justin: Academic Success Center.

Female Participant in Class: Okay and then you related that to Moodle?

Justin: Yes.

Female Participant in Class: Okay.

Justin: I did it, in the kitchen with the revolver.

(Laughter from Classroom)

Justin: So one of the things that the career center does is help students find jobs after college. And so they help with internships. That was the word I got hung up on. That may have thrown things off. But they help locate internships and there's a Web site called internships.com that provides a free plug-in for Moodle 2. So by plugging that in to Moodle it brings up this, essentially this portlet where students can create a resume, where students can find, search for between thousands and thousands of internship listings. So I mean this is very early on. I don't have a lot of detail on that, but as an example, that's a capability that wow, that sounds really cool. Really, really cool. So and that just, again, talking about the kind of analytic data to help with student success, that's just an example. One of many examples.

Integrations; again in the core of Moodle 2 there's a built-in Google, I think they actually still call it Google Docs, we know it as Google Drive now, but it's a Google Drive integration. I said I wasn't going to talk too much about the geek stuff, but it is a little technical to enable that capability, but it's there and that's what's important to mention. So especially if you are an institution that uses Moodle and you're looking into Google Drive for a lot of, for a lot of your solutions, if, man if you can get that to work it's actually a little, you can talk to me a little bit later if you want. I want to try to limit myself to going off on a tangent but, talk to me afterwards if you want a little bit more information on that. It is a little technical but it can be done, can be done.

So again the capability exists where if I'm a professor, instead of having to upload all my files, I can just type in my log-in and password when I get to my course and I can just start pulling all my Google Drive, linking all that, my Google Drive contents into my Moodle course. Which is great and one of the biggest reasons, I'm going to talk about this a little bit more in detail in just a second, but one of our biggest problems at Simpson was finding out that people were using Moodle as a document repository and what I mean by that is creating these really captivating videos. That meant that the courses were ballooning up to 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 gigabytes in size. Just to kind of put that in context; if you've ever filled up your own hard drive on your own computer, and it's like, wow do I really listen to that much music or download that many videos or what not? Well imagine that happening on the administrative/the server level and that's really fun when the server crashes during finals week. Because we're a very small IT department so when something breaks we all hear about it. Believe me. And that was one of the reasons why

we found the instability problem is because just so many people were just not using that in the best way. But you know something; we didn't have the best practice to find for that. Now we do. So now you can host those kind of files on Google Drive, link to them in Moodle. Dropbox integration works as well. The Dropbox is very, very popular for Cloud storage. And again integrations with several student information system services as I mentioned prior.

Single sign-on capability, huge. Huge, huge, huge. Meaning that again, remember how I mentioned we all love having like six or seven different log-ins and passwords for everything, right? With single sign-on, systems that support that provide an experience where again you log in once. Okay, let me go to Moodle. Cool. Here's all my courses cause I'm already logged in. That's what I get to see. Let me go to Google Drive. Cool. There's all my content cause I'm already signed in. Let's go to Mahara for my portfolio. Bam! It's all there. Don't have to log in. Really, really great service that you can provide to your users. I don't need to talk about how much time that saves.

And one of the biggest opportunities is the automation component and I'm going to talk a little bit more about how we're going to try to automate the service; partially through course creation and enrollment capabilities. So right now, as it exists, we have a lot of users that manually enroll their students and that's great, but it's funny how every once in a while I get an email from a student who is a senior and they're emailing me saying "there's still a course that shows up on my list of courses that I took as a freshman." So I'll go to that course and it's like wow, here's a thousand people that are still enrolled in this course. Cause again, we don't have a best practice to find for un-enrolling students. And I mean, that may sound shocking but we just don't have that. That's one of the things that we obviously need to fix.

So by creating a new system of auto-enrollments that we can manage and course creation that we can manage, this is our vision for providing what the new infrastructure looks like with Moodle.

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Justin: So Moodle Live. We figure that what should be hosted on a live server that students are taking classes on right now really should only be the current courses. There's no reason why a five year old course should still be on there. And I realize this is kind of pie in the sky stuff for a lot of people. It's like well we can only afford to have one Moodle server so I do understand that but one of the things that we decide to do is because we've had so many problems with stability in the past, where again, huge, huge courses are just taking up so much space on Moodle and so people are expecting us to provide literally 100% uptime all the time. So one of the best ways we can try to fulfill that vision is to keep courses on the live server that are current for this semester and maybe the next semester, but no more, no less than that.

And then so we want to automate the process of when after the current semester of courses, those courses go into an archive server. So faculty, if they ever want to go back for assessment data for WASC Accreditation, they can go back and pull up all that data. But that information no longer rests on the live server and they still have access to that.

But, if a professor wants to go back and reuse a course, as is very frequent, then they can transfer that to our Moodle Development server, we affectionately call MooDef, cause it's cute.

Female Participant in Class: What's MooDef?

Justin: It's what we affectionately term our development server. So for example, if you're a faculty member, you want to go ahead and work on a new course, we'll create a server for you just to do that. So we have a third server, each one of these represents a server, different Moodle server. This one, again, just for live courses that are currently being taught. This is the only thing that students will access. So that's another important point. If you have an old course that you want to reference for any reason, that's what the archives is for. If you want to start working on a new course that's upcoming for the upcoming semester, then you can do all that work in here and what this server also allows us to do is to also test out new patches, new requested features which is something previously we were really not set up to do. Case in point; I talked about stability being a key issue for us. One of the reasons why, server would go down, it would fill up out of, you know it would fill up space. Another reason if you ever want to update the servers security patches that frequently come out, we did that one time and the statistics ability in Moodle, the part that keeps track of, you know, any activity in Moodle, the analytic data, what your students are doing to run those reports, that broke. And so we had to turn that off. So kind of imagine any analytic data you've been relying on just one day saying 'nope'. Retention data, nope can't do it. It breaks the server. So we weren't able to test that. We weren't able to go ahead ahead of time, clone the live server and say well let's apply this patch, see what happens. That's really the best practice. We didn't do that and we lost a key bit of functionality that we're now going to bring back with Moodle 2.

So for best practice, especially for IT, we'll be able to put in, and if you have a new plug-in you want to test, new theme you want to test out, all of that can go on the development server and once it's been established for stability, we can put on to the live server. Yes?

Female Participant in Class: On the archives, aren't you going to end up running into size or, you know, the bulk problem with the archives (inaudible)?

Justin: That's a good, thank you for bring…

Female Participant in Class: way to zip it, zip it closed and I mean you know, like shrink it so something like that.

Justin: Yeah. Thank you for bringing that up. That's a good question. We are, we have really no choice but to reeducate some of our professors for taking that content and one of the things we'll be able to do, I'm glad you mentioned, speaking of analytic data, we'll be able to run a report, this is what I like, we'll be able to identify who the offenders are (laughs).

(Laughter from Classroom)

Justin: So we'll be able to, cause I just love this kind of data, like which is the course that's taking up the most space.

Female Participant in Class: So do you have like a traffic school, like cheaters.com?

Justin: Exactly (laughing). It's kind of like Alcoholics Anonymous "Hi I'm Justin and I'm a faculty of putting, I'm guilty of putting too much content on Moodle. Hi Justin!" And so it'll enable us to just, I think, have those kinds of conversations and say look, we understand what you're wanting to accomplish, let's help you accomplish that. If that means that I need to help you move content from Moodle to YouTube, I'll do it. Cause I mean it needs to be done. And so that's one of the great things about Google Apps is that as a Google App account holder you get access to YouTube. If you don't know this already, YouTube allows you to upload, if you verify your account with a cell phone number, you can verify your account and remove the 15 minute upload limitation. So if you're a faculty member and you have an hour long podcast lecture, which number one, as a best practice you might want to reconsider because who wants to sit through an hour of anything. I'm thankful that you want to sit through an hour of me talking. So I appreciate that.

But you understand what I'm saying? I mean we're investigating, now we're understanding more about best practices and online content, I mean, five minutes a lot of experts are saying that five minutes is really the maximum for videos. So I mean, really should, number one, you know, we start, we need to start to partner with faculty to have some of these hard conversations. I mean yes, I'm an IT person, but I'm also one of you. I understand what you're trying to achieve, so a lot of it is kind of reeducating, redoing, and rethinking about some of what we're use to and then here's a new way to achieve that and part of that is yeah, maybe manually moving content from one server to another. Absolutely! Yeah?

Female Participant in Class: I have a question. You mentioned that you give one server for live, another one for archives, does it means that the faculties don't share servers at all, so they have like three servers?

Justin: No, this is a university-wide set up. So this isn't like per department or per faculty or anything. So let's just say if I'm a teacher, I know that my students, my student's, my student's classes and you know my content is on this course. So if I want to go back and look at an old course, then I know I need to go to this server. And then if I want to start working on a new course then I go to this server. So it doesn't matter what department I work in, that's how everybody will interact with the new system. Does that make sense? Good question.

So this is our vision and we're looking forward to basically testing it out and I'm going to talk a little bit more about our journey here in just a couple of minutes. I'm getting almost short on time here. So, question?

Male Participant in Class: Yeah, just a quick question about the five minute, sort of video limit recommendation, is that for a whole course or just five minutes at a time as a general rule?

Justin: Well this is, again, something that we need to begin to start to have these conversations about best practices. The five minute that I was making reference to, would be if you're creating a lesson, okay, consider putting it in what's called chunking, little bits of, you know, five minute

blocks. So, and what I'm really kind of picking on is the mentality that some professors have of 'let me do my lecture to a live class and find some way to video tape that'.

Male Participant in Class: And then drop the whole thing on the server.

Justin: Exactly. Which I get. That means you don't have to do the same thing over again, but, I mean if you really put yourself in your learner's shoes, are they going to be able to sit through all that and digest all that content? You know, how about chunking your video down and creating, from scratch yeah, five minute blocks of information? Absolutely!

Female Participant in Class: Plus it's fast for the viewer if its five minute chunks than downloading an hour.

Justin: Exactly too. You know not all of us here have either broadband. Maybe the only way we have access to the internet is through our Smartphone's. You can imagine the data that eats up, for sure. Good point.

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Justin: So I want to move along now and talk a little bit about Mahara. Mahara got some talk in the last session and so we're actually, it's good to hear there are people that are, you know, looking at all these different systems because sometimes, you know, when you're investigating all these systems you kind of work within a bubble a little bit and so I might, might be picking some brains here a little bit more about Mahara in the future, but Mahara is a student portfolio system. So it's designed specifically for ePortfolios. And yes that, as was mentioned last, last hour, does mean different things to different people. But really this is primarily for student portfolios, project-based portfolios and can be used for assessment. But it's not an assessment system. I should be very, very clear about that.

What's really cool, and I kind of hesitate to use this phrase, cause this phrase does mean different things to different people when you talk about social networking, think social networking via a LinkedIn, a very professional social network. So it's not social network where it's like "hey let's show the Harlem Shake video for the 100th time" you know. I guess you could do that but, hopefully somebody will hold you accountable and dock you points. What's great is that there's a very, again, a modern approach to creating a portfolio system and that's really the heart behind this learning theory of using social networking and basing it upon that particular framework. So when students interact with a system, they're already familiar with it because it looks very similar to, say a LinkedIn, say a Facebook, even a Google Plus. So the interaction, I was really impressed with the ability to get around in the system.

Students can also create an online resume. I'll talk a little bit more about some of the surprises that we found. The online resume part is not something that you can really export to Word. I mean it's really meant to exist online, like again, like the LinkedIn kind of resume. But what's great about it is that students can export all of their learning artifacts so if they have a portfolio that they've created, that's shown off their best work, they can take that with them, which at Simpson has always been a big question for us. It's like yeah we like the portfolio system, but,

you know, there's been all these questions about well what happens when students leave and do they have to pay for this information, how do we host it. Well what's great with all these integrations, like with Moodle 2, these documents can rest just pointing out to the Cloud in their Google accounts, in other accounts and so Mahara can just be this nice presentation tool and students can export that and take it with them after they leave Simpson.

And as I mentioned there's a great integration with Moodle 2. So let's just say if a student got an A on a paper, if you want to put that in your portfolio to show that off, there's literally a one button export that you click on in Moodle and it pushes it to Mahara. Go to Mahara and there's your repository of your files right there and you can just plop that into your portfolio. It's all drag and drop. So that kind of capability exists. Really cool. There's also integration with Google Drive as well. As well as being able to host virtually any learning artifact. So if a student created a YouTube video, they can embed that in their portfolio. So if you, if you have a project based portfolio that students are going to be showing off more than just documents, they can show off pictures. I mean they can show off, again, virtually any kind of learning artifact that you want them to present. So really, really robust, flexible system.

Female Participant in Class: Question on that?

Justin: Yeah.

Female Participant in Class: Is it mahara.com and does it have to be integrated with Moodle or will it kind of be a separate…

Justin: Mahara.org. It is, it can exist separately. It is built to exist with a learning management system, a.k.a. Moodle. I think you get the most advantage out of integration with Moodle but you don't have to, no you can use it as a standalone system. Yes. And I should mention ahead of time and I don't want to just assume, all these platforms that I'm talking about, Moodle, Mahara and then BigBlueButton which I'm about to get to, these are not as easy as going and downloading and using today. I mean these do require some sort of administrative set up, an IT set up, okay? There are third party hosts like GoDaddy or like a Moodle Rooms that will host these services for you, but I just want to be very transparent and say I'm not encouraging you to go to Moodle.org and downloading your own copy of Moodle and trying to get it to run. You can try, but I'm not endorsing that. So I just want to be clear about that.

Slide on Screen

Justin: Finally what I'm really, really excited about is BigBlueButton. I think the Web site for that is BigBlueButton.com. Of course you can Google it and it'll show up as well. But BigBlueButton is a video conferencing platform. How many people have ever used Adobe Connect or WebEx? Cool, alright you know what I'm talking about. What's great is that there's an Open Source platform that does virtually the same thing. There are differences, yes, but to provide that kind of engaging experience that we turn to online for online courses, that does exist and that system is designed specifically for Moodle. It is really, really cool. I want to demo that. I've got about 15 minutes left so I want to demo that too. But what's great is, yeah, you can interact in a virtual learning environment with your students. So you can have that virtual

classroom where you can see your students via Webcam, talk via audio and text-based chat. You can share presentations. You can give an entire presentation as you would like, Connect or if you've ever used ooVoo or Skype, so you can throw up a PowerPoint narrated through your entire class. Throw up a Web site. Do a Web, a, ugh I can't think of the word I'm looking for; WebQuest. You do a WebQuest if you want to. You could even throw up a document and mark up on it. Your students can, you can invite your students to actually circle or highlight or draw on it. Virtual Whiteboard you can do the same thing as well. Again integrates with Moodle 2. It will actually archive the sessions as well. So the capability right now exists. It's only audio and slides, which arguably may be better for not only storage but also consumption capability. I don't know if everybody always needs to see like 20 people on the Webcam and that craziness. So you get those, that nice content there.

And the best part is there's no software to download from the user prospective. It works using Adobe Flash, so if you have Flash, that's all you need. Very, very cool stuff.

Female Participant in Class: Question!

Justin: Yeah.

Female Participant in Class: Without going too technical just a really quick question.

Justin: Sure. Yeah.

Female Participant in Class: So if you have say 10 different classes and they all meet and they go to Blue Button for a Web chat, is the drain on your Moodle server or on BigBlueButton?

Justin: It's actually on your BigBlueButton server.

Female Participant in Class: Okay.

Justin: So that's the nice thing. So it doesn't provide any stress, but it does require its own server and right now we're actually using a virtual server, again, not to get too technical, so we don't have dedicated hardware for it and so we're still in the middle of kind of stress testing and we've had very successful tests thus far.

Female Participant in Class: You're maintaining your BigBlueButton server?

Justin: Yes. I should mention that we're hosting all of these platforms that I've talked about. We're doing the hosting. We're crazy/stupid enough to do this.

Female Participant in Class: So is this the kind of thing where you wouldn't have to have you know an admin install, you know, something special that you do with your server? Can you just start using it or is it like Mahara (inaudible)?

Justin: It's like Mahara, it's like Moodle where you would need an admin install to set that up or rely on a third party host. Definitely! But the great thing is once it's installed and plugged in to

Moodle, in terms of actually using it, that's put on the faculty. So if I'm a professor and I want to go ahead and schedule a time for my students to meet online, that's on me. I have that power. I don't have to go IT; I don't have to go to an administrator. I am the administrator in that case. So I can schedule all my sessions ahead of time. So very, very empowering.

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Justin: So for the sake of time I want to go through this here as quickly as I can, cause I do want to show off some of these platforms.

So our journey here; we started out last year during the summer, made the decision in IT that based on some feedback, based on a lot of feedback, I'm talking the outages, the no statistics, the limited capabilities, the things that our faculty were asking for that we weren't able to provide, we decided hey, in order to really deliver, we need to go to Moodle 2. It has to happen. And so in the fall we started our first communications to the faculty via email, via presentations. We don't want to catch anybody by surprise. That's probably the worst thing we can do to the faculty and say "tada…figure it out." Don't want to do that. So we want to take a very earnest effort, an intentional effort to go educate, train, but identify what needs to be done. And again I mentioned earlier about our adjunct faculty, it's one of the hardest populations for us to just keep track of because they're not always on campus, not all of them use their Simpson email that we provided. Some of them use their home email which is not a best practice. So we have a lot of work cut out for us to try to reign in all this chaos and start from scratch. Basically saying "look from here on out here's how we do business." So we provide that consistency. So we provide that better service because everybody knows what the expectations are.

In November we started testing out the internal server for Moodle 2. And then in January we have a, we had a live beta. We have 70 plus users, both students and faculty, currently on Moodle 2 right now. And so there were some initial hiccups. There were some things that we knew was gonna break and we were very transparent. Like look, this is why they call it a beta. This is why it's a test. We don't promise a 100% perfection at the beginning. And so what's great is that our faculty were very, very patient with us. They were great and communicative in saying "look, here's what we need. Here's what needs to be fixed." So, based on that feedback, we're very, very happy with the stability and the usability of the server at this point.

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Justin: As a matter of fact we had our first meeting of the test teachers; we have about six test teachers, about seven test courses right now. And it's really funny. For even a test, the faculty don't think of it as a test. It's like, and I understand, especially for our students, this is their education, and it's like our students and some of them were, again they were very communicative and some were a little frustrated that it's like hey why are you taking advantage of my education in order to do your test, which I understand. And all I could say to them and keep in communication with them and their teachers and say look, please bear with us. This is the vital, we need to do this. Cause you can imagine, if we did this for a thousand, all thousand plus of our students, imagine the chaos that would be. So had to start somewhere. Had to start

small and so we're kind of at a no news is good news phase right now where I'm not hearing anything bad and we have another meeting coming up. So it's been a very, very good test so far.

This month we've also got our development server up for the faculty. So that way faculcy, excuse me, faculty can start developing their new courses for the summer. And we're also testing out plug-ins, new features that are coming. So we've got that piece of the puzzle up. And then for the rest of this month and next month, we've got our work cut out for us in terms of communicating to faculty, training, organizing training. We're working with our various departments. We have, we've identified which departments are going to hold summer courses and that right now is our area of focus. So not all of this may be in place; that three server infrastructure I detailed may not be in place by the summer. Cause our classes for the summer begin right at the end of April. So we may not have all of our integration set up yet, all of our automation set up yet, so we want to focus on getting people educated. We don't want our faculty to fail so this is our mission for February and March. Early April the course curriculum is going to be ready, meaning that our faculty will have opportunity again on the development server to create their courses, get that up. And we basically need to put kind of this cutoff date to say look, you need to get it done by this date so that we can automate, hopefully, the push onto the live server.

We also want to automate the enrollment. That'll take place in April. And of course shortly thereafter the classes will begin. So again, not all of this may be in place, but by the fall, it is our objective to get this completed infrastructure in place. Meaning all of our automation, the ability for a professor to, when they're done working on their course, they should be able to hit one button and have it push to the live server, their content. So all of that is our vision. That's what we're hoping to achieve. And again, we may need to do some things manually before the summer, but that's our goal. So.

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Justin: And so left to do; we have our archive server, got to get that up still. Course import mechanism, which I just talked about. So again, faculty should be able to hit a button and it pushes right to the live server. Still need to define many best practices and procedures. We still need to integrate with our student information system. I want to be able to, "I have a dream", if I could borrow a phrase…

(Laughter from Classroom)

Justin: …where if you're a faculty member, you don't have to log in to a different server to input your grades. You put your grades into the Moodle grade book and it goes to the student information system. That would just save our faculty a lot of time and that's been a request for many years. I hope we can finally deliver on that. That's a huge, huge goal of mine.

Training materials and organizing trainings. Huge, huge, obviously pieces of the puzzle that we still have yet to identify and I'm going to have to work with our departments, who, they are better at keeping track of their faculty, it's kind of a decentralized system, kind of silo'd, so we do need to do a lot of partnering in order to make this happen.

Cause especially when I tend to hold trainings, and I know our faculty asks for a lot of trainings, just because of scheduling and different things that come up, it's very difficult to get faculty to come to a training, so hoping to partner with the Provost office to really encourage, like "hey I know you need this, let's, what can I do to help you do that, to achieve that?"

Slide on Screen

Justin: Challenges; challenges, challenges, challenges. It's very difficult to do anything administratively, all the geek stuff, all the updates, when you always have classes going year round. I mean our schedule does not stop. Like I said there's summer courses for our Aspire program. Our Aspire program goes year round; has new cohorts every few months. So we basically have a very small window between the end of this semester and the beginning of the summer courses. And when I say small window I'm talking like two says to try and take the server down for maintenance, push out updates, get this all up and going, oh and it's all going to work.

(Laughter from Classroom)

Justin: Of course right? So big challenge for us. One of my favorite phrases; known unknowns and unknown unknowns. Come to find out, and I'll just try to capsulate this with a brief antidote, when I talk to our academic success center about Mahara and talking about its capabilities in the portfolio system and the resumes in particular, again, it's easy to work within a bubble until you start to invite people into that bubble to get their prospective and I come to find out that their needs for a resume system really cannot be met my Mahara, to be honest. And it wasn't until I had that feedback, where it kind of crystallized, like oh yeah, it is kind of, I guess rudimentary if your objective for a resume is to have a robust template system, something that students can print out and take to an employee, I mean it all makes sense, when you hear it, when somebody tells it to you. But, you know, again, it's something that just, an area that we just haven't really explored very much until we started inviting people in, so.

Ultimately there's only so much we can identify until, again, the more we start to talk to people, the more we start to talk about what your needs are, may find out that you know something, BigBlueButton may not work. So you know what we may have to look at, Google Hangouts. And for those of you that are using Google Apps, Google Hangouts, I'm going to plug that real quick because I want you to be able to take something away cause I realize a lot of this stuff, kind of higher end stuff, Google Hangouts could be your virtual conference. It actually works with Google Plus so you have to have Google Plus to use this. But you can have a chat with up to I think about eight people concurrently in a chat and see each other, interact on a virtual whiteboard, and so you can have a, basically a small virtual classroom. So feel free to look at that with Google Hangout. It's quick digression. But, again, based on our testing, based on our capabilities, we may find out that, oh this isn't going to work. So we have to be nimble enough to deliver plan B.

Limited resources; I represent 1/6th of IT. There's not a lot of us and when I need something done I have to go to my boss, who really should be delegating a lot of this stuff, and it's not picking on him, but we just don't have the resources and the money to afford some of the personnel that we need. And so we just, unfortunately, we're very resource constrained. I know we're all resource constrained and so that does kind of dictate what we're able to deliver.

Faculty attitudes towards Moodle, levels of expertise, that's going to really dictate, I think, a certain amount of buy-in, unless there's certain mandates for how we're going to use the system. I would like to see a consistent use. I think our students deserve, when you come to Simpson, this is how you can expect to use Moodle. I don't think it should differ between, oh if you're this kind of student, you get this experience, if you're this kind of student then you may not even get Moodle. Not to dictate pedagogy but I think if we're serious about saying we need to look at technology and how it can be implemented in a 21st century environment, I think we're just lying to ourselves if we're not going to have those hard conversations of no, we have to do this, sorry.

And so adjunct faculty I know we gotta reign those in. Reigning in chaos of course, time, our vision, communication, again these are all big, big challenges for us that we're going to be exploring basically now until when this whole thing is done.

Slide on Screen

Justin: So I know we're pretty much out of time here, but if you'd like to stay a little bit longer I'll show off some of the different Web pages. But I just want to give you my contact information. If you didn't get a business card I'll give you one, but please feel free to contact me if you have any questions, comments, if you'd like to know anything more about what we're doing. Love to be able to partner with anybody else on any best practices for Moodle, I mean again, we come from different walks of life but we're all in the same boat when it comes to, you know, trying to answer a lot of these questions and solve a lot of these problems and challenges.

And so I'll try and keep that up here while I show off some of the platforms here briefly. I don't want to take up more time than necessary and I know its lunch time, so that's good, nobody's going to kick me out the room.

(Laughter from Classroom)

(Computer activity is shown on projector screen)

Justin: So on the left here is our old Moodle, 1.9, and then our new Moodle. You can see a much more cleaner look, much more modern look with things like drop-down boxes, that capability, the ability to dock menus on the left. I mean that's just so cool. If you want a very clean look you as a user can do that and still access all of your menu settings. Just, again, so cool to have, again, that modern sensibility, that Web 2.0 sensibility.

Oops, let me log back in.

Female Participant in Class: Can I ask you a quick question?

Justin: Oh please, please.

Female Participant in Class: If I…I have an online course that's a Moodle platform, it's already developed, how do I tell if it's a 1.9 or a 2.0, I mean, how, is there some way to tell? It's been around for like three or four years but I don't know if they've upgraded it?

Justin: Sure. You may need to ask who's ever hosting it, yeah. That was a good question. One thing I will say, we had a great success with importing courses built in 1.9 to Moodle 2, so we didn't lose anything in the process. Assignments are handled a little differently so you do have to, you do have to manually kind of hit a button and just Moodle will do some magic to it, but it's not like you as faculty member have to worry about that. That's more of an IT thing.

I know we're out of time and I know there's some, excuse me, my minds kind of going off in a billion different directions. I really apologize for keeping you late but I know there is an eval so make sure you do get that eval out. I just want to put that out there real quick, in case anybody's waiting on that.

But just to show off Mahara, and if you need to leave feel free. You're not going to hurt my feelings. But what's so cool is that we have an option for Mahara that students can actually log in via single sign on. I'm going to sign out and log in as myself. And it's just a really cool, I think a very friendly kind of front page that you can get where you can, in terms of your activities, it's all laid out there right before you, so if you want to create your resume, right here. If you want to upload files, right here. You want to showcase your portfolio, right here. And here's an example of a portfolio that I put together from our masters in counseling psychology. Just a very clean look. Very easy to browse between the different pages and so if I'm a student and I want to show my competency, an example of an artifact for my competency of 3-A here, just drag and drop my evidence right here. So I don't have a file right here or else I'd show it, but it's literally that quick, that easy. You just click, bam there it is.

And so we can create, we can define all these on the institution level so if you're an Aspire student, here's your project portfolios that you'll be expected to do. If you're a Psychology student, here's your portfolio templates. We can define all these so students already have them and if students want to build their own portfolio they can certainly do that too.

Here's an example of a profile page. So you can see it looks very, you know, LinkedIn, social networky. So you can put as much or as little information on here as you want. So even, there's a wall posting, if you want to share, kind of like a blog, you can use that capability. We can create several professional groups on campus so groups of students, you know, different academic groups, or, can interact together. So those can be defined. Again, pages from the portfolio can be defined. Artifacts can be tagged with metadata. So it's easy for us to run reports to say okay, if we're going to do an assessment, I want to see all, you know, everything that ties into this

learning outcome, for an example. And so I can just click on the tag and it'll show me all the pages associated with that. So again, all of that can be defined in Mahara and in Moodle too.

So I'm going to go back. I know I'm kind of, kind of going quick here but just showing you briefly. And feel free to yell out questions if you have them. Want to show you BigBlueButton though. I'm really excited to show that off.

One of the cool things about Moodle 2 I'll talk about is the ability to support mobile themes. So for your Smartphone, if you go here on your Smartphone, and feel free to, the link is m2.simpsonu.edu. If you go there on your iPad or your Smartphone you'll get an experience formatted for that screen. So it's not just this crammed into a Smartphone where it's really, really tiny. It's a mobile theme developed for mobile devices. It's a really, really nice experience.

I'm going to go back and show a different course here. So here's an example. This course was imported, created in 1.9 and imported into Moodle 2, and here's a BigBlueButton session that's already been scheduled. So I'm going to go, I clicked on it, and in the amount of time its taking me to describe it, we're already in the session. And again, as you can see, I didn't install any software. I've never used this computer before. I mean this thing is good to go. So obviously I don't have a Web cam or a microphone so I can't show off that capability but in terms of, again, if you used Adobe Connect you should see a very similar experience. This should look very similar.

And so here you can present, you've got a little, you know, laser pointer, metaphor here. I can use this to upload a presentation if I want, or any kind of document that I want to share with my students. Session is telling everybody its being recorded. I can set how long the recording is going to be. Yes?

Male Participant in Class: Justin?

Justin: Yes.

Male Participant in Class: What's your mobile site again?

Justin: Oh, just m2.simpsonu.edu. Yes, simpsonu.edu. Yes, we didn't make it in time to get simpson.edu.

And so here again, just a very clean look. And I just really, I love showing off this experience because it's keeping people in the learning environment. You don't have to download another piece of software to make this happen.

So in a nutshell, that's all three platforms really quick. Again I really want to thank everybody for their time. Thanks for staying a couple of minutes late. I'll be here however long it takes to answer any other questions that you may have, but thank you again so much for your time. I really do appreciate it.

Classroom: Thank you! (Applauds)

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