Building the Maricopa Learning eXchange (Using a Bit of Competition and Bribery)

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Maricopa Community Colleges

The Maricopa Learning eXchange (MLX) is an electronic warehouse of ideas, examples, and resources that support learning at the Maricopa Community Colleges. See how we tripled our collection with a friendly competition for software prizes. Learn how we are syndicating content with RSS and connecting to other collections.

Key

Enter the loading dock to create or modify MLX packages. You will need an account (Maricopa employees only, adjunct faculty are welcome too). To quickly set up your account, register with **the Dock Manager**.

Enter the loading dock:
Loading dock ID (Maricopa email address[*]):
alan.levine@domail.maricopa.edu
Password:
☐ I forget my password, please email it to me

Go!

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Tour of MLX Loading Dock

Anyone who works for Maricopa is invited to share their own packages by visiting the loading dock (a) where the Dock Supervisor instantly creates an account. Users may check and modify their inventory at anytime, which tells how often a package has been viewed.

- Only Maricopa employees are allowed in the dock area (adjunct faculty can create accounts, but their packages are not publicly visible until their employment status is verified).
- Inside the loading dock, users are greeted by the "supervisor" and have options for adding or modifying the inventory of packages in the MLX (b).
- When a package is created, the Loading Dock Supervisor prompts for the descriptive information about the item.
- Next, is the option to list other people who are credited on the package
- Another option is to add as many web links that are relevant to the project, whether they link to the project itself, related resources, etc. (c)
- Users can upload any sort of media file (up to 10 MB each for a document, image, presentation, sound, movie, etc.) they are willing to share with our package.

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Feedback to Package Owners

People who create MLX packages receive feedback through several methods. Their own inventory (a) inside the Loading Dock, lists of all of their MLX packages, and details on the number of visitors and comments registered to each package.

When comments are submitted from the packing slip (b), the package owner is automatically notified by email with a link for them to return to the packing slip to see the comments. If the person posting the comment provides an email address, the package owner can communicate directly to him/her.

To discourage obsolete content, every year, the package owner will be automatically sent by email a summary of their MLX inventory and a reminder to them to remove any items no longer valid or make any necessary updates.

Finally, we have fully implemented Trackback which associates each MLX package with a unique identifier that can be used to connect the package to places on the web where it is used or described (c). The most typical way this is currently done is via weblog tools such as MovableType, so that weblogs may provide a descriptive context for an MLX package. However, the MLX features a web form so that any web address can be sent to a package and through the packing slip, "Trackbacked" to this external reference (d).

For example, a Math department may post reviews of effective problem-solving strategies on their department's web site. If one of the reviews is for an MLX package, the person responsible for the content of the department's web site can register their department's URL with the package. In this way, the package can provide a greater external context for later visitors to the packing slip.

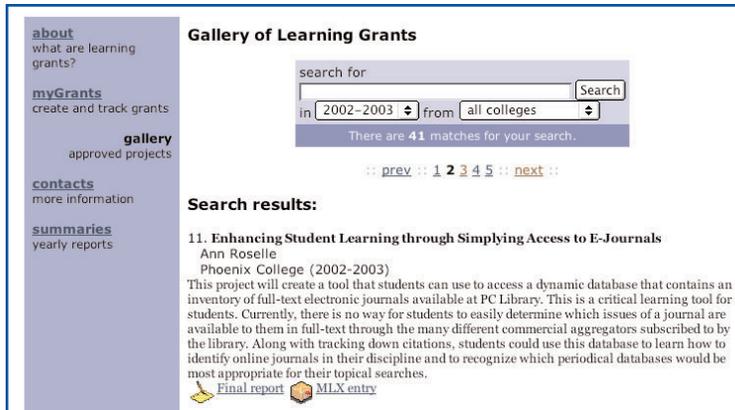In the near future we will add a package ratings tool to all MLX items.

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Connections With Other Programs

To expand the content within the MLX, we are working with other programs that have electronic reporting tools. For example, the Maricopa Learning Grants are an internal grants program that awards $180,000 each year to Maricopa staff and faculty for projects that are designed to improve, advance, and enrich student learning (a).

The entire grant application, review, and reporting processes are done online. Grant recipients for 2002-2003 are required to submit their final reports via the Learning Grants web site, and the information recorded is automatically stored in the Learning Grants Gallery database and at the same time, sent to the MLX.

We have added links to MLX for several other of our programs (b), such as the modules developed for the Systemic Reform In Science (SyRIS), and the projects of the Maricopa Institute for Learning (MIL) fellows.

In addition we are working with a number of other Maricopa programs that might easily gain from having online reporting, and at the same time, expand the reach of their results by sharing via the MLX. We expect this year to add MLX reporting to programs for faculty sabbatical reports, internationalizing the curriculum projects, and the Creative Pathways staff development program.

In addition, we are encouraging college-based programs to consider using or including the MLX in their own reporting structure, such as faculty summer projects, mini-grants, or other college-supported development programs.

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MLX Great Race! Competition and Bribery

To stimulate contributions to the MLX, we held a competition (a) that tracked the new contributions between November 1, 2002 and March 1, 2003. Prizes of software (Adobe PhotoShop, Macromedia Flash, Corel Graphics Suite) were offered to the three colleges that submitted the most items. Because of the various sizes of the ten Maricopa colleges, the college scores were normalized by their total full time employee count. A dynamic generated "scoreboard" displays the latest results (b).

For that time period we were able to increase the size of the MLX by 350 new items.

Because of this success, we decided to make the "MLX Great Race" an ongoing affair, awarding prizes and resetting the counter every six months. The current race is run for MLX items added between March 1 and August 31, 2003.

In addition, we have added software prizes for individual contributions, thanks to generous donations from Macromedia and AgilityPresenter. Individual scores are based not only on the number of packages contributed, but weightings based on the comments, visitor counts, and trackback records on all the packages.
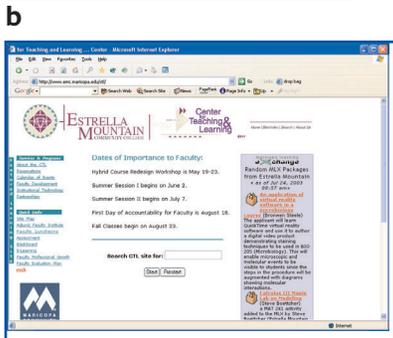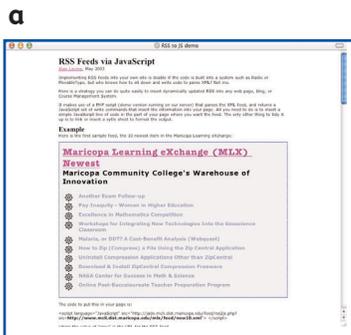
Key

Syndicating MLX Content

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Since February 2003, we have developed a number of innovative and unique features to allow "syndication" of MLX content at other web sites. The initial concept was to create a way for our individual colleges to be able to include on their own web sites a dynamic updated "window" into that college's contributions to the MLX.

This led to development of publishing college based "feeds" using RSS (Really Simple Syndication), an XML construct (a). The MLX has been recognized as one of the first learning object collections to provide RSS feeds for content.
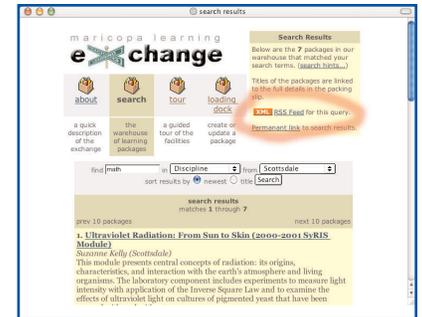
Because many web site developers lack the tools or expertise to incorporate the XML content of RSS feeds, we developed a simple method that utilizes a single line of JavaScript that provides the same functionality (b). This code passes the web address of an XML feed to a script on our server that returns a series of JavaScript commands to output the data. Use of CSS allows colleges to customize the output to match their site, and to date, at least three of our colleges now how their own feeds inserted into web sites for their faculty development centers (c). The college have options to display the 3 newest items form their college or 3 randomly chosen items. The feeds are automatically updated every hour.

Other syndication options developed include RSS feeds based on the academic discipline fields, so anyone can subscribe to the newest MLS items in "Biology" or "Humanities". And we have added a feature to the MLX search tools so that any custom search result can be saved as a dynamic RSS feed (d).
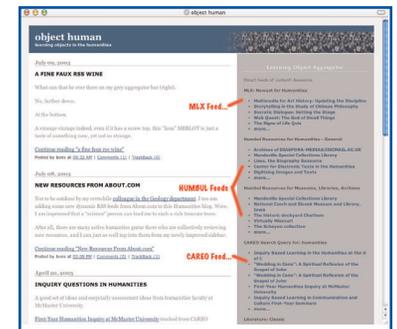
Parallel efforts at CAREO and other sites now make it possible for individual faculty or departments to assemble dynamic collections of resources from multiple learning object collections, and hopefully soon, MERLOT will add to the mix (e).

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