

# Another Look at the Tower of WWWebble

By Judith Boettcher, CREN

*Time spent on the Net is soaring for faculty and students as well as for technologists as more content and courses move to the Web. Here, Judith Boettcher takes a look at where we are in terms of moving from classroom instructional space to using the Web as an instructional space.*

The challenge of moving instruction and content to the Web continues. And expectations about the amount of time and expertise and campus infrastructure it takes to move courses to the Web continue to be unrealistic. Some faculty are being asked by frustrated administrators to just to “Do it.” Other faculty are more fortunate, finding some level of support, training, and infrastructure tools in campus faculty support centers.

## Types of Web Courses

In a *Syllabus* magazine column in September '97 I suggested that we were experiencing a phenomenon akin to the “Tower of WWWebble.” We all talked about Web courses, and putting courses on the Web, but we all meant something different. Based on examples of Web courses that were evolving, I proposed three categories of Web courses: Web-enhanced, Web-centric, and the Web course (which was a fully Webbed course). About this same time, an initiative was announced at UCLA to create a “Web page for every undergraduate course” in the College of Letters and Science. This amounted to about 3,000 courses. It seemed that we had identified a new category: *Web presence*. In planning your move beyond the physical classroom in either a revolutionary or evolutionary model for Web shifting, there are now four levels of Course Webness to consider.

**(1) Web presence.** A course with a Web presence—at a minimum—has all the information about the course that has traditionally been in the course catalog. A course with a Web Presence might also have pictures of the faculty who generally teach the course, course outlines, bibliographies, and course requirements. A course with an active Web Presence may evolve to feature comments and evaluations from students who have taken the course. How much time does it take to create a Web Presence? This can be done quickly as it is an outgrowth of existing materials, but it is important to note that this is more about the marketing of a course than about instruction.

**(2) Web-enhanced course.** A Web-enhanced course makes use of Web technology and services to support distribution of course materials and student access to the resources on the Web. Designing, developing, and delivering Web-enhanced courses can be an evolutionary step for many faculty by removing the dependency on handouts, phone communications, and office meetings. It can also be an evolutionary step away from the current classroom-centric model. This can be called a “Web-lite” course.

**(3) Web-centric course.** A Web-centric course makes significant use of Web technology to facilitate access to class materials and support communication between faculty and students, among students, and between students and resources. A key characteristic of a Web-centric course is that the communication hub of a course has shifted from the physical classroom to the Web. Web-centric courses can be cohort-based—keeping one group of students together over multiple classes. Web-centric courses can also be courses that are available within a limited geographic area, such as a campus or a city, but attract more students with needs for flexible schedules and fewer classroom meetings. Web-centric courses may include the use of other “gathering strategies,” such as intensive location-based launching activities, weekend seminars, and other special events. Web-centric courses might look a great deal like regular campus residency courses, but with fewer class meetings and heavy reliance on Web technology and tools.

**(4) Web course.** A full Web course is a course that can be accessed anywhere and anytime via the Internet and a Web browser. A Web course makes significant use of Web technology to facilitate access to class materials and to support communication between faculty and students, among students, and between students and resources. Web courses can be cohort-based to build a learning community over multiple courses and even a full certification or masters degree. Web courses are particularly attractive as a tools to reach cohorts of students in remote areas or with highly constrained time schedules. Web courses do not require any attendance or participation in location-specific sites.

In each of these types of Web courses, the number of hours of instruction on the Web varies. Below is a chart that lists the number of hours that may have to be redesigned for the Web environment. This chart is based on the traditional assumption of 45 hours of in-class time and 90 hours of outside-class time or independent work for a three-credit course.

## Hours of Instruction: The Web Environment

	Course hours to be designed for the Web	Physical classroom hours	Hours already designed for Independent work	Total hours of instruction
Web course: 100% available on the Web	45	0	90	135
Web-centric course: 50% on Web	23	22	90	135
Web-enhanced Course: 25% on Web	11	34	90	135
Campus course with Web presence	0	45	90	135

### The Fastest Way to the Web—Three Steps

So, what is the fastest way to establish a Web course of any type on the Web at this time? Those of you who are ready may want to consider the following three-step process: Determine your vision, select your tool, and adopt course materials.

**(1) Determine your vision:** Select the level or type of Web course you are ready for, and gather the resources and the tools together for this level. For a Web-enhanced course, this can be a one-semester release time project with support. You will want to select the course to be moved to the Web with care. Ideally, it will be a course for which digital and Web materials are available and a course that is important and visible in your department offerings. This will help to ensure support along the way.

**(2) Select/adopt/use a course management tool.** We all know that faculty and academics—as a group—often want to wait for the tool that really meets their unique personality and content needs. This is not the time to wait for the perfect tool. If your institution already supports a course management tool, accept that as a starting point. You will be able to learn from others, and support will be more readily available for you and your students.

Most of the more popular course management tools have their origins in templates designed by and with higher education faculty. So even if a tool is not perfect, it is often good enough for now. Some of the course management vendors recognize the trait of reluctance to use something new in faculty (and indeed, in most of us) and offer free Web hosting or trials for faculty just starting out with putting their courses on the Web.

The course management tools are getting more flexible every year. Now is a good time to start using them—while they are still being developed! Also, it is possible to use a tool, and not use *all* of it. Some faculty are using the tools for the communication modules and linking to existing course sites for other resources. Hint: Many faculty have suggested keeping digital originals of your course materials someplace, so that if you or your campus decide to switch to a new course management tool, you have easy access to your original materials. In other words, one drawback of these tools is that it can be difficult to extract the materials.

**(3) Select/adopt/use a book or set of course materials that have an accompanying CD materials or a “book site.”** The content Web sites offered by publishers are rapidly evolving. These Web sites often started out as digital twins of the analog textbook and faculty resources. The faculty resources at one time consisted of overheads, PowerPoint presentations, test banks, and student problems and assignments. Book Web sites have now evolved into sites offering interactive tutorials, animations, simulations, and real audio and video content. Such Web sites are quickly becoming even more dynamic, with links to related Web resources, hosted events and contests, and contributing editors that are almost like journalists—always on duty. The book sites also offer virtual spaces for faculty networking. Rather than waiting for annual conferences, faculty who are teaching in similar areas can network and share resources online.

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**Note:** A new monograph, *A Faculty Guide for Moving Courses to the Web*, by Judith Boettcher and Rita-Marie Conrad, is being published by the League for Innovation in the Community College. The monograph will be formally introduced in a special session on Friday, October 23 at the League for Innovation conference in Chicago, October 20 -23. For more information, visit the League for Innovation’s Web site: [www.league.org](http://www.league.org).