

# Faculty Use of WebCT: Impact of P3T3 Faculty Development Initiatives

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**Abstract:** A study conducted within the School of Education, Purdue University, explored how a PT3 implementation grant project helped the faculty integrate the use of WebCT in their teaching. Data for this study were collected using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. An online survey was conducted. In-depth interviews were conducted with 3 faculty members who had attended WebCT workshops and were using WebCT in their courses. The results indicated that the overall rating of support services to the faculty was high. However, the faculty suggested changing: 1) the structure of the workshops to facilitate learning of WebCT, and 2) the quality and timing of the assistance that the P3T3 staff provides.

## Introduction

The implementation of educational technology has been closely linked to the evolution of faculty development (Shapiro & Cartwright, 1998). Previous research (Dusick, 1998; Matthew, Parker & Wilkinson, 1998; Quick, 1999) has indicated that training and support are two significant factors in helping faculty to effectively integrate technology into the classroom. A major goal of P3T3: Purdue Program for Preparing Tomorrow’s Teachers to use Technology, a PT3 implementation grant project, is to prepare teacher education faculty to teach pre-service teachers in technology-rich environments, modeling approaches that future teachers should use themselves. To achieve this goal, P3T3 provides activities and extended support for faculty members. These include: 1) workshops on various technology topics, 2) help sessions, and 3) one-on-one faculty assistance on technology integration. For more information about P3T3, please visit our website at: <http://p3t3.soe.purdue.edu>.

WebCT is a web-based course development and management tool that allows faculty to construct and manage online courses, put materials online to supplement existing courses, create online communication environments, and keep track of students’ performance electronically. It is the “standard” platform for web-based courses and course support at Purdue University. To help faculty master the tool, P3T3 offers three workshops that provide step-by-step guidance for course design using functions available in WebCT. In addition, the P3T3 staff provides assistance for those who have difficulty when using it.

## Study on the P3T3 Project WebCT

This study collected both quantitative and qualitative data. An online survey was conducted to obtain general information about faculty use of WebCT. Twenty-two faculty members from the School of Education participated in the survey. Results showed that 77% of the participants had attended P3T3 workshops on WebCT. All participants incorporated WebCT into their teaching. Most (59%) used WebCT for basic content presentation such as putting course notes, syllabi, and assignments online. Many (41%) posted and organized students' grades and used the quizzes/survey feature. WebCT e-mail (71%) and discussion forums (82%) were among the most popular features. Few faculty members had experimented with the WebCT live chat feature. Among those who attended the workshops, 25% continued to seek help from the P3T3 drop-in help sessions, and 63% had requested one-on-one assistance. Besides the help from P3T3 staff, several faculty members had sought assistance from elsewhere, such as personal help from friends and peers, and help from various centers around the university. Overall, participants rated the services from P3T3 high: 50% great, 25% good, 6% ok, and 19% no opinion.

In-depth interviews were conducted with three faculty members who had attended WebCT workshops and were using WebCT to get more detail regarding P3T3 project impact on faculty use of WebCT. In general, faculty members liked WebCT because it helped them better organize course materials for students. All three faculty members mentioned that, because of the features available in WebCT, they could conveniently make all course materials available in one place. Although all three liked WebCT, they thought the interface was not intuitive. Two interviewees found the P3T3 workshops very helpful in getting started with WebCT. However, one felt that they went by too quickly; he recommended they be restructured to accommodate less experienced users. Two faculty members had attended a P3T3 help session as well as requested one-on-one help available during the semester. One commented that the help sessions and the one-on-one assistance were very helpful. He added that he learned more from the personal help sessions than from the workshops. Another faculty member who had also requested help from the P3T3 staff commented that it was somewhat inconvenient to go for help to get answers to minor questions. Since the P3T3 project is not dedicated to WebCT support, the staff does not always know the answers to the questions. Therefore, this faculty member found it was quicker to go to the campus support group that dealt exclusively with WebCT. The one faculty who had never requested help from P3T3 explained that he didn't know much about the assistance available from P3T3 and had received support through the campus center instead.

WebCT is one tool that the P3T3 team supports. This study uncovered both positives and negatives. Overall, P3T3 faculty services are rated highly. However, there are concerns to address. The two major ones are: 1) structuring the WebCT workshops to facilitate faculty learning of the program and 2) providing quality and timely assistance. In brief, the workshops should be more hands-on and learner-centered with mastery of one topic before moving on to the next. Staff assistance should be promptly supplied by knowledgeable personnel.

## References

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