

## **Choosing Course Tools: WebCT, Course Studio in WINGS, ERES, or Web Sites?**

### ***Purpose of This Document***

Course instructors at Wright State University have several tools available for managing courses, distributing course materials, and communicating with students on the Internet. Sometimes it can be difficult to decide which tool to use.

This document lists the four most popular tools (WebCT, Course Studio within the WINGS portal, ERES (Library Course Reserves) and public web sites) and describes when it is appropriate or inappropriate to use each tool.

Remember that no single tool does everything well.

- 1) Course Studio (accessed via the My Courses channel in WINGS) is integrated with University email, calendar, the WINGS portal, and serves basic classroom needs of communication, file sharing, and collaboration.
- 2) WebCT is the high-end course management system on campus and the selected standard supported system for distance learning at Wright State University.
- 3) ERES is the management system to provide online access to library materials for course use.
- 4) Web sites are good for the simple task of distributing public information.
- 5) Sometimes combining tools is the best solution for a given course.

### **Course Studio within the WINGS Portal:**

#### **Course Studio is the solution if:**

- You want an easy to use system for distributing files, posting your class syllabus, threaded discussions, chat, sharing photographs, and listing links to web sites.
- You want to quickly and easily post announcements that are presented on the Personal Announcements channel in WINGS, or news articles
- You want a calendar that has pre-loaded the student class meet days and times.

- You want to email students at their regular email address, not a private email system accessible only from within WebCT.
- You have only basic file and content sharing needs, want a limited number of photos, or links published to the whole class, and do not require database or search capabilities.
- You do not need any student evaluation features such as quizzing, assignment dropboxes, or other.

**Consider an alternative to Course Studio if:**

- You want to provide content that is reused year after year. Course Studio in WINGS currently has no way to copy information to other courses, or backup material so it can be reused.
- You want to publish a web site that is accessible by the general public. Course Studio in WINGS can post html files, but doesn't support easy creation of a web site with navigation links between components, etc.
- You need to upload or download many files. Course Studio can only upload or download one file at a time, which can be a problem with a lot of files.
- You need to post very large files. Currently the maximum single file size is 5Mb.
- You need to fully integrate multiple courses together, such as several sections of a class, or a combined undergraduate and graduate class. However, this feature is expected to be available in the future.
- You need discussion forums that remember what messages you have read. Course Studio does not provide any indication of new or previously read messages.
- You need to use a tool that is not provided by WINGS, but is provided by WebCT (like the gradebook, student group work, whiteboard, student tracking, etc.)

**WebCT Course Management System:****WebCT is the solution if:**

- You need to manage a student gradebook.
- You want students to be able to see their grades in the course.
- You need automatically graded quizzes or anonymous surveys.
- You want to provide an assignment dropbox that markers can easily grade.
- You want students to work together in groups (Student Presentations).
- You want discussion topics that notify you if there are new messages waiting, and can hide messages that were already viewed.
- You need to easily compile and download discussion topics or lecture notes.
- You need to archive chat sessions.
- You want more than one chat room (so multiple chats can happen simultaneously).
- You need a whiteboard to share freehand drawing among course participants.
- You need to easily organize a lot of web pages by adding navigation links between them (build "Content modules").
- You want to export course material easily to other courses (using the WebCT 4.1 "import" and "export" capabilities).
- You want to backup your course materials easily (using WebCT's backup and restore features, or the ability to archive course materials as .zip files).
- You need to upload or download many files at a time.
- You want a simple "image database" that is searchable (the photo gallery in the WINGS portal is not searchable).
- You want to easily integrate your course with materials distributed on a CD-ROM.
- You want the system to remember the last page a student viewed so that next time they log in they can resume the course where they left off.
- You want the ability to release information to students only if certain conditions are true. For example, show Unit 2 only after they pass the quiz for Unit 1.
- You want to combine multiple courses together.
- You want to monitor student activities in a course (how they participated in discussions, what content they viewed, how long they spent in different areas of the course).
- You want to monitor quiz effectiveness (how well students do on specific questions, which questions are consistently answered wrong, etc.).

**Consider an alternative to WebCT if:**

- You need public web pages people can access without a password. (This can be done with WebCT using guest accounts, but is easier to do with a normal web page.)
- You need students to use a real email account. WebCT's email is really a messaging system just between participants of the course. If real email is required, they would have to use an outside email tool, such as the email in WINGS.

**ERES (Library Course Reserves)****ERES is the solution if:**

- You want to provide password protected access to course materials such as journal articles, audio and video files, and other electronic documents.
- You want to provide access to library materials from off-campus 24 hours/day.
- You want the library staff to manage and upload materials for your class.
- ERES supports: email to an instructor from the course page; cross links from multiple courses; class announcements on the course page; use of statistics on reserve materials, ability to add items to course page as needed; and automatic notification when new items are added to a course page.

**Consider an alternative to ERES if:**

- You need public web pages accessible without a password.
- You need an interactive communication and collaboration center.
- You need a class list of WSU student email addresses.

**Public Web Sites****Public Web Sites are the solution if:**

- You want to publish material that people can access without a password.
- You need to make material available to people who are outside Wright State University. These people normally do not have access to WINGS or WebCT, so it may be easier to password protect material on a normal web site and then share that password with selected off-campus people than it is to get them accounts in WINGS or WebCT.

**Consider an alternative to Public Web Sites if:**

- You need to develop a tool that is already provided in either WebCT or WINGS (chat, whiteboard, gradebook, etc.). It is much cheaper to utilize the existing tool than it is to rebuild a new tool for your web site that does the same thing.
- You need to password protect the page. This can be done in a public web site, but obtaining the class list in the right format can be difficult. It is much easier to limit access using WebCT, ERES or WINGS. The only exception is when you want to grant access to course materials to people off campus who cannot obtain accounts in WebCT or WINGS.

***Conclusion:***

Each of the tools discussed above have their own unique advantages and disadvantages.

A web site can do whatever you want, with enough programming. However, most instructors do not have the appropriate web development or application programming skills, or necessary time, to build the system they want.

Course Studio within the WINGS portal is integrated with email, calendar, and announcements. It is useful as an easy way to share information and facilitate communication with students (links, files, pictures) and set up simple discussions or chats. However, it lacks advanced course management features like a class gradebook, graded quizzes, assignment drop boxes, student tracking, or student management. WINGS should be considered an easy-to-use course communications and collaborations tool, not a full course management system.

WebCT is the premier course management system on campus. It has a wealth of communication, student assessment, course management, and course development tools built in that can greatly simplify creating and operating online courses. However, this added flexibility also adds complexity. It takes time to learn how to use the WebCT system effectively. WINGS is more limited in its features, but that also makes it easier to learn and use.

No one system will do it all. You may choose to actually use a combination. For example, you can use Course Studio for basic and integrated content, and link to WebCT and ERES from within Course Studio for other features and material. Instructors must analyze their course needs, and select the system or combination of systems that best addresses those needs.

***Additional Resources:***

WINGS portal login page:

<http://wings.wright.edu>

- Main login page for the WINGS portal.
- Available to everyone at Wright State University

WINGS Frequently Asked Questions:

<http://www.wright.edu/portal/firsttimefaq.html>

- Answers to your most frequent questions about the WINGS system

WINGS Course Studio Faculty Documentation:

<http://www.wright.edu/cats/coursestudio/>

WINGS Course Studio Faculty Guide:

[http://www.wright.edu/cats/coursestudio/faculty\\_guide.pdf](http://www.wright.edu/cats/coursestudio/faculty_guide.pdf)

- Detailed guide to all the tools available within WINGS Course Studio

WebCT login page:

<http://wisdom.wright.edu/>

- Access to the WSU WebCT System

Distance Learning Support:

<http://www.wright.edu/ctl/faculty/dl/home.html>

- Faculty support information for distance learning

ERES:

<http://wright.docutek.com/>

- Access to Course Reserves, policies and procedures

Help Desk:

<http://www.wright.edu/cats/help>

- Central support for Course Tools issues.