Hello and welcome to the fourth edition of the Monash Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) newsletter. We hope that you find this a valuable source of news and information about the Monash VLE Project and Monash’s new educational technologies and initiatives.

What’s new in this edition?

Announcements

○ Introducing New Moodle Themes!
○ Implementation of Turnitin Scheduled for 2013
○ Training Takes Off for Wave 3 Faculties
○ 150 Online Support Resources... and Counting!
○ Moodle 2 Performance Enhancements

Learning and Teaching Corner

○ Wave 3 Faculties Adopt Templates
○ Lecturers Swap Ideas in the ‘Moodle Teaching Tips’ Unit

Community Reports

○ Six VLE staff to Present at MoodleMoot 2012
○ VLE Webinar Facilitates Discussion Across Faculties

Feedback in Action

○ Development Requests Page to be Launched on VLE Website
○ We’re listening, Even When You Don’t Expect It

Announcements
Introducing New Moodle Themes!

Monash Moodle 2 has been visited by our eSolutions resident artists and the exhibition will be coming to your desktop next week when the new Moodle 2 themes are released! There are 12 new themes which are not only aesthetically pleasing, but have been created with accessibility as the top priority.

The only issue reported by those testing the new themes to date is that of 'sugar cravings'. It's no surprise either with colour choices like 'choc-mint', 'berry' and 'honey' on offer!

Once the new themes have been released next week you will be able to change your theme within the 'General' section via the 'Edit profile' link in the 'Settings' block. Have a different theme for every day of the week if you like!

Implementation of Turnitin Scheduled for 2013

Planning is well underway for the integration of Turnitin, Monash’s newly selected text matching software, and the Moodle 2 assignment module.

Meanwhile Monash is in the process of revising its current plagiarism policy to an 'academic integrity' policy which reflects the Universities’ updated thinking that academic integrity should be managed with an educative approach. To make clear how Turnitin and the new Academic Integrity policy can best be used to complement one another, a set of guidelines will be published.

Consultation of the new Academic Integrity policy is underway with panel Q&A forums scheduled at Clayton and Caulfield campuses in July. The panel will include Monash policy and technical experts. All staff and students are welcome to attend and should register by sending an email to georgia.blood@monash.edu. Event details are as follows:

Clayton Campus - 9 July, 10:30AM - 12PM, Sir George Lush Room, Building 3A
Caulfield Campus - 10 July, 10:30AM - 12PM, Room 222, Building H

So that the new policy and Turnitin can be made available concurrently it is now anticipated that the implementation of Turnitin will commence in Semester 1, 2013.

Training Takes Off for Wave 3 Faculties

The VLE is pleased to announce that on Wednesday, 18 April, the VLE Project Team held its first Moodle training session for Wave 3 Faculties. Training has come a long way since the first session hosted at Peninsula campus on 8 November 2011. Staff feedback has played a significant role in improving the training over time. Since last November over 120 training sessions have been conducted with 700+ attendees across all campuses including Monash’s overseas campuses.

The VLE training team recently developed two new trainings related to assessments to be piloted at the Monash Malaysia campus this week. The first targets quizzes and the second, assignments. Both trainings will include contextual review of the gradebook. These new trainings will be available on Australia campuses in week 3 of Semester 2 and will be available for registration shortly.

Training for Wave 2 lecturers who may have missed out on training last semester is also available.

For more information regarding the VLE’s training, support and outreach activities for staff and students and to register for training visit our website.

150 Online Support Resources... and Counting!
The VLE Project does seem very young to be having an 150th celebration, however we recently reached this important milestone with the 150th resource being added to the VLE website in early April. These resources are comprised of:

- **Staff FAQs** - In addition to FAQs about Moodle, Turnitin and the VLE, the staff FAQs page houses several step by step instructions for how to use Moodle 2
- **Learning Topics** - Step by step, printable instructions for how to create and modify your Moodle 2 unit
- **Simulation Modules** - Online, self-paced Moodle 2 learning modules
- **Early Adopter Showcase videos** - Moodle 2 Early Adopters discussing some of the interesting ways they have been using Moodle 2 for Learning and Teaching and how you can recreate them in your unit
- **Student FAQs** - Similar to the staff FAQs, the student FAQs page houses several step by step instructions for how to use Moodle 2 as well as answers to frequently asked questions about VLE technologies
- **Student Learning Topics** - Step by step, printable instructions for how to navigate and use Moodle 2

Just fyi, the 150th resource was the Learning Topic, **Recommended Browsers**.

**Moodle 2 Performance Enhancements**

In late March several academic staff and students reported performance issues with Moodle 2 related to data integrity in quizzes. These issues were investigated as a matter of priority and it was determined that a database change made earlier in the semester was the cause. This database change was reversed in mid-April resulting in extremely slow page load times. On 1 May Moodle’s performance issues were escalated to critical incident status and remained in this mode until 11 May at which time it was downgraded to 'high'.
A dedicated technical team comprising experts from both Monash and Netspot, Monash’s Moodle hosting vendor, have made a number of enhancements to Moodle to date. This group continues to meet on a weekly basis to evaluate and action further enhancements prior to semester 2 and the introduction of four new faculties to Moodle.

Learning and Teaching Corner
by Mitch Hughes, VLE Lead Educational Designer

Wave 3 Faculties Adopt Templates

Moodle’s flexibility is definitely one of its advantages. Flexibility however, also brings the potential for inconsistency within unit layout. This in turn can cause confusion for students and teaching staff. Moreover, for those of us starting with a ‘from-scratch’ unit, it can almost seem like there are too many possibilities and too few constraints in Moodle. This lack of system-imposed direction can result not only in disorganised online content, but also missed opportunities for using Moodle’s range of activities.

To combat these potential pitfalls, a number of faculties have recently begun using templates. The Faculties of Arts, Business and Economics, Education and Law have all implemented templates for their Semester 2, 2012 units. Each of the templates represents the needs and priorities of the individual faculties.

“*The feedback regarding the banner and template design has been positive. The banner blends in with the Moodle colour scheme and the setup of blocks and collapsed topics has made setting up new units easy for academics.*”

*Benjamin Zylbersztajn, Faculty of Arts Moodle Administrator*
Technically, a template in Moodle is no more than a regular unit. A backup copy of this unit is then used to create as many cloned copies as required through the restore function. Alternatively, template features can be applied manually to units with existing migrated content.

Some of the key features included in the templates are:

- **Standardised section names**
  - Different templates have been used to help lecturers arrange content by weeks, topics or streams, and to group materials for assessment and unit administration.

- **Pre-populated labels**
  - Some templates have included labels that host visual banners in 'Topic 0’, navigation tables to present an alternative structure to the unit, headings within sections to prompt lecturers to use weekly learning objectives or focus questions, and to group together materials for lectures and tutorials.

- **‘Collapsed Topics’ format**
  - This format configuration helps combat the long vertical scroll that can occur in Moodle, and makes it easier to navigate quickly to all content in the unit.

- **Standardised blocks**
  - Many of the templates have been designed to include the following blocks:
    - **Activities block**, which provides quick links to content grouped by the type of activity (rather than chronologically)
    - **Calendar block**, which automatically displays due dates and can be used to add in other events for the unit
    - **Latest News**, which automatically displays the latest posts in the News and Announcement forum of the unit.
    - **Recent Activity**, which automatically lists any changes or activity that has occurred in the unit since the user’s last visit to the unit.

**Lecturers Swap Ideas in the 'Moodle Teaching Tips' Unit**

A ‘Wordle’ Image decorates the home page of the 'Moodle Teaching Tips' Unit

The Moodle Teaching Tips unit is a place for Monash teaching staff to share and seek tips for using Moodle for learning and teaching. The vision is that this will be a vibrant idea-swapping space for learning and teaching with Moodle and related technologies. The VLE Educational Design team will be curating this unit, adding tips and finding people with answers where possible.
The key features of the unit include:

- A glossary activity for collecting and categorising tips for teaching with Moodle
- Discussion forums for requesting tips and exploring issues further
- A demonstration section to explore ideas raised in the tips collection

All staff are invited to explore the unit and submit their own teaching tips. The VLE Educational Design team will check submissions and can help provide additional support to the ideas where needed.

To check out and contribute to the Moodle Teaching Tips unit, visit [Moodle Teaching Tips](#).

---

**Community Reports**

**Six VLE Staff to Present at MoodleMoot 2012**

The VLE is really excited about the upcoming MoodleMoot conference to be held at the Gold Coast in July, not least because six of the team will be presenting! Following are the list of VLE presentations:

**Enterprise Open Source - Moodle management from a Monash perspective** - Emily Spencer, Project Manager, will be talking about the initial approach taken to “Moodle modification” and outline how, as a result of our experiences, this approach has evolved into one that is more suited to meeting the needs of the enterprise.

**The Academic Staff Training Trojan Horse** - Mitch Hughes, Lead Educational Designer and Marissa Viray Carlos, VLE Training Officer, will be presenting about Moodle 2 training and how they incorporated Educational Design into each session.

**Personalising the Journey | A user-centred approach to the implementation of Moodle 2** - Susan Zolezzi, Communications and Change Manager, and Erika Gough, Communications and Change Officer, will be making their presentation about the University’s move to Moodle 2 highlighting its phased and personalised approach.

**Making Moodle Accessible** - Nilma Perera and Pasquale Stella (eSolutions) will describe the steps undertaken during the implementation of Moodle, to make Moodle 2.0 more accessible.
Other Monash University presenters include Margot Schuhmacher of the Faculty of Information Technology, Steven Yates from the Library and Phillip Dawson from the Graduate Certificate of Academic Practice.

We hope to see some of you at the conference.

**VLE Webinar Facilitates Discussion Across Faculties**

On 3 April Mitch Hughes, VLE Lead Educational Designer ran an online ‘Moodle Templates Share and Tell’ session using Blackboard Collaborate to give Faculties the opportunity to bounce ideas off one another regarding the creation and use of templates in their Moodle 2 units. As mentioned above in the Learning and Teaching Corner, templates assist in making units more consistent and makes it easier for content to be organised by lecturers.

Giving faculties the opportunity to discuss their ideas in a central forum hosted by the VLE allowed for a diversity of view not often shared in this space. It was exciting to see representation by the majority of Monash’s faculties involved in the webinar and we hope to host another such event in the near future. If you have a topic for ‘Share and Tell’, please contact mitch.hughes@monash.edu

To see a recording of this video visit the [Blackboard Collaborate archive](#).

---

**Feedback in Action**

**Development Requests Page to be Launched on VLE Website**
In mid-July a Moodle 2 Development Requests page will be published on the VLE website. This page will reflect requests for changes to Moodle which have been categorised as 'development requests' as they require development of the system’s code to be changed. This list will reflect requests which have been made since Moodle was first introduced in Wave 1 (semester 2, 2011) and will include information regarding whether the feature request will be resolved with an upcoming upgrade or the introduction of a new VLE technology.

Stay tuned for more information and a link to the VLE Development Requests page.

We’re listening, Even When You Don't Expect It

The VLE training team comprising Mitch Hughes, Marissa Carlos, Li Mei Brusey and Jeannette Ngau are the folk on the VLE team who have opportunity to speak and listen to Monash lecturers and faculty staff on a near daily basis. Though an informal channel, the training team take comments about Moodle made verbally, during training, or via the Training Evaluation Form back to the VLE team for investigation. These comments and requests are recorded and go through a formal review which aims to improve our resources and trainings.

Recently a query was raised in training regarding awarding how decimal grades to students. You can now find this solution and other FAQs at vle.monash.edu.

Warm regards,
The VLE Project Team

.......

To subscribe to the VLE newsletter please complete our Google form.

The VLE welcomes contributions about your experience with Moodle and other VLE technologies to our newsletter. To contribute please email vle@monash.edu.