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LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

When classes are offered over the Internet students, teachers and administrators need a learning environment (LE) in which to interact. Such environments are provided via software which comes with a pre-designed user interface and incorporates features ranging from listservs and chatrooms to automated test grading and on-line libraries. The number of LE products available is growing by leaps and bounds. TEC has evaluated twenty-one of the most readily available softwares as they are presented by their websites. Our findings are presented in the following matrix.

The most important thing we discovered about LE software is that there is little discernable standard for what a user "should" expect with regard to features, services, price, or necessary hardware. (LE software websites vary widely in what they present about their product as well. Some provide on-line tours. Others offer only hyperbolic sales language.) Most of the environments we looked at include threaded listserv discussion, live chatrooms and whiteboards, audio and video capabilities, and graphics files as attachments. Most need to be installed on a central server. Most are "scalable," meaning the user can to some extent turn features on or off, change the on-screen design, or customize the software to fit anything from one class to a half dozen departments.

We recommend that you think carefully about your institutions' particular needs and evaluate any potential purchase carefully. In particular, don't assume that all packages are multi-platform, or that training or tech support is included in the software price.

	Blackboard http://company.blackboard.com on-line course management software and website service additional services available Products: -Blackboard CourseInfo server software -Blackboard CourseInfo	Click2Learn - (Asymmetrix) http://www.click2learn.com Products: -Toolbook -Ingenuim additional services available	Convene http://www.convene.com Product: -Ac@deme additional services available *bookstore and library options	eCollege http://www.ecollege.com/ company products/etools.html Products: -eToolkit -eCompanion -eCollege Campus
server software	yes	yes	yes	yes
software suite				yes
scalable or can be customized	nsi	nsi	nsi	yes
enterprise product	yes	yes	yes	
threaded discussion or listserv	yes	nsi	yes	yes
live chat & whiteboard	yes	nsi	nsi	yes
audio & video	nsi	yes	yes	nsi
graphics as attachments	nsi	nsi	yes	nsi
course templates	yes	yes	nsi	nsi
gradebook	yes	nsi	nsi	yes
student tracking	yes	nsi	nsi	yes
individual web pages	yes	yes	nsi	yes
group work space	yes	nsi	nsi	nsi

	Blackboard, cont'd	Click2Learn - (Asymmetrix), cont'd	Convene, cont'd	ECollege, cont'd
on-line registration (e-commerce)	yes	nsi	yes	w/ eCollege Campus only
student services		nsi		w/ eCollege Campus only
training and/or tutorial	yes	nsi	yes	nsi
tech support	yes	nsi	yes	yes
multi-platform	yes	No, only runs on Windows	yes	nsi
hosting	yes	nsi	yes	nsi
other		CD-ROM publishing	yes	online bookstore & library w/ eCollege Campus only
cost & pricing structure	<i>individual website course</i> -unregistered is free -registered is \$100 annually <i>server software</i> -contact for price	contact for price discounts available for federal government and for educational institutions	per-student fee determined by features & components chosen	eToolkit is free eCompanion has free 6- mo. trial contact for price

nsi = no specific information available

	Eduprise http://www.eduprise.com training, hosting & support services for Internet-enabled instruction Products: -RCDDS	E-education / JonesKnowledge http://www.e- education.com on-line course management software	Embanet http://www.embanet.com/in dex2.html on-line course management software builds, hosts and maintains virtual education environments	Hot Potatoes http://www.uvic.ca/hrd/halfbak ed software
server software	nsi	yes	yes	yes
software suite	yes			
scalable or can be customized	yes	yes		
enterprise product				
threaded discussion or listserv	yes	yes	nsi	
live chat & whiteboard	yes	yes	nsi	
audio & video	nsi	yes	nsi	
graphics as attachments	nsi	nsi	nsi	
course templates	yes	yes	yes	
gradebook	nsi	yes	nsi	
student tracking	nsi	yes	yes	
individual web pages	yes	yes	yes	
group work space	nsi	yes	nsi	

	Eduprise, cont'd	E-education / JonesKnowledge, cont'd	Embanet, cont'd	Hot Potatoes, cont'd
on-line registration (e-commerce)	nsi	yes	yes	
student services		yes	yes	
training and/or tutorial	yes	yes	yes	yes
tech support	nsi	yes		
multi-platform	nsi	nsi	yes	yes
hosting	yes	yes	yes	
other		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •on-line library planned •on-line bookstore planned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Course Conversion •Electronic Book Store •Program Marketing 	applications which allow for on-line test design
cost & pricing structure	contact for price	offers a free trial-run course contact for price	2 available packages -Unilearn -Collaborative Classroom contact for price	freeware

	IntraLearn http://www.intralearn.com/product.htm Products: -Intralearn -ICOSA	Lotus LearningSpace http://www.lotus.com/home/nsf/welcome/learnspace	LUVIT http://www.luvit.com/default2.asp on-line course management software	MentorWare http://www.mentorware.com web-based course management additional services available Product: -Enterprise Education Server
server software	yes	nsi	yes	
software suite		yes		
scalable or can be customized	yes	nsi	yes	yes
enterprise product		nsi		yes
threaded discussion or listserv	yes	yes	nsi	nsi
live chat & whiteboard	yes	yes	nsi	nsi
audio & video	yes	yes	nsi	nsi
graphics as attachments	nsi	yes	nsi	nsi
course templates	yes	nsi	nsi	yes
gradebook	yes	nsi	nsi	yes
student tracking	yes	nsi	nsi	yes
individual web pages	nsi	nsi	nsi	yes
group work space	nsi	nsi	nsi	nsi

	IntraLearn, cont'd	Lotus LearningSpace, cont'd	LUVIT, cont'd	MentorWare, cont'd
on-line registration (e-commerce)		nsi	nsi	yes
student services		nsi		nsi
training and/or tutorial		yes	yes	nsi
tech support		nsi	nsi	nsi
multi-platform	NT server only	NT server only	yes	Yes, but Local server must have a Java enabler or must support version 2.0Java Servlet Development Kit. Local server interfaces with Mentorware's Education server
hosting		yes	yes	yes
other	Intralearn.net Professional Services	web site provides much sales language, but little detail about what the product actually is		
cost & pricing structure		trial version available contact for price	contact for price	contact for price contact for administrator demo

	SAP http://www.sap.americapublicsector.com Product: -SAP R/3	SCT Learning Suite http://www.sctcorp.com/industry/solutions/education/servicesS.htm provides consultant services, web hosting services, on-line course management software	SoftArc http://www.softarc.com/homepage.shtml Product: -First Class Intranet Server	Top Class http://www.wbtsystems.com/solutions/howtoorder.html on-line course management software Products: -Top Class Publisher Studio -Top Class Enterprise Server -Top Class Player
server software	yes	"SCT Learning Suite	yes	yes
software suite	business and education management software, including "delivery of course content through the web." No other information given.	provides full-service, online and offline, distributed, competency-based learning. It supports traditional, in-classroom instruction. And, it integrates fully with SCT's campus information systems (Banner2000 and Plus2000). SCT Learning Suite is based on an object-oriented architecture, TCP/IP Internet Communications Protocol, and the latest Web browser technology intended to create and deliver highly interactive learning content objects that are rich in media such as audio, video, graphics, animation, and simulation." No other information given.		yes
scalable or can be customized			yes	yes
enterprise product				yes
threaded discussion or listserv			yes	yes
live chat & whiteboard			nsi	nsi
audio & video			nsi	yes
graphics as attachments			nsi	nsi
course templates			yes	yes
gradebook			nsi	nsi
student tracking			yes	nsi
individual web pages			nsi	nsi
group work space			nsi	nsi

	SAP, cont'd	SCT Learning Suite, cont'd	SoftArc, cont'd	Top Class, cont'd
on-line registration (e-commerce)			nsi	nsi
student services			nsi	nsi
training and/or tutorial			nsi	nsi
tech support			yes	yes
multi-platform			yes	only runs on Windows
hosting			nsi	
other				
cost & pricing structure	contact for price	contact for price	client software is free contact for price	contact for price

	Vcampus http://www.uol.com/webuol/ index.cfm Outsourced hosting	Virtual Learning Environments, Inc. http://www.vlei.com on-line course management software	Web Course in a Box http://www.madduck.com/wcb /info/web.html on-line course management software Products: -Web Course in a Box -Web Campus in a Box -Web CourseBuilder Toolbox
server software		yes	yes
software suite			yes
scalable or can be customized	yes	yes	yes
enterprise product			
threaded discussion or listserv	nsi	yes	yes
live chat & whiteboard	nsi	yes	yes
audio & video	nsi	yes	yes
graphics as attachments	nsi	nsi	yes
course templates	yes	yes	yes
gradebook	yes	yes	yes
student tracking	yes	yes	yes
individual web pages	nsi	yes	yes
group work space	nsi	nsi	nsi

	Vcampus, cont'd	Virtual Learning Environments, Inc., cont'd	Web Course in a Box, cont'd
on-line registration (e-commerce)	yes		yes
student services			
training and/or tutorial	nsi	yes	yes
tech support	yes	yes	yes
multi-platform	yes	yes	nsi
hosting	yes	nsi	yes
other		multi-lingual - English, French, Spanish & Brazilian Portugese	
cost & pricing structure	contact for price	single server license academic \$3,500/yr corporate \$5,000/yr	educational institutions: -Entire suite =\$6000 -Course in a Box software only =\$4000 see site for other options

	WebCT http://www.webct.com online course management interface & tools	WebMentor http://www.avilar.com/avilar/m subfrm.html on-line course management software additional services available Products: -WebMentor Enterprise Server
server software		yes
software suite		
scalable or can be customized	yes	yes
enterprise product		yes
threaded discussion or listserv	nsi	yes
live chat & whiteboard	yes	yes
audio & video	nsi	yes
graphics as attachments	nsi	yes
course templates	yes	yes
gradebook	yes	yes
student tracking	yes	yes
individual web pages	yes	yes
group work space	nsi	yes

	WebCT, cont'd	WebMentor, cont'd
on-line registration (e-commerce)	nsi	yes
student services		
training and/or tutorial	nsi	yes
tech support	yes	yes
multi-platform	yes	NT server only
hosting	yes	yes
other	provides pre-made courses	stand-alone authoring option available
cost & pricing structure	use is free until course is made available to students educational institutions: progressive discounted pricing according to number of licenses & length of use	contact for price