

Distance Learning Systems

Teaching Tips #7 – Learning Objects for Your Online Classes

There is never enough time in the day for any instructor to create all the custom materials for a class he or she might wish. Textbooks, handouts, and visual displays enliven curriculum and keep students engaged in face-to-face classes. Online courses benefit from the same activities, but traditionally there are fewer ready materials available... and when something interesting is found on the WWW it might disappear before it can be used!

But there are better solutions. At DLS we are working on identifying, procuring, and documenting various utilities and tools to create engaging curriculum, which we will discuss future teaching tips. Available to you immediately, though, is a wealth of material known as *Learning Objects* (LOs).

Put simply, a Learning Object is a piece of reusable digital curriculum that you can integrate into your online class the same way you might use a handout, workbook, or material from a teacher's guide. Most commonly the LO will simply be a site that you can link to, though some materials are available in a form that you can download and use, or even as a package that can be integrated directly into tools like BlackBoard.

Learn More About Learning Objects

- *CLOE About Learning Objects*– http://learnware.uwaterloo.ca/projects/CCCO/cloe_about.html
- *Instructional Use of Learning Objects*– <http://www.reusability.org/read/>

Many Learning Objects have been gathered together into a number of *repositories*. The difference between general web links and making use of LOs, is that the learning objects are designed by educators to be curriculum units, and they should remain available over longer periods of time. Repositories catalog and index the LOs using standard descriptions, categories, and professional formats, making the objects easier to find and use. Some repositories allow you to create your own portfolio or collection of objects for easy access. Most require a free registration to access and make use of LOs, though some of the objects are available only for a fee or through programs of curriculum exchange.

Learn More About Learning Object Repositories

- *Introduction to Learning Object Repositories*– http://www.irc.gmu.edu/resources/twt_guides/repos.htm

Find Learning Objects

- *Gateway to Educational Materials (GEM)* – <http://www.thegateway.org/> – Sponsored by the U.S. Dept. of Education, GEM indexes thousands of LOs from Kindergarten to Graduate level.
- *Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching (MERLOT)* – <http://www.merlot.org/> – Links to many LOs, including annotations, assignments, and reviews.
- *Campus Alberta Repository of Educational Objects (CAREO)* – <http://www.careo.org/> – Over 3500 learning objects across most disciplines.
- *Science, Math, Engineering, Technology Education (SMETE)* – <http://www.smete.org/> – More pointers to indexes of materials than discrete curriculum, this will help you uncover many hard-to-find resources.
- *Maricopa Center for Learning and Instruction (MCLI)* – <http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/> – Look for the 'MLX Learning Exchange' and 'Teaching and Learning on the Web'.

[Let us know](#) if you need help or have other questions about using Learning Objects in *your* class!

For more Teaching Tips and other Distance Education information, please visit the new and enhanced Center for Distance Education Distance Learning Systems website at:
<http://distance.uaf.edu/dls/>