

In-Service Training Program

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Abstract

In-Service Training is a web application that offers staff of the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service classes that advance skills and meet continuing education requirements. A student can review all courses offered; enroll in available classes; drop approved or pending classes. Once approved by the supervisor, a class is automatically placed on the student's GroupWise calendar. Instructors can review the names of students who have enrolled in their courses. They can also send emails to their students and submit class attendance reports. Supervisors can approve or disapprove course requests and see the schedules of all students who work under their immediate supervision.

The program administrator can update course offerings by

- § Correcting class listings in the database*
- § Removing a class from the database*
- § Adding a class to the database*

The administrator can also generate reports for

- § All or individual student schedules*
- § All or individual instructor schedules*
- § District participation*

Special administrative privileges include

- § Adding a student directly to a class, even if the class is closed*
- § Removing a student from a class*
- § Approving or disapproving of a pending class request*

Introduction of Organization

The University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service [Extension] delivers research-based information to individuals, organizations and communities in each of the seventy-five counties in Arkansas. Locally delivered instruction is conducted by content specialists and county faculty in the areas of agriculture, community and leadership development, family and consumer sciences and youth. The organization serves more than 100,000 youth in Arkansas through its 4-H chapters. The mission of Extension is to improve the quality of life for the people of Arkansas through researched-based education. "Arkansas Is Our Campus" defines its purpose and relationship with the University of Arkansas.

Statement of the Problem

To provide the excellence in education that is required to carry out its mission, faculty and staff must constantly update their technical skills and knowledge of current research. In-service training is a key component of that process. As advances in technology have become more frequent, the number of in-service training offerings has increased, making the management of those courses more challenging.

An initiative was started to develop a software program to manage the in-service training offerings and meet the following requirements:

1. Information concerning classes must be available equally to staff in more than 80 locations across the state.
2. The program has to be simple to use, requiring minimal skills and training.
3. It must run successfully on both older and newer computers.
4. Supervisors are required to approve each enrollment of their employees in classes.
5. Instructors need to review enrollments for those classes they teach and to record attendance.
6. The program must provide a method to allow Instructors to notify all the members of a class with prerequisite and other information.
7. Extension management and each employee must have a way to track the courses they have completed.

Design

A design team was formed to determine the platform, structure and features of the program. Members of the team included Dr. Joe Waldrum, Director of Organizational Staff and Leadership Development, Yvonne McCool, Computer Specialist, Nina Boston, Director of Information

Technology, Dot Temple, Administrative Office Supervisor and Susan James, Administrative Office Supervisor. As a result of their collaboration, with input from other faculty and staff, the In-Service Training Program took form. The new software was written by Yvonne McCool to be a web-based application, developed using Microsoft Visual InterDev 6.0, with Microsoft Visual FoxPro as the primary database engine and served out to employees from a Microsoft NT 4.0 application server. The software has the following features:

1. The status of the employee (supervisor, instructor or student) is determined at login and a customized menu is displayed, depending upon status. Each menu item clearly denotes the intended function.
2. Courses are subdivided into subject areas for better management with the option to list all courses alphabetically.

When a student queries the courses available or selects the option to sign up for training, the student's current class schedule is displayed at the beginning of the page. The student may then scroll through the available courses and select the class of interest. Once selected, all class information is displayed [see below]. To enroll in a class, no data entry is required. The student selects the options wanted through a series of menus and selection buttons.

Class	Grab N Go Family Programs for Your Community [04/22/03]
Description	
Provide training on ready-to-use units on parenting, marriage, and family life that can be used by county agents and their partners in a variety of settings including workplace, schools, housing communities and faith communities. All county FCS agents are encouraged to attend and bring their community collaborators in family programming. There will be a registration fee for meal for non-extension participants.	
Location	Fort Smith
Contact Person	Wally Goddard
Contact Person's Email	wgoddard@uaex.edu
Group	Family And Consumer Science

Date	4/22/03	Number of Days	1
Number of Hours	6	Start Time	09:00 A.M.
Continuing Education Units	1	District	NA
Capacity [0 = No limit set]	50	Number Attending	0

3. The program references a table extract from the organization's human resource database. Immediately upon signup for a course, an e-mail is generated by the program, addressed to the employee's supervisor. Included in the e-mail is a link to the approval screen. When the supervisor follows the link, a list of all employee requests is presented, defaulted to the approved position. The supervisor can quickly change the approval indicator for any enrollments being disapproved and select the Submit Approval button to process all requests at once [see below].

Pending Classes From Your Group:

Approve Or Disapprove			
A Check Indicates That The Class Has Been Approved			
Approve	Name	Class	Date
<input type="checkbox"/>	Doss, Patricia	Access 2000 - Level 1 [01/8/03]	1/8/03
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	James, Susan	Template Training [05/19/03]	5/19/03

4. If the course is approved, an appointment is sent to the student's Novell GroupWise calendar. GroupWise is used across the organization for e-mail and schedule management. If disapproved, the student receives an e-mail notification of the disapproval.
5. A student can drop a course up to two weeks prior to the course. Once that window closes, the supervisor of that student must notify the organizational, staff and leadership development department to have the student manually dropped from class.

6. The instructor has the ability to view/print the student list for each class taught and may send a message to the students in each class, notifying them of changes or prerequisites.
7. At each class, the instructor takes roll. When the roll is entered into the program, the supervisor of every absent student is notified automatically via e-mail.
8. In addition to approving the enrollment of employees, a supervisor can also access the class schedule of everyone under his/her supervision.

Implementation

A month into development, the target implementation date was shifted by administration from July 1, 2002, to December 1, 2001, reducing the window for design, creation and testing from twelve months to five. This placed pressure upon the design team and, specifically, the programmer to produce a viable product with little time for testing. As a result, the planned testing phase of the project was abandoned and the software was released as a year-long pilot program encompassing the entire organization.

Although this was definitely not the recommended method for releasing such a complex program, it has proved to be highly effective. Faculty and staff were informed at the onset that certain flaws could be discovered in the course of the pilot and asked for their cooperation. Because hundreds of employees used the new system, many of the problems were identified and corrected early. Needed enhancements were also incorporated more quickly after feedback from the individuals using the program. The suggestion to place the appointment for the class on the GroupWise calendar came from one of the supervisors learning to use the system.

The pilot project officially ended in November 2002, at which time the program underwent a technical review and approval process. During that time, instructors followed the manual method for receiving supervisor approval to conduct a class and only authorized administrators were allowed to input classes into the system. Further enhancements are anticipated in 2003 that will move the manual process to an online submission and approval

function incorporated into the In-Service Training Program.

Benefits

The benefits of the program became apparent as soon as it was put into use. The program

- ✓ was easy to use;
- ✓ could be accessed from any web browser;
- ✓ maintained records of each person's in-service training that the employee and supervisor could use for performance evaluation, promotion and guidance;
- ✓ gave tools to instructors to help manage classes;
- ✓ scheduled the class times on the individual's calendar for easy reference;
- ✓ notified a supervisor when a student was absent from an approved class;
- ✓ demonstrated new programming logic that could be shared with others and
- ✓ organized information in an efficient, strategic manner.

Retrospect

The primary challenge of the project was time. In an ideal environment, a full testing cycle would have insured the final product was more polished when it was first introduced to the entire organization. However, in this case, demanding more time would have required delaying the project by a year. The benefits of releasing it early as a pilot far outweigh anticipated improvements thorough testing would have achieved.

The implementation would have been eased by a short, positive marketing campaign to introduce faculty and staff to the benefits of the program and to provide a brief overview of

instructions. Although an online user guide is included in the program, targeted presentations to key groups would have generated early enthusiasm and reduced anxiety during the learning curve.

The project was very rewarding to all involved and has resulted in a stable product that addresses the information management needs of Extension without placing an added burden on the faculty and staff who use it. Due to Extension's emphasis upon in-service trainings, the number of class offerings, students and class hours has increased. Extension will continue to place resources in training our employees in subject matter areas as well as other skills necessary to do their jobs.