Key features of the new WebCT Vista
[at McGill University]

Interface & roles

- Tab-based interface for efficient navigation
- Separate building and teaching roles
- True student view for instructors to test all aspects of their course
- Multiple designers don't share accounts
- Instructor-controlled permissions for teaching assistants

Teaching & learning activities

- Detailed selective release of content and course components
- Structured learning paths for students
- Flexible group management
- Virtual sign-up sheets allow students to select their own groups
- Discussions include categories for discussions and gradable discussions
- Pop-up announcements from instructors
- "Who's online" tool for instant messaging
- Multiple options for assignments include group/individual, gradeable/non-gradeable, public/private and resubmission
- Multiple question types for online quizzes and surveys (e.g., jumbled sentence, fill-in-the-blank, true/false, short answer)
- Multiple grading options (e.g., by individual, by question, anonymous)

How WebCT was used in the past

Here are just a few of the ways that McGill instructors have used WebCT to take their classes beyond the limits of the classroom:

Content Management:

- provides password-protected access to course materials that may include text, presentations, complex equations, non-English languages, images, video, and audio
- facilitate learning using a searchable index, glossary, and image database for each course
- share course content with other professors

Administration:

- obtain up-to-date class lists (synchronized with Minerva) and submit final grades
- track student access to different course components
- record, maintain, and communicate grades in a secure way to students

Communication:

- communicate with students via asynchronous discussions, course mail, real-time chat sessions, and an interactive whiteboard
- encourage student interaction by enabling the creation of student homepages, online presentations and collaborative learning

Evaluation:

- evaluate students with on-line quizzes and surveys using text, images, sounds and video
- obtain anonymous feedback from students through on-line surveys
- create and manage electronically submitted assignments
- enable student self-evaluations through self tests and progress tracking

WebCT requires no special software to use, only a web browser and access to the Internet. There is an extensive support structure available including just in time support by email and phone, on-line tutorials as well as structured hands on workshops (with no more than an 8:1 instructor to student ratio).

What are some of the key features of WebCT Vista?

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Implementation Timeline

To make the transition from WebCT CE to WebCT Vista as smooth as possible for all faculty, students and staff, an extensive support team has been assigned to the task. The preparatory work of implementing WebCT Vista began in January 2005 and will continue in phases over the next 18 months.

	Infrastructure	Teaching & Learning
Phase 1 Mar-Sep 2005	Hardware & software installed & tested

Support systems designed & implemented | Phase 1 instructors trained & courses migrated / developed |
Phase 2 Sep-Dec 2005	Systems monitored & adjusted	Phase 2 instructors trained & courses migrated / developed
Phase 3 Jan-Aug 2006	System enhancements designed, developed & installed	Remaining instructors trained & courses migrated / developed
Full Launch Sep 2006	Ongoing maintenance & support	All courses on WebCT Vista

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What is WebCT?

WebCT is the most widely used learning management system in higher education. WebCT enables instructors to design interactive web-based learning environments and to facilitate collaborative, engaging and individualized learning outside the classroom.

WebCT was first introduced at McGill in 1997 and its use has grown dramatically over the last five years. Currently, there are more than 3,000 courses per year using WebCT Campus Edition (CE). Seventy-five percent of students at McGill have at least one course in WebCT. In April 2005 WebCT received more than 35,000 visits a day, which is more than the system was designed to support.

As a result, McGill is moving to WebCT Vista. Instructors are invited to participate in the transition to WebCT Vista throughout this academic year.

How do you start using WebCT Vista?

In order to begin using WebCT Vista, you must submit the "Sign up for WebCT Vista" form at the address below.

You will have the option of creating your Vista courses from scratch, or migrating any of your previous WebCT CE courses directly into WebCT Vista.

www.mcgill.ca/webct/vista/instructors/start/

How do you learn how to use WebCT Vista?

McGill has designed a number of specialized workshops and other opportunities to train and support instructors on all features of WebCT Vista.

Transitional user training
If you have used WebCT CE for at least one semester we encourage you to attend an introductory workshop where the differences between it and WebCT Vista will be explained. You can then follow this up with sessions of individual course development in a group setting.

New user training
This training consists of a series of six sessions designed to give instructors who are new to WebCT hands-on practice with the tools.

Library resources integration service
McGill Liaison Librarians will help you link to electronic versions of your course readings (journal articles, e-books), if available. They can also help you find and link to relevant article indexes, databases or course materials on reserve.

Ongoing support for instructors
Individual consultations are available for all users of WebCT Vista as it is phased in during the coming year. Just-in-time support is also available by email, phone or on the web.

For more information, please visit:
www.mcgill.ca/webct

How does WebCT Vista support learning?

- It can encourage student-student interaction, reflection and collaborative learning, both synchronously and asynchronously.

- It can encourage student-instructor interaction.

- It can give students personalized access to an extended classroom, with learning activities integrated both in and out of class.

- It taps into the web-based culture of students.

- It can enrich class content with additional text, images, audio and video.

- It can provide opportunities for students to practice and receive immediate feedback on their learning.

- It can enhance assessment with online quizzes, surveys and electronic assignments.

- It can link directly to library, website, and other resources.

"I encouraged my students to participate in challenging exchanges with each other after class hours and used online quizzes to help them prepare for class and to assess their own level of learning."

Professor Andrew Kirk, Dept. of Electrical & Computer Engineering, Faculty of Engineering

"WebCT is an invaluable resource. It allows teachers to put their course material where we can find it easily and then lets us benefit from the questions and comments made by our professors and fellow students alike in both a productive and efficient manner. WebCT makes any class seem less daunting."

Tiffany Gasse and Terry Varshney, medical students from Professor Eugene Daniels' course, Dept. of Anatomy & Cell Biology, Faculty of Medicine

"One of the best things about WebCT is how it can be integrated into course design to help students develop their independent learning skills."

Professor Carolyn Samuel, English and French Language Centre, Faculty of Arts