What is TRACS?

TRACS (Teaching, Research, And Collaboration System) is a new open-source collaborative learning environment. TRACS is being built on a technology developed by a consortium of universities including Texas State, MIT, Stanford, the University of Michigan and Indiana University, among others.

What Can I Do in TRACS?

You can create two types of sites in TRACS; course and project sites:

A course site is used to present coursework, documents and materials for a course.

A project site is used for collaboration on research, for committee work, for collaborative development projects, for clubs and organizations, and more.

You can create a simple site, providing just course documents, materials and announcements, or a complex site that uses more of the available features such as online tests, embedded websites, a wiki, RSS news feeds, or a discussion board. How you use TRACS is up to you and your needs.

Computer Skills

What computer skills do I need in order to use TRACS?

If you…

» have less experience with computers
» have some experience using the Web
» have not used a collaborative learning environment, but would like to
» are willing to invest a little time

Then you can create a site…

» that uses certain basic features such as announcements and assignments
» add more advanced features and functions as your comfort level grows
» If you have a medium comfort level with computers
» have fairly extensive experience with the Web
» have some experience with a collaborative learning environment
» are willing to invest the time to learn more

Then you can create a site...

» to make announcements and assignments
to post a syllabus

to use email through the site

to make documents, URLs and other resources available online to students

with embedded websites

If you...

have a high comfort level with computers

have extensive experience with the Web

have perhaps created a website for a course or project

are willing to invest additional time and effort

Then you can create a site...

that includes basic functions and…

that includes a drop box where students can upload assignments

with online discussions

with online tests and quizzes

with embedded web sites

with a wiki to use for collaboration

with RSS feeds

with an online file repository for course documents and other resources

FEATURES

What Features/Tools are Available in TRACS?

Some features are for use by faculty and students within a course or project site. Others are tools used by faculty to create, administer and maintain the site.

Tools Within a Course or Project site:

These features appear in the site home page as menu buttons that are used by students and anyone else that visits your site:

Announcements:

To inform users of changes in deadlines, schedules, policies of the class or project, as well as to answer questions or make general comments. Announcements can have multiple attachments such as documents or links to URLs. An announcement can be automatically emailed to all site participants. Announcements can be sent only to a selected section

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or group within a site. Dates of availability can also be added to announcements.

Assessments:

Faculty can administer online surveys, quizzes, and exams. Questions can be created as multiple choice, multiple answer, true/false, short answer, matching, or fill in the blank questions. A question pool can be created and an assessment can be separated into sections. You can upload files and audio recordings to use as part of an assessment.

Assignments:

Create, distribute, collect and grade online assignments. Assignments are private and student submissions are not visible to other users of the site.

Assignments can be made available only to selected groups or sections within a site. Assignments can also be returned, with or without grades, for re-submission. You can choose to have assignments added to your online Gradebook.

Blogs:

Create a blog for site participants to view and comment on.

Calendar:

The calendar can contain class or meeting dates, deadlines, assignment dates, special events, and more. The calendar can be viewed by the day, week, month, or year, and, by the list of scheduled events. Calendar items can be made available only to certain groups or sections within a site. A calendar item can have multiple attachments. You can print a PDF file of any view of a calendar.

Chat Room:

Chat is designed for real-time, unstructured conversations with users who are signed on to the site at the same time. By default, Chat messages are saved and visible to all users so that all site participants can benefit from clarifying conversations, and questions and answers. Multiple chat rooms can be used.

Drop Box:

Instructors and students can share documents within a private folder for each student. The Drop Box allows you to upload many types of files and many files at a time. It also allows for nested folders (folders within folders). The instructor can view, delete and modify items in any student’s Drop Box.

Drop Box folders and documents are accessible through the Resources tool.

Mailing List Archive:

Course sites have an automatically generated site email address. Email sent to the site email address is copied to all site participants and to the site maintainer(s). All messages sent to the site’s email address are stored in the Mailing List Archive.

Forums:
Discussions are threaded conversations in written form. Discussions are set up in forums and topics, to which users can respond. Users can respond to other responses. Threads can be locked, unlocked, moderated, and deleted.

**Gradebook:**

The Gradebook can calculate, store, and distribute grade information to students online. The gradebook incorporates different grading structures. Students can view their own grades once you have released them. Grades can be viewed by groups or sections that you create. Grades can be grouped into categories and weighted.

**Groups:**

Groups can be used to organize study groups, project teams, and other non-official subsets of worksite participants. Groups are managed through the Site Setup tool. They are also accessible through Worksite Setup in My Workspace. A group doesn’t have the assigned meeting days/times or location that a section does. Both are created by the instructor. Groups work with Announcements, Assignments, Calendar, Gradebook, and Resources.

**Home:**

The home tool provides a base for students to come to that will display the course description, recent announcements, forum and message notification, recent chat items, and course calendar.

**Help:**

TRACS provides an online contextual Help Tool. By clicking the Help button while you have a tool open, you will see a window with information about that tool. The Help Tool also contains a list of links for browsing other help topics, and a search function.

**Learning Modules:**

Learning Modules allows instructors to publish learning sequences that can be created by using a rich text editor, uploading learning objects, or pointing to existing URL resources. Instructors can design content that supports instructor facilitated learning or system managed self-study. Lessons can be released automatically based on start and stop dates.

**Messages:**

The messages tool allows users to carry on private discussions either via email or by messages contained in TRACS. If messages are not sent to the recipient’s email address the user must log into TRACS to view the message sent to them.

**News:**

Site owners can display automatically-updated content from (RSS) news feeds within their site. You can find such feeds on a variety of topics by using an Internet search engine. The News tool is an RSS news aggregator (or news reader) that reads and displays content from RSS news feeds.

**Page order tool (available in Site Info):**

The page order tool allows you to re-order your tool set to reflect the order you wish. The tool also allows you to re-name
and show/hide tools in your tool set. The Page Order tool can be found in Site Info.

**Podcasts:**

Create podcasts of your lectures and/or other audio content for site participants to download and listen at their leisure.

**Polls:**

Create simple polls for site participants to take. The poll results are not sent to the gradebook.

**Post'Em:**

For uploading .CSV formatted files from the testing center, or .CSV files the user creates to post grades, comments, attendance, or extra credit.

**Resources:**

Documents, electronic files, or URLs can be posted for users to access for a course or project. You can post multiple resources at a time, post items outside of folders, and create folders within folders. You can also move documents between sites. Drop Box folders are visible in Resources and can be managed from within Resources. You can make files visible/available only to certain predefined groups or sections within the site.

**Roster:**

The roster tool allows you to view a site participant’s name, username, and profile, if they have created one.

**Section Info:**

The Section Info tool provides a way for instructors to efficiently manage sections of a class. Sections must be assigned to a given category. Available categories are lecture, lab, discussion, studio, and recitation. A section must have a title, as well as assigned meeting days, start time, end time, maximum size, and location. Sections work with Announcements, Assignments, Calendar, Gradebook, and Resources.

**Sign Up:**

The sign-up tool allows you to create meetings or other events (presentation times, test times, paper topics, and office hours) and allow site participants to sign-up for the event. The tool keeps record of who signed up for the event and even includes a waiting list if needed.

**Site Info:**

The Site Info tool is automatically included in sites you create. In addition to providing information such as the participant list, Site Info allows you to make changes to information about the site, the tools, and access to the site. Use it to publish the site, duplicate it, and import material from other sites that you own to include in your site. Use the Site Info tool to add participants to your site and to create groups within a site.

**Site Stats:**
Site Stats allows instructors to keep statistics of site usage, visits, and monitor individual use of a TRACS site.

Syllabus:

You can enter material directly into the Syllabus tool or link to your department's official online syllabus. You also have the option to format your syllabus content in HTML instead of plain text. You can add an attachment to a syllabus item.

Web Content:

Links to outside websites can be displayed within the menu bar of the site.

Wiki:

A wiki is a Web site that allows users of the site to edit it. This allows for joint authoring and ownership and is different from conventional Web sites which can only be edited by the webmaster. The wiki can be used for collaborative editing of pages and content.

Features found in My Workspace to create, administer and maintain a site:

My Workspace is your own individual online worksite, which functions as a private workspace. This is the screen you see when you log in. This is where you can create course or project sites. Your workspace has features common to course and project sites, including Announcements, Resources, Calendar, Site Info, and Help. It also has features found only in My Workspace such as Account, Membership, Preferences, Profile, Bobcat Mail, and Worksite Setup.

Account:

This is a feature found in My Workspace, which contains basic information on you, including your name and email address.

Membership:

The Membership Tool allows you to join and un-join sites. It provides a list of sites of which you are a member and a list of other sites that have allowed global access, and are therefore joinable.

Preferences:

The Preferences Tool found in My Workspace allows you to choose how you would like to receive emails to your course and/or project site(s), and email notifications of new announcements and resources. For example, you can choose to block low-priority notifications, to receive notifications when they are sent, and to receive a daily digest of emails all at one time.

**NOTE:** You cannot adjust your preferences for individual sites. For example, if you change your email notification to daily digest, you will get a daily email message from all sites to which you belong. Or, if you choose to block announcements, notifications about posted announcements will be blocked for all sites. Also, you cannot block receipt of high priority notifications.

Profile:

Your profile includes information you enter about yourself, such as your name, your position, your department, phone
number and location. You also have the option to add a picture.

Worksite Setup:

The Worksite Setup Tool is used to create project and course websites. It is a series of forms in steps that guide users through the process of creating a site. This tool is found only in My Workspace. The Worksite Setup Tool also provides a list of your worksites. In Worksite Setup, in a course/project site, you can revise your course/project sites by changing the information about a site, adding/removing tools, and changing access rights. In addition, you can publish the site, duplicate it, and import material from other worksites that you own.

Functions Available in Certain Tools:

Attachments:

In course or project sites, you have the ability to attach documents in certain tools. For example, you can add an attachment to the announcements screen or to your calendar. You can attach one or more documents from your local computer, URLs to other sites, or files from resources that are already part of the site.

This function is available in the Announcements, Assignments, Discussion, Calendar and Syllabus tools.

NOTE: Attachments sent by email to the site will be archived in the Email Archive.

Local file repository:

In TRACS, you can use a technology called WebDAV (Web-based Distributed Authoring and Versioning), to access the Resources folder for your course or project site on a University web server even when you are not logged in to your TRACS course/project site. Once you have connected your computer to the repository using WebDAV, you can drag and drop multiple documents and folders from your local computer to the file repository on the server. The folder appears as a local folder on your computer desktop and can be used to store course files and folders.

This function is available in the Resources tool of your course or project website.

NOTE: Students will be able to access all documents within your Resources folder. Do not upload exam answer keys or other sensitive documents to the Resources tool on a course site.

Permissions and Roles:

When you create a course or project worksite, you choose which tools (e.g., announcements, discussion, calendar, resources, etc.) you want the worksite to have. For some of these tools, you can set permissions that allow or prevent users from seeing or performing certain tasks depending on a user's “role.” Roles are given default permissions, but worksite owners can change these as desired for their site. The Permissions setting is accessed via a button that appears when you open a tool in a project or course worksite. To view the default permission settings for a tool, click the Permissions button from the top menu bar in the tool's first page.

WYSIWYG Editor:

In many tools, you use a WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) editor to enter text and other content. This editor allows you to format text much as you would using a computer office program, such as Word.
Prerequisites to Creating a Course Site:

To create a TRACS course site, your course must be listed on CatsWeb, and you must be listed as the instructor of record for the course.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IF</th>
<th>THEN</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your course is not listed…</td>
<td>Contact TRACS support at 245.5566.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You are not listed as the instructor of record</td>
<td>Contact your department administrator or program chair.</td>
</tr>
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Before you begin… You must have a Texas State Net ID (username) and password. This is the same ID and password you use for Texas State BobcatMail; e.g.: az90.

**IF you do not have a Net ID and/or password… THEN** contact ITAC at 245.4822.

**Browsers:**

TRACS is Web-based, so you use a Web browser to access it. Certain recommended browsers work well with TRACS. They are shown below.

To determine what version of a browser you currently have, open the browser and go to the menu Help> About IE; Help> About Netscape; Help> About Mozilla Firefox; etc.

The following browsers are recommended for use with TRACS:

**Windows:**

- Internet Explorer 7.0 and newer
- Mozilla Firefox

**Macintosh:**

- Mozilla Firefox

**Other platforms:**

- Mozilla Firefox

**NOTE:** Some functions in TRACS will not work well, or will not work at all in the following browsers. (The WYSIWYG editor may not work at all).

- Safari
» Macintosh Internet Explorer
» Camino 0.7
» Netscape 7.0 or older
» Opera

For Internet Explorer upgrades, go to: http://www.microsoft.com/

To download Firefox, which is a free browser for both Windows and Mac: http://www.getfirefox.com/

Navigation in TRACS:
Although you use a browser to access TRACS, TRACS has its own dedicated navigation system, which you must use while in TRACS.

On most screens, the [Cancel] or [Back] button at the bottom of the screen will take you back one page.

DO NOT use the browser [Back] or [Forward] buttons while in TRACS as this can cause unpredictable behavior.

NOTE: With some tools in TRACS, you must click your browser [Refresh] button in order to see changes you have made.

Screen Resolution:
The preferred screen resolution for viewing TRACS is 1024 by 768 or higher.

With a screen resolution of 800x600, you will have to scroll repeatedly within your Web browser window to see the entire page.

Recommended Document Types:
You can use any document on a course/project website, but certain types of files are recommended because they are readily accessible by most users.

The recommended files types are:

- html
- pdf*
- gif
- jpg
- mov* (Quicktime)
* require plug-ins

Other common formats include:

- doc (Word)
- xls (Excel)
- ppt (Powerpoint)

**General Tips on Using TRACS:**

- Determine your goals in setting up a course or project site. This will help you choose which TRACS features to use.
- Determine the amount of time you have available to create, use and maintain your site.
- Make a list of documents, URLs and other items you can use on the site as resources.
- Prepare course materials, for example by digitizing graphics or other documents.
- **Always** save backups of your course documents on your computer.
- **Do not** use your browser’s back button to go to a previous page. Use the cancel, back, or reset button provided by TRACS.

**Copyright Information:**

Be aware that Copyright may be an issue with some of the course materials you wish to include on your course or project site.

**Copyright is PROBABLY NOT AN ISSUE with:**

- Your lecture notes
- Your course syllabi/reading lists
- Problem sets you’ve developed for your courses
- The tests you’ve created for your courses
- Publications of the US Government
- Published works for which copyright has expired or does not apply; i.e. works in the public domain

**Copyright MAY BE AN ISSUE when dealing with:**

- Journal articles, or excerpts from them
- Books, or excerpts from them
Databases and electronic journals

Musical works, scores, lyrics, and sound recordings

Pictorial/graphic works, art, sculpture, photographs

Audiovisual works, motion pictures, videos, video games

Computer software

Links to Resources about Copyright:
Copyright Guidelines, Texas State:  http://www.txstate.edu/effective/upps/upps-01-04-21.html

The Copyright Site:  http://www.thecopyrightsite.org/

University of Texas tutorial on copyright:  http://www.utsystem.edu/OGC/IntellectualProperty/cprtindx.htm

For questions, contact ETC Support at 254.5566. You can also email us at tracs@txstate.edu.

For the TRACS website home page, go to:  http://tracs.txstate.edu/portal/login

If your login fails and you need help with your Net ID or password, contact ITAC at 245.4822.