

Ep. 007: ReggieNet

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ReggieNet is Illinois State University's customized learning management system, or LMS. It's powerful collection of online tools... but it's not always as easy or intuitive to use as one might think. CTLT's Charles Bristow joins Jim to highlight some of ReggieNet's most popular features. They discuss where instructors can get help with common problems, and they also share tips that instructors should pass on to their students about having a frustration-free ReggieNet experience.

Transcript

JIM: Hi there. I'm Jim.

CHARLES: And I'm Charles.

JIM: Let's Talk Teaching Welcome to Let's Talk Teaching a podcast from the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology here at Illinois State University. I'm Jim Gee. And today we're talking ReggieNet. So, joining me is Charles Bristow. Hi, Charles.

CHARLES: Good afternoon, Jim, how are you?

JIM: I'm doing fine. You are an Instructional Developer here at CTLT.

CHARLES: That's right.

JIM: What does that mean?

CHARLES: I'm not sure if it actually means anything. It's my job title. But it's my duties have changed so much over the years that I'm not sure how much the title actually matters at this point.

JIM: Right. Right.

CHARLES: But primarily, what I do is I do a lot of support for ReggieNet for faculty.

JIM: Yeah.

CHARLES: I also teach some of our workshops here. And I do support for a few other things as well. But ReggieNet is the big one, or in my list.

JIM: And that's evolved over the years because ReggieNet on campus has really become, you know, it used to be that the learning management system on campus was kind of optional to teaching. And at least from my experience, still being in the classroom once in a while, I don't know what I would do without either ReggieNet or something like it a learning management system. So, it really has grown over the years.

CHARLES: It certainly has, from the changes in systems we've had over the years from Web CT to Blackboard, which was actually still Web CT, but with a different name. Yeah. And once we adopted ReggieNet, the the number of faculty that have been using it has steadily

been increasing over the years. So, it really has become an integral part of learning and teaching here on campus.

JIM: So, our goal today is to talk about how teachers how faculty members can help students learn better, through ReggieNet, you know, what are some of the things that they can do? And also just kind of talk a little bit about what are the things you know, from your perspective? What are you hearing from faculty. But before we get to all that, tell us a little bit about what a learning management system is, and specifically, how ReggieNet has been kind of implemented here on campus?

CHARLES: Well, a learning management system. In general terms, it's, it's up. It's a platform that instructors and students can use to interact in lots of different ways. And most learning management systems have kind of a similar suite of tools that are available, things like submitting assignments, posting a syllabus, or posting other files, tests and quizzes, those general tools are generally available in the different kinds of systems that are out there. But it's, it's all employed in the, in the goal of helping our students learn the material we'd like them to learn.

JIM: And you know, when you talk about it does many things when I started working here a few years ago, that's what I actually started to appreciate about ReggieNet, because I've used ReggieNet, when it was first introduced on campus around what 2012 or something like that, I think

CHARLES: That's correct.

JIM: And then I mean, in some ways, it really is kind of the the Swiss Army knife of teaching in that you can do a lot of things there. You know, for example, like surveys, I didn't know you could do surveys and ReggieNet, you could poll your students about certain things. So I would always use something like Survey Monkey or one of those other online free online applications. But I found that and maybe Survey Monkey may have other features that I like that you can't necessarily do in ReggieNet. But there is a real advantage to having all of these different tools, all of these different services in the same place. Right.

CHARLES: Certainly.

JIM: So what are what are some of the more popular tools that you that you help faculty members use?

CHARLES: Well, certainly the the major tools that are kind of part of the default template, that's they're generally popular, and they're frequently used, are syllabus, certainly the gradebook, assignments, forums for doing online discussions, and tests and quizzes are probably the major tools that are used here on campus.

JIM: And when and I guess to make sure that we're clear when we say tools, these are the items that appear on the left hand menu of ReggieNet when you...

CHARLES: Right, they're part of that main navigation that you'll see on the left hand side.

JIM: Yeah. So we're a few weeks into the semester now. I know initially, we have a lot of you get a lot of questions probably about how do I publish my syllabus and all of the beginning of the semester things? What do you start to hear from faculty as the semester goes along?

CHARLES: Usually a lot of the questions that arise once the semester is really starting to get going, revolve around tests and quizzes that's that's probably the most frequent thing, I get questions about some questions about gradebook as well. But tests and quizzes really does seem to be the, the one that generates the most amount of questions. And I think in part, that's because it is one of the more complex tools and ReggieNet that has lots of different settings. And it's so little bit quirky in the way it works, that sometimes throws people off.

JIM: You know, when I my job here at CTLT, I walk around and kind of stick my nose in other people's offices once in a while and find out what's going on. And so on occasion, I will come around and ask how's ReggieNet feeling? So let me ask you, how's ReggieNet feeling this semester?

CHARLES: So far, ReggieNet is feeling pretty well. We haven't had any problems to date. At least nothing major.

JIM: Yeah.

CHARLES: And we'll knock wood. I suppose.

JIM: No, no, you can. In that case, you're more than welcome to knock wood on the podcast. Okay.

CHARLES: So yeah, I think things have been going reasonably well.

JIM: Right.

CHARLES: I haven't seen too many tickets. And yeah,

JIM: And we had a little update right before the semester began. But that was basically just a little behind the scenes tuning and whatnot. Yeah,

CHARLES: that that little bit of an update was primarily just bug fixes, or patches, as they're sometimes called to fix things. Again, behind the scenes, there weren't any real functional changes that that faculty or students would see from the, from the user side?

JIM: Well, I know at some point in the future, we'll have you back on and we'll talk about the future of ReggieNet. Because I know you ReggieNet being based on what is it Sakai is...

CHARLES: That's, that's correct.

JIM: And there's an update that's kind of in the works of Sakai communities working on. Right.

CHARLES: Right. So, we're currently on version 10.7. If you want to know the nitty gritty details.

JIM: Sure.

CHARLES: Version 11 has just been released to kind of the general community. And we were talking about possibly upgrading to 11 this year, but the release came out later than they were originally expecting. So we decided between our group and administrative technologies in the powers that be to hold off on that the current plan is to do the update at some point next summer. We haven't. But yeah,

JIM: there are a lot of factors that go into when that actually gets scheduled, including, you know, we have to take into account that people are using ReggieNet almost all year round. No, there's a winter intersession this year, so they're they're teaching classes for the first time over winter break their online classes. So obviously, they're they're probably going to make heavy use of ReggieNet, Well, it's all related in going back to the way we started, the show today that ReggieNet had, has become kind of an integral tool to teaching. One thing we wanted to touch on today was maybe some advice that we can give to faculty members that they can give to their students at any point in the semester on how to successfully use ReggieNet. And I know that when I am looking at, for example, social media, and students tweeting about ReggieNet, or they're on Yik, Yak or one of those things, a lot of times, one of the things we still hear about is when students say I was writing an essay in ReggieNet, and it lost my assignment or I was taking a test, or something in ReggieNet, and I lost it and it didn't say my results. So Right. So there's a there's kind of a timeout function, right? In ReggieNet.

CHARLES: Right? Oh, certainly. So yeah, it's it This schedule is really tight on when we can squeeze a major update in because it might be down for a day or two. And we don't want to do that in the middle of a semester. We try not to disrupt things as much as we can. But but the academic schedule is certainly gotten a lot more crowded. Shun. Maybe that's something that needs to be looked at by other people than me. Yeah. Well, that yeah, that has to build in some time to do some of these things that they need to get done. That's correct. So and, and a lot of websites will have this kind of timeout, where if you're not interacting with the website, it logs you out of the system. And that's and that's a security feature, so that somebody doesn't, you know, walk up to an abandoned computer and and get in and...

JIM: But, but interacting doesn't necessarily mean what you, it doesn't mean just typing? Right?

CHARLES: That's, that's correct. And that's usually what causes students angst about this is that if you're just typing into the editor, that doesn't count as interacting directly with the server, you're really more just interacting with your browser at that point, right. And so, one of the things that that we recommend is that if students are going to be typing in some kind of lengthy entry, either for an assignment, or possibly a discussion posting, or a very long essay question and tests and quizzes, is to save periodically or

The other option is to, if you're going to have them write a relatively long piece is to have them write it outside of ReggieNet first, and then copy and paste it into the edit box.

JIM: Right.

CHARLES: So, they're not spending a lot of time just typing because that the interaction with the server doesn't really happen unless you you're clicking Save to send information to the server. And just typing doesn't do that, right, you're just typing in, in that sense, you're just typing into the browser, whereas you really need to send stuff back and forth to the server itself to to refresh that timeout, so it doesn't cut you off.

JIM: So, the only way that you know that you're interacting with the server, as you put it is to hit that Save button,

CHARLES: Right. And for assignments, there's a Save as Draft, so you can, so the student can do that periodically, within the Tests and Quizzes tool, which is the other place where this really comes into play is there's always a save button there

JIM: as well. And where's that located is typically like at the bottom of the page,

CHARLES: It's gonna be at the bottom of the page, right? So we always recommend to faculty that they try and relay this to their students to you know, if you're taking a quiz or a test, save early save often, it's kind of like voting. Yeah.

JIM: Well, depends on where you live for voted. Yeah. But

CHARLES: Yeah. Seemed appropriate for this state. Or at least this state's reputation. I was I won't make any accusations. But, but yeah, to just make sure you periodically save so that if for some reason, either the timeout happens, or some other disruption in your internet connection.

JIM: Right. Yeah.

CHARLES: I mean, it's not just the timeout issue. You could drop your wireless signal or whatever might happen to interrupt that, then anything you've done up to that point, or at least up to the last save, is retained. Because if you're taking a test and quiz from the student point of view, if you do get interrupted as long as the the time limit hasn't run out, you can re enter that, that test or quiz submission and pick up where from where you left off.

JIM: And when you're talking about time limit there, you're talking about whatever time limit the instructor has set,

CHARLES: That's correct. 60 minutes to complete this assessment, or 30 minutes or whatever it might be that that the instructor has deemed appropriate for that assessment.

JIM: So back in the, while, I was about to say good old days, but it wasn't really well, they weren't really good old days. So last year, so back in 2015, the fall of 2015, we had

some major infrastructure, technical problems on campus that really impacted ReggieNet. And as part of that, I remember that we were advising faculty members to keep their tests when they when they build out quizzes or tests in the Tests and Quizzes tool to keep only a couple of questions per page, because you can you can you can subdivide your assessment into pages, and each page has a Save button at the bottom. So the idea was that the fewer the fewer questions that were being displayed at one time on the screen, the more stable the system was. That's correct. Is that true still? Or are there other reasons why you still want to do that?

CHARLES: Well, to the best of my knowledge, that's not no longer really necessary. There are different reasons why you might want to separate your your assessment into different parts or pages. That would be that can then be displayed separately, if you so choose, to some instructors will choose an option that allow that this allows students from going back to previous pages, okay. So they don't want, you know, subsequent questions to be able to influence what they might have answered previously. That's not real common, but but some instructors do do that.

JIM: Right.

CHARLES: And then the other reason an exam might be separated into to parts is if an instructor is created and exam using random draw from question pools, okay. And each random draw from a pool will be a separate part. So those can be put on separate pages as well. I know another example of an instructor who is using images with some of their questions, and they would have one image that applied to several questions. So they would display just the the image and those questions on a page. And then okay, we'll move on to the next page. So there are various pedagogical reasons to break your exam up as well.

JIM: So as part of regiments kind of technical technological update technology update, over winter break of 2015. I remember, it seemed to run and it actually this may have been before that it played better with mobile devices. What advice though, do we give faculty members that they should tell their students about using ReggieNet on a mobile device?

CHARLES: Well, the best biggest thing we say is we definitely recommend against using mobile devices to take tests and quizzes. They definitely seem to be prone to having more issues of of things getting lost.

JIM: Connectivity?

CHARLES: Connectivity and things not submitting properly. So that's one thing we definitely recommend against. Actually, most other functions I've, I've found I've been able to do on a mobile device, sometimes it's kind of hard because just navigating around isn't isn't always the greatest on a small screen, right. But it's usually possible. It's not always easy. Yeah.

JIM: And someday, that may change a little bit, but there but we, but there are always going to be things that you know, you can do better on a tablet or on a laptop than you can on a smartphone just because of real estate. Right? Those smartphones are getting

bigger and bigger and bigger and size of dinner plates down and stuff like that. One other thing I wanted to mention, as we wrap up here, I've always I've always kind of felt like this must be you must have an interesting perspective on ReggieNet, in that by the time people come to talk to you about ReggieNet, they're probably a little bit frustrated.

CHARLES: They certainly can be.

JIM: What what are some things you would encourage faculty members to keep in mind? Or maybe to do because we've talked before about how you and I have both shared stories about how people come to us and we say, oh, but if you don't want to come to us,

CHARLES: right? That's one of the things I always hate to hear if I if I particularly if I run into a faculty member in some other setting, you know...

JIM: Right.

CHARLES: ...wherever. And they say, Oh, I was having a problem with Reggie net, or, or whatever it might be. And I said, well, did you call us? And they say no. It's like, well, why didn't you just call? That's why we're here.

JIM: Right.

CHARLES: We want to be able to help her. I always hate to hear, or even when somebody does call, it, they've spent two or three hours trying to figure something out. It's like, don't do that, just, just call us. And we're happy to answer questions.

JIM: I think there's something almost deceptive about systems like ReggieNet. I don't think it's I don't think it's unique to ReggieNet. But I think there's something deceptive about these systems where we think they should be easier to use. And they actually are because they are.

CHARLES: They're growing more and more complex.

JIM: Yeah, exactly.

CHARLES: Particularly some tools specifically, are more complex. So if you start out doing something really easy, where it is relatively intuitive, and there's not a whole lot of things where you can go wrong, and then you move to something else, and you think it's going to be just as easy. In that case, maybe it's not, it's a more complex tool, and there are a lot more options, and you can get lost in the woods, right? Because there's a lot more trees at work, right. And you know, it's not just a little grove anymore, it's this big forest, and you can get lost

JIM: Final thought here. I know sometimes when people come to us, we find that there's actually a bonafide technology issue going on. It's not just a how to issue but it's something's not working.

CHARLES: Oh, certainly.

JIM: So what do we do then?

CHARLES: So, well, it depends on what the specific problem is. But if it's something that's kind of in the back end, then we'll get in touch with administrative technologies and have them take a look, particularly if it's a more widespread issue than just one. individual's, "Oh, I can't figure out how to do something". Maybe there's something more seriously wrong, that that can be addressed and fixed.

JIM: And that's where the helpdesk ticket system comes in. I mean, we don't we don't inflict that on people, for our own perverse pleasure or anything like that.

CHARLES: No, I'm not thrilled with this system myself. But, but so yeah, if there, there is a more serious problem, and I'll either have a faculty member submit a ticket or all I'll submit the ticket on on their behalf.

JIM: Right.

CHARLES: But it's in some ways the, the new ticketing system that we have is kind of nice, because I can submit a ticket on somebody's behalf. And and so they'll get contacted as well, when when there's some kind of resolution or update to the ticket. Or if they're requesting more information that comes to both myself and the person I've submitted the ticket on behalf of. Yeah, if I phrase that correctly,

JIM: I think you did. I think you did. I think you phrased it nicely. And and by doing that, all that data can then show us trends or show our friends and administrative technologies, trends about what's going on and how it's being used and what problems there may be

CHARLES: Right if there if there really are specific...

JIM: Right.

CHARLES: ...problems as opposed to oh, it's just I'm not sure how to do something.

JIM: Well, Charles, thank you so much for taking a little bit of time. It's been great to have you here.

CHARLES: Well, you're quite welcome. I'll be happy to come back some other time. Sounds good.

JIM: All right. That's all the time we have for this week's episode of Let's Talk Teaching. You can find out more about the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology by going to our website CTLT.IllinoisState.edu. Of course, if you need instructional support for ReggieNet, just click on the big ReggieNet logo right there on the main page. You can also click on podcast to learn more about Let's Talk Teaching. For Charles Bristow and everyone here at CTLT, thanks for listening, Happy Teaching.