Ep. 044: Days of Future ReggieNet

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We kick off our Fall 2018 season with a look at ReggieNet, Illinois State University's customized learning management system. Instructional Developer Charles Bristow joins Jim Gee to discuss new features like the Attendance and Commons tool, introduced in the latest system upgrade. Plus, they look at some long-requested improvements to popular tools like Assignments, Tests & Quizzes, and the Gradebook. They also hint at a future improvement to ReggieNet that almost made it into this update, something exciting enough that Jim makes his happy teacher sound.

Transcript

JIM: Hi there. I'm Jim.

CHARLES: And I'm Charles.

JIM: Let's Talk Teaching

JIM: 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. Joining me today, Charles Bristow. Hi, Charles.

CHARLES: Hi, Jim.

JIM: Hey, we're talking ReggieNet.

CHARLES: We always talk Reggie net when we get together, don't we?

JIM: We do a lot of talking about ReggieNet? Well, specifically, we're talking about new for the fall of 2018, ReggieNet has gotten more than a new coat of paint; there been some significant upgrades to ReggieNet, tell us about it.

CHARLES: There have, yes, we we did an upgrade to the new version, July 26. If I'm remembering the date, right. And we've got some new tools, we've got some changes to old tools that I think faculty will will like; the first thing you'll see when you log in is there's a little bit of a change in in kind of the overall layout a little bit, the navigation buttons have been streamlined a bit, So, they take up a little bit less space. So, that's nice. We have two new tools. Okay, So, tools are the main things that you see in that left hand navigation, things like the familiar tools that that you know, are tests and quizzes, assignments, the Syllabus tool, things like that. So, we have two new tools. One is a tool for it's called the attendance tool for taking attendance. And it does allow you to grade attendance. And the other tool is called the commons tool. And that's a I'm always having a hard time kind of describing what this one is. It's sort of a social media type tool. It allows students or any user in the site to post a kind of an update, you can post a picture or a link as well. And there's one level of reply. So, it's kind of a social area, Course Cafe, I heard somebody referred to it as–

JIM: Right. It strikes me as being like a forum. But there is a separate forum tool, which is much more in-depth, and you can have threaded conversations and there's it can be graded. This one you cannot grade first of all, right?

CHARLES: Not directly from within the tool. So, in some sense, yes, it is a very simplified forum tool.

JIM: Yeah

CHARLES: You just have one discussion area; you don't have multiple ones like you can have in the forum's tool.

JIM: Yeah.

CHARLES: But some faculty might be interested in using it just as a simple place to answer questions or kind of build community within their course.

JIM: So, those are the two new tools that have been added to Reggie net. Other changes, I know that there have been some significant improvements to a few of the of the of the Greatest Hits, for lack of a better term. So, I'm thinking in particular, the Gradebook and the Test & Quizzes tool.

CHARLES: Yep. So, in the gradebook, they have improved the kind of the navigation and scrolling issues that that I know some, some faculty were were having issues with. So, now all students in your roster are displayed automatically. There's a vertical scroll within that So, you can scroll up and down. And the horizontal scroll bar stays at the bottom of the screen, you don't have to go all the way down to the bottom of the list that to get to that horizontal scroll.

CHARLES: Correct.

JIM: So, some podcasters had problems with that, that just member full time members of the faculty, it was one of those things that just when they when the new gradebook tool– because the Gradebook we're using is relatively new.

JIM: And I think that was just something that got by when the community to build it the first time and yeah, and we're the only hit classes of eight with eight students in it. And so, it didn't matter.

CHARLES: That could be. So, yeah, maybe they all had, that university has all small courses. So, that's actually a big improvement. There's also a new item order button in the Gradebook that makes it a lot easier for you to adjust the order in which you see items. In the Gradebook, you know what order they are as columns, at least within a category; you just click on the button, and it's drag and drop within that to change the order. So, that's made that a lot simpler as well.

JIM: And as far as the Tests & Quizzes tool goes, I think there's another–

CHARLES: the Yeah, that's another nice new feature; there is now built into the settings, something called– and now I'm trying to remember exactly what it's called the extended delivery exceptions, which allows you to select a student or group and change either the delivery dates and or the time limit that a student has to take that particular assessment. Previously if you wanted to manage that kind of situation, for example, if you had a student who had gone through student accommodations and was allowed to have extra time to take an assessment you had to do duplicate the quiz, create a group released the duplicate to that group and then manually transfer a score. Now, that's all built into the original quiz. It's much simpler to do.

JIM: Yeah, I think that's and that was a long-requested feature. So, at least it was a problem that had long been identified; faculty members, were asking us to come up with something. Yeah, fix it. So, I think that that's a really, that and the Gradebook scrolling are two big, too big wins.

CHARLES: Yep. There's been a little bit of change to the Assignment tool.

JIM: Oh, yeah.

CHARLES: The first time an instructor looks at in the assignment editing screen, they're going to see that all of the options have been reordered? Well, not all of them. But but quite a few. It's a little bit disconcerting at first, because you might be used to seeing the due date is, as one of the first things near the top that's been moved down. The reorganization, they did actually make sense. They've kind of grouped similar things together now. So, you know that the title and instructions are together?

JIM: It's a much more logical workflow, isn't it?

CHARLES: Yeah.

JIM: It's just different than what were you. So, if you're doing a muscle memory, you're gonna take a little while?

CHARLES: Yeah, you might get a little bit of a cramp or something in your muscle, but everything's still there. It's just in a somewhat different order. And and it really does. It's an order that makes more logical sense, particularly if you've never seen the way it was before.

JIM: Yeah.

CHARLES: Another new feature in the Assignments tool is there's now kind of a soft delete, if you delete an assignment, it kind of goes into a trash area. And that can then be restored, without having to go through any rigmarole of contacting us and saying, "oh, cool, I accidentally deleted an assignment." And along with that, if there are submissions to that assignment, the submissions come back as well. So, you don't lose anything.

JIM: So, you're not losing your students contributions or your students' data either. Yes. Cool. Yeah. And that, and people may not have realized that if you had accidentally

deleted something, what you had to do was put in a helpdesk ticket or, or contact CTLT directly. And, and we would help you through this. So, I'm familiar. You know, in my teaching, I use Gradebook. Obviously, I use Tests and Quizzes sometimes certainly make use of the Assignment tool. I don't use the Lessons tool a lot. But I understand that there were a couple of additions, additional features that were added this time around for lessons as well?

CHARLES: That's correct. So, the Lessons tool is a tool that you can use to present content, you can also– interspersed with that content, you can also put in links to other items within the course, like tests and quizzes, individual assignments, links to forums, you can now also embed the Announcements tool within a Lessons page, which shows the most recent announcements. You can embed the course calendar if you're using that particular tool. And you can also embed the most recent forums conversations. The other nice thing that they got added to the Lessons tool is if you use subpages, you can now enable subpage navigation in the left-hand navigation bar, So, that a Lessons page will will be a link in that left hand navigation, it will now turn into a little drop down where it will then display the subpages. And you can directly access them from the left-hand navigation no matter where you are in the course. And–

JIM: Kind of the best practice. I know we talk a lot about I know Linda Summers, our colleague talks a lot about when she's working with faculty on online courses is that you want to list out the either by weeks — I know a lot of instructors do — or some other order on that left hand side menu. So, they don't have to go digging too deeply into the system in order to find what they need to be doing. And to make sure that they're on track because of a self-paced sort of learning thing. So, that sounds like it's a it's a it's a pretty sort of handy tool. We are we have our challenge that we usually have. And we talked about ReggieNet, which is that it's a very visual thing. And we're doing it we're doing a very non-visual podcast,

CHARLES: Right, I'm sort of waving my hands right pointing out to the left-hand navigation and there's nothing to point to.

JIM: We should let people know that you and and some of our other colleagues here at CTLT had been spending the summer updating documents and I know we're starting to get videos updated and whatnot on our website, which is CTLT.Illinoisstate.edu, you'll see a big ReggieNet logo on the screen. And that will get you to CTLT's Reggie net support pages. And from there you can very easily find a lot of those handouts and stuff. So, what else do we need to let people know?

CHARLES: Well, one other thing that that doesn't necessarily directly impact faculty as much as it does students is the mobile view has been improved a great deal. And I know some instructors also look at ReggieNet on their phone if you want to check something quickly; the– particularly kind of the main navigation and just getting from one course to another that's has been vastly improved. And I think–

JIM: I think you're right; students will really appreciate the enhancement to the mobile view. In the survey we did in the spring of students, we found that more than half of the students who responded said yes, they do use their phone to access ReggieNet.

They're not doing we hope they're not taking quizzes and stuff on it, that it's that most of them disagree that is their primary way of accessing ReggieNet. But you know, I and I hear anecdotally from students that they want to just jump in and see what, what's due today, or they want to jump in, or if or if faculty members have opted to use a communication tool and originate that requires them to log in as opposed to just getting an email. Right? That that's handy too.

CHARLES: So, yeah, it makes them easier, makes it easier for them to jump in and navigate around. And for instructors as well.

JIM: So, we probably need to mention… we may edit this out. We, you know, I always like to end this by asking you what's next. But we know what we want to have next and ReggieNet, right. And it almost made it into this version of Sakai, which is the engine that runs ReggieNet.

CHARLES: Right? And what Jim is talking about is… Rubrics,

JIM: The electronic rubrics, having rubrics, and when we're talking about rubrics and ReggieNet. We're not just talking about what I do already, which is copying and pasting an HTML table with feedback for students into the Assignments tool. This is an integrated, very complicated sort of thing. And unfortunately, the community just missed it by–

CHARLES: That much. So, yeah, this tool, this new Rubrics tool will be when you add it to your course, you will be able to at least it's our understanding– I don't want to make any absolute promise.

JIM: Oh, we should? No, we really shouldn't. And this is probably about a year out. Yes. So–

CHARLES: They– it's our understanding that this will be it should be included in the next version. So, whenever we get to upgrading to the next version of Sakai, then this tool will be included. And the intention is that it will be integrated with the Assignments tool, the Forum's tool, individual gradebook items. So, if you've got a grade book item that you want to use a rubric for that that's not being mediated through something else. And even short answer questions in the Tests & Quizzes tool.

JIM: This is my happy sound hmmm.

CHARLES: So, it seems very, very likely, yeah, that that will, that will finally appear in the next version of, of, of ReggieNet.

JIM: We know there has been great interest for this on our campus; we know that there's pretty strong interest for this on many campuses that use Sakai to power their learning management system. So, I think in the very least we can be we can confidently say that it's going to happen at some point. Yeah. Which which is which may, which we may not have been able to have have said even just a couple of years ago, and this is this is something that really has gotten a lot of input from a lot of people. So, we're excited about it. So.

CHARLES: Something good coming in the next version as well in the next–

JIM: In the next version. Always something to look forward to– So, well, Charles, thank you So, much.

CHARLES: You're quite welcome.

JIM: And that's all the time we have for this episode of Let's Talk Teaching. You can find out much more about our podcast and of course about support for using ReggieNet for your teaching. Go to CTLT.IllinoisState.edu with Charles Bristow; and for all my colleagues here at the Center for Teaching Learning and Technology until we talk again, Happy Teaching!