Ep. 051: Rubrics Come to ReggieNet

Podcast:

CTLT's Charles Bristow returns with good news about the next update to ReggieNet, Illinois State University's customized learning management system... including the debut of a long-awaited new feature! Charles and Jim take a look at the new Rubrics tool, discuss an updated, cleaner interface for managing Tests & Quizzes, and more. Learn all you need to know about changes and improvements that await you for the start of the Fall 2019 semester.

Transcript

JIM: Hi there, I'm Jim.

CHARLES: And I'm Charles. 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.

JIM: I'm Jim Gee. Making his triumphant return to our pokey little podcast is my colleague Charles Bristow. Hi Charles.

CHARLES: Hi Jim. How you doing?

JIM: I'm doing fine. How are you?

CHARLES: It's I'm doing all right, and its apparently time for my annual return to your lair.

JIM: It is, yes. This becoming an annual event, which is we're going to talk today about JIM: Reggienet and about the upcoming upgrade for the Fall of 2019 to our campus learning management system. You know it occurred to me before we started recording today, we do have a lot of listeners to our podcast who are not part of ISU, or who are not on campus at least. So, can you explain a little bit about, go back to basics, what is ReggieNet? What may it be analogous to on other campuses?

CHARLES: Sure. So ReggieNet is, as you mentioned, it's the name that we use for our learning management system or LMS. In our case, ReggieNet is based on the learning management system Sakai. Which is one of a number of learning management systems out there. Others you might be familiar with are Blackboard, or Canvas, or Moodle. They're all kind of similar sorts of sets of tools that allow you to manage your, your classes online.

JIM: And I think what you said there was key when you talk about sets of tools, I think even on our campus when we think of our learning management system we think of it as kind of one thing, because we talk about it as one thing, but it really is a lot of different moving parts that all have to kind of work together, which means that 'A' it's not the most intuitive thing to use right off the bat if you're new to campus. And 'B' it has a lot of moving parts, and there are a lot of changes that can be made and stuff, right?

CHARLES: Oh, yeah, that's for sure. So, you've been spending, we're recording this in early July, and the upgrades going to happen around July 25th. I think Thursday July 25th.

CHARLES: That's right And, but you, and your colleagues, not just here at CTLT, but also some folks over an Administrative Technologies, have been testing this update for a long time. Just very briefly, we don't need to get into too mu,ch detail about how the sausage is made, but just briefly what's that entail? What do you do? So, we basically have a set of scripts that we, or protocols, that we go through step by step. Make sure all of the common tasks that an instructor or a student would, would perform and ReggieNet are working the way they're supposed to. So, it's like for an example if we took a nice simple tool like the announcements tool. Okay, an instructor needs to add an announcement, they need to put in all the information, post it, make it available to students. So, we go through and we do that in a test course and make sure everything is working the way it's supposed to and there aren't any funny things happening.

JIM: We were talking before we started recording, we're both very happy because the last time you were on we did tease a little bit a new tool that's being added to ReggieNet and we can actually make good on it this year, right?

CHARLES: We can make good on our promise.

JIM: And what was that promise?

CHARLES: That promise was rubrics! Rubrics! We are so thrilled and of course again people who listen to our podcast or have ever come over to CTLT have had the rubric word thrown at them quite a lot because we from a teaching standpoint. We a lot of us around here really appreciate the value of rubrics and it's so exciting to finally have that available. Tell us all about it. So yeah, it we're really excited about this and we think a lot of faculty will also be excited about this because it's it's integrated into the tool or into the a number of tool other tools within ReggieNet. So, what you'll do from the instructor point of view is you'll be able to add the rubrics tool to your course site. that will then allow you to create rubrics with as many criteria and standards and Whatever labels and point values all of that is completely under your control. It's pretty flexible for, for what you can do with it. Then once you've created that rubric you can then associate it with an item in the grade book. You can associate it with an assignment. You can associate it with a short answer question in that in tests and quizzes and it's also integrated with forums. So when you go to grade one of these items you can just point and click on the different cells in the rubric that you want to assign for that student. It adds up the points. You can also add individual comments if you wish to do so and then you finish it out and then the student can then view that rubric and see how it's been filled out and click on the comments.

JIM: And so that's an important thing to keep in mind that this is not just a grading sheet for you. It does truly what a rubric is supposed to do, which is it it also provides that feedback in a standardized way, but it provides that feedback to the students as well, so they're seeing what the standards and the criteria were and what you chose to evaluate. Exactly, and I should also mention that in most cases the student can also preview the rubric, either in the grade book or in the assignments so that they know how you're planning on grading that particular item. Right assignment. Again, we've talked a lot about rubrics on our podcast. We incorporate the idea of using rubrics into a lot of the teaching workshops. We do here at CTLT. We will link to at least one

episode on rubrics with Dr. Julie-Ann McFann that we did quite a while ago, but it still, still has legs, so people can kind of get an idea about how to work with rubrics just in general. So, in the ReggieNet System you're talking about rubrics. It sounds like I could create the assignment first and then create the rubric. Or I could have a rubric kind of sitting in the wings and then when I create an assignment, I can associate that existing rubric with the assignment? Is that the case?

CHARLES: That's pretty much the the workflow, yeah. And generally speaking you're probably better off to create the rubric first.

JIM: Okay.

CHARLES: Before you create the item, but, but, there's nothing that prevents you from "Oh, I've created this assignment I want to use a rubric with it to, to, go back in edit the assignment and attach that rubric later" so that's, that's, certainly not out of the question of doing it that way as well.

JIM: Right, but again they're the value and we believe that there is value in students seeing the rubric before they actually do the work right because you know that's that's part of the learning process. So, what are some limitations that you found in your testing and whatnot of the rubric system right now?

CHARLES: At the moment that kind of the biggest limitation is it seems to only want to deal with whole numbers. No decimal points.

JIM: Oh. Well.

CHARLES: Which isn't a big deal, but you just need to take that into consideration when you're creating your, your rubrics and assigning point values

JIM: Yeah.

CHARLES: Because one thing I've seen in the past is it's very easy to to skew the points and make your grading actually harsher than you intend...

JIM: Right...intended to give if you if you minimize the scale too much. Yeah. So that's one thing to be aware of because it doesn't it's not quite as flexible as far as the point things is concerned. And you're talking about when you create the rubric because, because when it comes time to actually evaluating, assessing students work with the rubric you're not able to go in and put in a customized number are you?

CHARLES: Actually, you can. That's an option that you can choose to do so, so for example if you've got one standard that's worth ten points and another that's worth eight

JIM: Yeah.

CHARLES: When you create the rubric, you can choose to there's an option to adjust points. Okay. So, I could go in and give somebody a nine if I wanted to. Yeah. I just can't give them a nine point five. We don't necessarily always recommend doing that. Mhmm,

JIM: Because one of the one of the values of rubrics is that it forces us as the instructor to make a decision.

CHARLES: Right.

JIM: And not and not and not vacillating over something. I actually really think about which of these two criteria but, but it's good to always have options, right?

CHARLES: I think that's the that's the thesis here, yeah.

JIM: So, well, so there are some other options that are going to be coming to ReggieNet too as far as a few well maybe options isn't the right word. A few optimizations. I'm thinking about the tests and quizzes tool.

CHARLES: Right, so there are some other options that we can talk about as well, but the other biggest visual thing you'll see within ReggieNet is there is a fairly big change to the main page in the tests and quizzes tool from the instructor point of view. This isn't something that students will see.

JIM: And this is something that's very we apologize that this is an audio only podcast. This is one of those rare occasions where we're really talking about something but you, but we will have some help material and whatnot on our website.

CHARLES: We certainly will. So those that have used the tests and quizzes tool in the past will be aware that on the main interface page there's there's two main tabs 'working copies' and 'published copies.' That interface has been eliminated. Everything will be seen all on one single page and what we used to consider and kind of still do as the working copies will be labeled as 'draft.' There are various filters that will be available to just display only published copies or only the draft copies or even only things that are active so things that...

JIM: Oh, cool!

CHARLES: Students can, can, actually currently access; it allows you to control exactly what you're seeing as far as which assessments are currently being shown. And then the ad part where you actually add a new quiz that used to be at the top of that interface is now on its own separate tab but some kind of similar to the way a site the assignments tool is set up where you have one tab that's for adding and one tab that's for just displaying the list of current assignments.

JIM: Right so well and that sounds great because I think one of the problems I always had in the tests and quizzes tool especially if I was going back to a course that I hadn't taught for a while and I was digging up the old test it's like "What am I, which which which flavor of them am I working with the published ones or the archived copy ones?" Right?

CHARLES: Right, and, and, that was always a it could be a little bit of a bugaboo of you know an instructor would make a change to, to, a working copy instead of a published copy unit and it wasn't changing what the students were seeing. Right, right. So hopefully this

will help alleviate that. It'll take a little bit of getting used to but I think in general it is an improvement and I've actually heard a little bit of feedback from some other schools that have already made the transition to this new version that have given some positive feedback about that so.

JIM: Great, great. So I know there are some improvements kind of under the hood as far as the performance of the Sakai engine that runs ReggieNet that you talked about that something happens with all of these upgrades; are there any other things of that you think would be of interest to faculty especially?

CHARLES: Actually, there are. I think there are a couple other things. One thing is on the site info tool. Um, that's place where you can go to kind of manage a lot of settings and things like that within the course and in the past when you looked at that main site info tool page when you scroll down you would see the list of participants in your course. That has now been moved to a separate tab...

JIM: Okay (Charles)...within the site info tool and now I'm trying to remember what it's labeled, and I can't

CHARLES: I think it's labeled 'manage participants.'

JIM: Okay

CHARLES: That's something that's a little bit different.

JIM: Well, and, and, that's one where I'm again, I'm glad that they're making this change because that like you said that was at like the bottom of that page and I never knew to scroll down.

CHARLES: Right, yeah, it's yeah below the fold.

JIM: It was before yeah. Yes.

CHARLES: The assignments tool has a new option.

JIM: Oh, I'm excited about this one.

CHARLES: Oooo, good for you.

JIM: I really am if it's what if it's what I think it is.

CHARLES: Right and what this is is this allows you to choose an option where the system will automatically send students an email reminder 24 hours before the due date and time for an assignment.

JIM: Yes.   JIM: Now, I would never say this as a substitute for having that that one-on-one or that personal communication or you know suddenly but I often do this anyway, and of course sometimes I'll do that more than 24 hours ahead of time because they really should have been thinking about it more than 24 but...

CHARLES: Oh, really?

JIM: But yeah, but I think this is something that students are positive about. In fact, I know it is because we did a little, we had a little conversation. We did a little focus group with some students and they all kind of did the same thing I did which is like "ooh!" So it's so it's an interesting option, but it's an option that you have to turn on for each assignment is that that's correct?

CHARLES: Yep, so that's just in the assignment settings page you'll go through and you'll see an option to send students an email 24 hours before the due date.

JIM: Cool.

CHARLES: The other kind of tool that got a little bit of improvements is the grade book tool.

JIM: Okay.

CHARLES: We've been kind of incrementally trying to, to fix some of the things that that we know have been a little bit annoying with instructors using the grade book so a couple things if you're using categories within the grade book the system will now display the total points for each category.

JIM: Okay

CHARLES: So, that's one good thing and actually we're in the process of trying to get it to show the total points for the entire grade book. Somehow that didn't get added in with the same thing, but we're working on that. So another new feature in the gradebook is instructors can choose to display or allow students to see statistics for individual grade items or the overall course grade and those are actually two separate options.

JIM: Oh, so like how other students did on this...

CHARLES: Exactly.

JIM: particular assignment. They see kind of a mean, median histogram of the grade distribution. Well, that's great because that will then, now see I didn't know that was coming in and that's something I could see using because I'll have discussions with students sometimes about their projects, especially like essay exams and stuff like that and we look over common things. It would be great to kind of see the, the, the statistics on the feedback I gave them and then how I actually assessed it. So that's cool.

CHARLES: Right, so yeah, it can give students a feeling on of how they're doing. You know, if they did particularly bad on something, they might look at that and see "oh, well, you know nobody did really well on that."

JIM: So, for those of you who are listening before July 25th, 2019 ReggieNet will be unavailable for we're kind of saying all day.

CHARLES: Right.

JIM: It may come back late that afternoon or early evening but we're kind of hedging our bets and, and, because there are still some classes going on some summer courses going on we've been telling instructors all spring and all summer that we've known this upgrade was coming or potentially coming to be aware of that. If you're listening to it to this after July 25th, 2019. Reggienet probably wasn't available that day and yeah, and no big deal.

CHARLES: But you get to log in and see all these new fun things.

JIM: That's exactly true. Charles is there I know that you are involved in the Sakai community, you and some of our other colleagues here on campus. Is there anything coming in the next, next, version of Sakai that you want to tease or? Are we not going to press our luck two years in a row?

CHARLES: Let's not press our luck. There's various projects going on that are optimization of some tools. There's also kind of an overall project to try and make all the make the various parts of the interface more consistent across tools so that...

JIM: Ah, yes.

CHARLES: things like buttons will should all look the same and...

JIM: Right

CHARLES: ...be labeled in similar ways. So, so, we get more consistency across...

JIM: Well, and that goes back to what we talked about in the beginning of this episode when we were talking about how ReggieNet is actually many tools and because it's part of this open source community driven sort of project, different people are contributing to different tools and so when they're all fitted together they haven't always it hasn't been a seamless experience across the tools.

CHARLES: Exactly and that's something that that was kind of realized and, and, so they began a project to actually kind of do an inventory of...

JIM: Yeah.

CHARLES: ...you know, all the labels and buttons and, and, things across all the tools and try and make them more consistent throughout and, and, that's an ongoing project.

JIM: Sure. And then I also know that that speaking that actually just reminds me and I know we have some colleagues here on campus who are involved in this, um, an effort to also make sure that it is is as accessibly friendly and as accessible as could be for those who need to need screen readers and whatnot.

CHARLES: That's correct AT and and web services together have been doing a lot of accessibility testing and contributing what they found back to the community...

JIM: Yeah.

CHARLES: And that and actually ISU has been recognized at the national meeting for their contributions in that area, so it's been kind of nice to see.

JIM: Well great Charles. Thank you so much. You're welcome. And that's all the time we have for this episode of Let's Talk Teaching. You can find out more about ReggieNet and if you need help with ReggieNet as a teacher at Illinois State University, go to ctlt.illinoisstate.edu Look at our brand new homepage and you'll see big buttons on that homepage both for ReggieNet support for instructors and for our pokey little podcast, Let's Talk Teaching. For Charles Bristow, for all of my colleagues here at the Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology, until we talk again, happy teaching. Show Notes   Here are some additional resources: Redbirds Keep Teaching - an extensive collection of support for instructors Online Teaching Mentors - how to access a special ReggieNet site connecting faculty with colleagues highly experienced in online teaching.