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Erie Community College Switches to ANGEL

INTRODUCTION

The history of Erie Community College's ANGEL adoption is familiar. College faculty and community members recognized the value making courses available online would provide county residents. So, when the College received funds from a county sponsor, they invested in necessary infrastructure and in the fall of 2001, Erie Community College (ECC) adopted its first course management system and began offering classes online.

But ECC faces the same challenge colleges across the country face: resources are scarce and demands placed on the system continue to grow. Personnel and financial resources must be effectively utilized to achieve the best possible return on investment in terms of both time and dollars.

When two years into their CMS adoption the cost to license the CMS they originally adopted rose substantially, ECC had no choice but to look for an alternative.

Today, Erie Community College is a satisfied ANGEL adopter enjoying greater success with its switch to ANGEL than ever envisioned

ANGEL'S LOWER TOTAL COST OF OWNERSHIP, FEATURES WIN AT ECC

According to Mary Beth Orrange, ECC Professor of Mathematics/Computer Science and Distance Learning Faculty Liaison, the College would have continued with the popular CMS it originally adopted and used for two years, but providers "priced themselves out of the market." Joseph Lundin, ECC Director of Communications Systems, agreed that they had no choice but to switch, and after a survey of course management systems available, "the reasons we switched to ANGEL were cost and features."

Efficiencies engineered into ANGEL as a part of design philosophy coupled with forward-thinking management strategies enable ANGEL to provide more value at a more sustainable price point.

EASE-OF-USE, FEATURES OVERCOME FACULTY FEAR OF CHANGE

Although ANGEL provides more value and is more cost effective, fear of change is an issue that can keep an institution from adopting a new CMS. Often getting faculty to use a CMS has been an uphill battle and making a switch can be considered asking for trouble. However, much to the surprise of College officials, ECC did not experience the negative faculty response they had anticipated.

COLLEGE ANTICIPATES NEGATIVE RESPONSE TO SWITCH

In the fall and spring of 2003 when they introduced faculty to ANGEL and began training, "We faced a lot of anxiety, grumbling, and anger," said Orrange.

"Just the concept of change made people unhappy." In the fall of 2004 when ECC retired the CMS they originally adopted and began using ANGEL, faculty liaisons and support personnel expected faculty to "back off" and were prepared for problems.

ANGEL SURPRISINGLY EASY TO LEARN

But according to Orrange problems never materialized. "In September when we began using ANGEL, everything was fine. Faculty were quickly online in ANGEL," said Orrange. "It was surprisingly easy for people to learn to use ANGEL. They were delighted with ANGEL's ease-of-use and features."

ANGEL PROVIDES SUPERIOR FEATURES

Jason L. Steinitz, ECC Professor of Social Science and Distance Learning Faculty Liaison with Orrange, attributes a major part of the success of ECC's ANGEL adoption to ANGEL's features. "When we got into ANGEL, we found that ANGEL has features our previous CMS didn't have: reporting functions, multiple drop boxes, discussion forums that are linked to the gradebook," said Steinitz. "Overall ANGEL is just more accommodating for teachers."

FACULTY AGREE SWITCHING TO ANGEL THE RIGHT DECISION

Orrange and Steinitz's positive perception of the ECC switch to ANGEL is echoed by comments from their fellow faculty members. The College uses ANGEL group functionality to communicate with the entire faculty. When Orrange and Steinitz recently surveyed the faculty group regarding both their level of satisfaction

with the ECC ANGEL adoption and their perspective as to whether switching to ANGEL was the right thing for faculty and students, the response to both questions was very positive.

Anthony Cilano, ECC Professor of Business Administration reported that he is “very satisfied with the ANGEL adoption,” and said, “On a scale of one to 10 with 10 being the best, I’d give the ANGEL adoption a 10.”

Mathematics and Computer Science Professor Trish Lanz pointed to ANGEL features she values that weren’t in the college’s previous CMS when she talked about her satisfaction with ANGEL. “We gained several excellent features,” said Lanz, “the math equation editor, the ease of using the HTML editor, the ability to copy one course section to another, the ability to grade discussion forums, students’ ability to use the equation editor and HTML editor” are among the features Lanz identified. Lanz also reported that she has had “several students say they thought ANGEL was more user-friendly” than the College’s previous CMS.

Even English Professor Donna Allen, who calls herself “a developmentally delayed techie,” reports that she is “getting to like ANGEL very much.” And English professor Anne Benedict who has had to work at it, but is “finally getting the hang of ANGEL” now thinks “ANGEL is great.” Sharon Trent, professor of office management, agreed that “switching was definitely the right thing to do” and said, “It was an easy transition. There are so many more features with the ANGEL program and the learning curve for students was so much easier in terms of navigation and understanding the program.”

SYSTEM ADMINISTRATORS VALUE ANGEL’S SUPERIOR “BACK END” FEATURES

End user satisfaction with ANGEL at ECC is matched with satisfaction from those who work behind the scenes with ANGEL. From this perspective, Orrange pointed out that she appreciates ANGEL’s “regular, frequent version updates” instead of “waiting two years for changes.” Orrange also commented that ANGEL support staff is “very helpful.”

ANGEL EASY TO CUSTOMIZE, STABLE

In his position as Director of Communications Systems, the ANGEL features Lundin finds particularly valuable are those that make institution-specific customizations easier. Lundin points to ANGEL “nuggets that make custom programming easier and a backend database structure with simple, straightforward tables and logical linking,” as ANGEL values. And, now that ANGEL is in regular use at ECC, Lundin pointed out another ANGEL benefit – stability. With their former CMS, Lundin explains, ECC “experienced stability problems,” but with ANGEL “there has been hardly any downtime.”

TIME-SAVING SYSTEM ADMINISTRATION

Carol Baker, ECC ANGEL administrator, agreed with Lundin and pointed out that the switch to ANGEL has allowed her to focus on technical support for students and instructors, rather than spending huge amounts of time administering the system. With their former CMS, Baker had to “hand load course rosters one course at a time.”

Baker reports it took “days to load the rosters,” and then she had to “go through it all again for drop and add.” But with ANGEL, Baker creates courses in one step and enrolls students in another. And thanks to ANGEL’s flexibility and Lundin’s custom programming, ANGEL synchs to the college’s Datatel system daily without Baker “touching a student record.”

UNEXPECTED BENEFITS OF TRANSITION TO ANGEL

NEED FOR FACULTY TRAINING REDUCED

ECC ANGEL faculty liaisons Orrange and Steinitz have even managed to make the training that is a necessary part of any transition more efficient and valuable to the faculty they work with. Training began as a series of workshops to help faculty transition to ANGEL. Now, the number of training sessions has been reduced to two-hour, one-on-one work sessions with faculty using the faculty member’s own course materials. Steinitz said they were able to make training more efficient because “ANGEL is user friendly.”

A two-week online training course, “Teaching Online with ANGEL,” is in the works and soon all ANGEL training will be available online as an option to face-to-face training using ANGEL. Lundin has also constructed a faculty help website, HALO, Help for Alternative Learning Online, that provides useful ANGEL information and uses ANGEL message boards so faculty can communicate with one another about ANGEL. Of course, as a testament to their commitment, Orrange and Steinitz are on call to answer faculty phone calls and emails when needed, and they also find time to use the College’s faculty group

to relay tips, hints, and tricks for using ANGEL.

RESTRUCTURING TRAINING PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY TO ADDRESS PEDAGOGY

In addition to making training more efficient, Steinitz and Orrange capitalized on the transition to ANGEL to make training more valuable. “The transition gave us the opportunity to revisit and restructure training,” says Steinitz. With the transition they began to meld pedagogy into faculty training by applying things they had learned in the two years they used their original CMS. “We didn’t want to spend the training time simply teaching people to use the technology,” said Steinitz, “as we teach faculty how to use ANGEL, we illustrate how to use the technology to make classes better, to get to know students, involve them, and get them to interact.”

ANGEL CREATES BETTER STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Because a large portion of ECC’s student population is adults who work full time and fit college courses into already busy lives, the original emphasis of ECC’s ANGEL adoption was to enable the college to offer classes totally online. But their experiences using ANGEL in online classes has lead them to encourage more web-assisted access for students in traditional classes. Orrange said online learning is “just so wonderful for students and really works for everyone.” She no longer has to carry piles of printed materials to class and “if a student loses something, it’s available online even at three in the morning.”

ANGEL COMMUNICATION CAPABILITIES ENGAGE STUDENTS

Orrange reported that teaching online has made her “excited all over again about teaching” because of the opportunities that come with online learning. She also said that she “communicates more with the students in her online classes and feels she gets to know these students better” than she does students in her traditional classes. Steinitz agreed that ANGEL “email and discussion capabilities create a sense of community, remove feelings of isolation, and create a better experience for students.” The college is encouraging faculty to use ANGEL in their traditional courses for these reasons and because students have begun asking for ANGEL.

“ANGEL DOES EVERYTHING BUT PERK YOUR COFFEE IN THE MORNING”

Faculty, staff, and students at Erie Community College are clearly pleased with the College’s ANGEL adoption. Carol Baker, ECC ANGEL administrator said she “tells everyone that ANGEL does everything but perk your coffee in the morning.” Orrange commented that one of the great things about ANGEL is that “ANGEL does so much,” but in the same breath cautioned that because ANGEL does so much “there is more to learn.” Baker agreed with Orrange but also pointed out that their “users are becoming more advanced and are asking to learn more about ANGEL.”

The notable fact is that Erie Community College lead by the four key personnel turned the challenge of limited resources into an opportunity by switching to ANGEL. Slightly daunted by the fact that they were

asking the college’s faculty and students to move outside their comfort zones with a CMS switch, but convinced that switching was there best alternative in the long run, they chose to make the transition to ANGEL. Now, they enjoy a stable CMS with capabilities that improve the user experience for everyone from system administrators to faculty to students to staff.

ABOUT ANGEL LEARNING, INC.

ANGEL Learning develops and markets the ANGEL Learning Management System (LMS). ANGEL|LMS is the enterprise learning management system that combines an open, flexible architecture with a complete set of easy-to-use features. This proven, powerful system allows instructors to efficiently manage instruction, communicate quickly, easily, and effectively, and develop the sophisticated learning experiences today's demanding educational climate requires.

ANGEL Learning evolved from research and teaching experience at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis. Today, though ANGEL Learning has grown from a campus-based organization to a profitable firm with global reach, the company stays loyal to its academic roots.

ANGEL customers include two of the largest universities in the United States, Penn State University and Michigan State University, large community college systems, small and large public and private postsecondary institutions, K-12 school systems, and businesses across the country. Visit the ANGEL Learning website at www.angellearning.com.