Getting Started with WebCT

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What is WebCT and Why Do I Need to Know About It?

WebCT is a web-based course development and support environment. It is one of a number of products now available to schools and universities for developing, delivering, and maintaining courses or course support materials on the web. In one package, it provides many of the functions commonly needed for online courses or online support of regular on-campus courses (e.g., capability for materials posting, threaded discussion forums, live chat, internal e-mail). It has become the *de facto* standard not only at Purdue University but throughout most of the universities in the Big Ten. As a result, many students now use WebCT to access course materials online. Because of the growing use of WebCT, and the fact that it is used to support this course, you need to be familiar with how to use it. This guide introduces the basics of how to get started. For more information, use the Help features built into WebCT.

Accessing WebCT

To access WebCT courses at Purdue University, use any web browser (e.g., Netscape Navigator or Microsoft Internet Explorer) to connect to: http://webct.cc.purdue.edu
You will see a screen like the one shown below.

Simply click on the Course Listings link to proceed.
You will see the following.

Simply scroll down until you can click on the EDCI link. You will see a list of all available EDCI courses in WebCT.

Scroll down until you find this course, EDCI/EDFA 586, Topics in Educational Reform.
You will see something like this.

Notice that there are three icons to the left of the course name (other courses may only have one or two of the icons). The leftmost icon, a blue i, stands for information. If you click this icon, you can view a publicly accessible screen of information about the course. Clicking the rightmost icon, a little house, or the course name will take you to the course home page in WebCT after you log in with an ID and password. But, what if you don't have an ID or password? That's where the middle icon, the key, comes in. Clicking it allows you to create your own course account. You'll need to do this the first time you access the course. Read on!

**Creating Your Course Account**

Click the key icon next to the course name. You'll see this screen.

Simply complete the required information and click the Done button to proceed. Please use your real name. There is nothing to prevent you from making up an account, but you are the one who will be graded based upon your contributions in the WebCT environment. You won't get credit for things posted under another name. Also, we'll try to make grades available via the system at
some point. Privacy is ensured because you can select your own ID and password. We recommend you record your ID and password is a safe place in case you should forget. **Note:** the account creation option will be available only for the first two weeks of the semester. Please create your account within that time frame.

**Using the WebCT Environment**

Once you have created an account, you can log in to the course at any time from any web browser. Here is the home page for the course.

There are four main links on the home page that lead to additional information.
- Click **Course Information** to view key course information such as the syllabus, information about assignments, and readings.
- Click **Course Calendar** to view a calendar. This option shows information from the syllabus laid out on a monthly calendar. You can add your own private entries to your course calendar.
- Click **Discussion Forums and Other Tools** to access the online discussion forums, live chat, and other tools. Because the discussion forums are an important part of what we'll do in WebCT, a brief explanation of those is given below.
- Click **Links to Readings and Resources** to see links to online readings and to other online resources that you might want to access.

Most of the functions you'll run into in WebCT are pretty much self-explanatory. The program was designed to be relatively easy for non-technical individuals to use. If you get stuck, click the Home button to return to the home page. Click Done to complete tasks. If you start to do something and you're not sure about it, click the Cancel or Back button to quit what you are doing and go back to the previous screen.
Discussion Forums

To access the discussion forums, click the Discussion Forums and Other Tools link on the home page. You will see the following.

Click the Discussion Forums link. You will see something like the following screen (but probably with more messages).

By default, a list of all new messages is displayed on the top right side of the screen. To read any message, simply click on the subject heading that is displayed. The entire message will appear and can be read. After you've read a message, it will disappear from the list, although you can use the Show All option to display all messages.

Several forums have already been set up. Main and Notes are two default WebCT forums. Any general messages about the course, procedures, or updates on assignments will be posted in Main. The remaining forums were created specifically for our course topics.
To post your own message to one of the forums, click the Compose button on the left. You'll see the following composition window.

Click on the drop-down menu (the little down arrow next to where it says Forum Main) to select the appropriate forum. Be sure to pick the correct forum for your topic. We have forums labeled: Introduction, Choice, Curriculum, Assessment, Technology, Influences, and Directions to correspond to our major topics. If you don't select a specific forum, your message, by default, will be posted in the Main forum. Enter a subject heading; don't leave the subject blank because the subject heading is what appears in the list of messages. Finally, type your message. Click the Post button to post the message to the forum.

Two things may simplify your life. First, if you prefer to use a word processor to compose your message, you can use standard Windows or MacOS copy and paste procedures to copy information into the message box for posting. Second, WebCT does support message attachments. So, if you'd like to attach a file to a message that you post, simply click Attach and locate the file to attach. (There are a couple of steps in there, but they are not too difficult.) Keep in mind that other users must have access to appropriate software in order to view any attachments. So, as a general rule, you should probably avoid most attachments. But, it is an option.

That concludes this brief introduction to WebCT. There is a lot more to the package, but most functions are relatively simple to use once you get used to the way the system works. Have fun, and don't be afraid to try out new functions. Learning to use WebCT should be one of your course goals!