Use of Online Portal for Advanced Learning (OPAL) to enhance Medical Education

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Abstract—Web based Curriculum Management Systems (CMS) are increasingly utilized to deliver medical education across Canadian and other Universities. CMS can facilitate the delivery of learning resources, broadens the capacity for tracking and reporting of teaching & learning across an institution, simplify and automate administrative and supervisory tasks, and serve a useful function for institutional accreditation. Some of these systems are equipped with business intelligence tools to analyze data and create reports to facilitate curriculum governance and education delivery. These intelligence reports can improve curriculum governance and are expected to be immensely advantageous while preparing for medical school accreditation visits. At University of Manitoba, we have been using Online Portal for Advanced Learning (OPAL) to generate reports to find missing sessions, learning objectives, resource uploading and instructor assignment during the pre clerkship year. In this paper, we demonstrate approaches to creation of necessary reports for curriculum governance and accreditation standards. We used OPAL for the following quality improvement projects: 1) reports of missing learning resources for the MED 1 year (Class of 2014); 2) reports of missing clinical encounters for the clerkship rotations for the Class of 2012. To determine if there was an impact on educational quality, we followed the trends of missing clinical encounters for four periods. We also used OPAL for accreditation reporting and curriculum mapping utilizing analytics dashboards to examine areas of potential gaps and overlaps. These intelligence reports can improve curriculum governance and are expected to be immensely advantageous while preparing for medical school accreditation visits.

Keywords—Learning Management System, Curriculum Management System, Learning/Curriculum Management System, LMS, CMS, LCMS, eLearning

I. INTRODUCTION

Classroom teaching prevailed as the traditional model of learning for several millennia. At the time, formal learning was scarce and resources were centered on the availability of the educator, rather than the learner [1]–[5]. Initial applications of eLearning were therefore designed on the basis of the old classroom model and its associated characteristics [6]–[10]. The classroom model, while comprehensible, does not achieve the true potential of the Internet as the new learning paradigm. The first wave of e-learning offered solutions that assisted with administration of classroom training; i.e., the Learning Management System (LMS) [11]–[13]. Since then, the discipline has developed and evolved into a newer wave of a more sophisticated e-learning [14]. This second wave involves an e-Learning Content Management System (LCMS), also termed Learning Curriculum Management System or Learning Course Management System, designed to facilitate self-regulated and lifelong learning [15]–[18].

The adoption of LCMS for web-based instruction continues to increase in higher education. LCMS is a software program or integrated platform that contains a series of web-based tools to support a number of activities and course management procedures [12]. Examples of Course Management Systems include Blackboard, WebCT, eCollege, Moodle, Desire2Learn, Angel, and OPAL. The adoption of e-learning environments using CMS facilitates learning in areas away from the institutions for distributed learning. The e-learning environments also offer added advantages that improve the self-regulation skills of both students and educators, in particular, their metacognitive skills (‘knowing about knowing’ as reflected in applied learning theory). Despite the potential of LCMS to improve the delivery of e-learning, the features and functionalities built into these systems are often underutilized. Consequently, the learning environments created; do not adequately support improvement of self-regulation skills by learners. Therefore, to improve...
implementation of LCMS by learners and enhance the overall learning experience, the e-learning environments should be constructed with particular attention to the diversity of individual learning styles, prior knowledge, and self-regulation skills [19]. Self-regulated learning requires personal initiative, adaptive skills, perseverance and adequate monitoring strategies, and metacognitive skills. The e-learning environments should encourage learners to plan, attend to the relevant content, and monitor and evaluate their learning. Policy makers, educators and researchers should collectively provide leadership to develop and implement LCMSs as powerful learning tools. An effective LCMS should thus incorporate features and functionalities that provide extensive mentoring and support self-regulated learning [20]–[26].

Learning, in particular, the means by which individuals learn effectively is an extremely complex process. Historically, learning is a fragmented process with little use of technology and varies significantly among individuals. Therefore, uncertainty exists on what constitutes a comprehensive e-learning suite for medical education [24]–[25]. An all-inclusive e-learning solution with the institution and learner at the centre is comprised of three core components:

1) Infrastructure; 2) Services; 3) Content

The infrastructure refers to the application-level software that allows all aspects of learning (from classroom to web) to be created, managed, delivered, and measured. Similar to all e-business technologies, the e-Learning infrastructure builds on classic networking and enterprise infrastructure services and standards, such as IP-based networks, web browsers and database repositories. At the application level, three primary sets of technologies can be integrated to provide an infrastructure framework for delivering the complete suite of e-learning services. These components include the Learning Management System (LMS), the Learning Content/Curriculum Management System (LCMS), and the Virtual Classroom (VC) [22]–[26]. A revolution in medical education that began with the advent of the Learning Management System (LMS) is at the verge of emerging into a new wave of learning, termed Learning Content/Curriculum Management System (LCMS) [22]–[25].

In this paper we describe the approach taken at University of Manitoba to acquire a comprehensive Learning/Current Management System (CMS). We examined available electronic curriculum systems and conducted needs assessment of the students, faculty and administrative staff. A pilot evaluation of one CMS solution to assess system’s strengths and weaknesses and an outcome evaluation of user satisfaction was performed. The pilot experience proved a profound need for an electronic CMS for the undergraduate medical education at Faculty of Medicine, University of Manitoba. Lessons learned from the pilot experience led to the development and implementation of Online Portal for Advanced learning (OPAL) Fig.1 OPAL is a product of academic and business collaboration and offers Web 2.0 technology via an appealing, user friendly Liferay Portal [27]. We adopted a phased approach to the development and created governance and organizational structure to solicit feedback, provide a milieu for collaboration and communication, and mandate accountability. OPAL was successfully launched as the exclusive Learning/Curriculum Management System in August 2009 [28]. OPAL is a comprehensive CMS that offers the following suite of functionalities:

**Individualized Calendars:** Students and faculty see their own unique calendar. If an event changes, the user’s calendar updates immediately.

**Curriculum Explorer:** Users can search or browse the curriculum in an easy, intuitive interface, allowing them to review what’s been taught and where.

**Learning Materials:** Learning materials are linked to the curriculum, but they can also be browsed or searched independently, providing easy access to their knowledge base.

**Reporting & Analytics:** The unique reporting and analytics modules provide the most advanced, integrated, and flexible access to your school’s data.

**Clinical Evaluations & Logbooks:** Clinical tools are an integral part of the Opal workflow, allowing users to seamlessly move between their calendars and their tasks.

**Questionmark Perception Integration:** Opal is tightly integrated with Perception to allow exams and quizzes to be associated with individuals, events and objectives.

II. **IMPROVING QUALITY OF MEDICAL EDUCATION USING OPAL**

In this paper, we demonstrate approaches to creation of necessary reports for curriculum governance and accreditation standards. These reports encompass educational objectives, general design and content of curriculum, curriculum management and roles and responsibilities of faculty. We used OPAL for the following quality improvement projects:

1. We created weekly reports of missing learning resources for the MED 1 year (Class of 2014).
   - The curriculum governance committee communicated with the instructors to upload their resources in a timely manner.
   - To determine if there was an impact on educational quality, we followed the trends of missing resources for the whole year.

2. We created reports of missing clinical encounters for the clerkship rotations for the Class of 2012.
   a. The Director of Evaluation followed up on these reports with the clerkship directors.
   b. To determine if there was an impact on educational quality, we followed the trends of missing clinical encounters for four periods.

3. We used OPAL for accreditation reporting and curriculum mapping:
   - We created prototype analytics dashboards to examine areas of potential gaps and overlaps in the curriculum.

III. **RESULTS OF THE QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT**

**Quality Improvement Project: Learning Resources**

We tracked which sessions were missing learning resources
Throughout the MED 1 year, the Director for Pre-clerkship used these reports to coordinate with Course Directors to post learning resources in a timely manner for students. The following data shows the tracking of missed learning resources and effect of intervention (Curriculum Governance). A marked improvement in Faculty collaboration was observed through this quality improvement initiative.

Fig. 2

**Percentage of Missing Learning Resources: MED 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>August</th>
<th>September</th>
<th>October</th>
<th>November</th>
<th>December</th>
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<th>February</th>
<th>March</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% Missing</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>28%</td>
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<td>24%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
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Quality Improvement Project: Clinical Encounters
We tracked the number of encounters that were missing from students’ Essential Clinical Procedure logs, during clerkship periods 2 to 5, relating to the LCME ED-2 standard. The Clerkship Director of each program acted on these reports with respect to their students. The Director of Evaluation also followed up on these reports with the respective clerkship directors. The following data shows the tracking of clinical encounters and effect of intervention. A marked improvement in the number of missing clinical encounters was observed through this quality improvement initiative.

Fig. 3

**Percentage of Missing Clinical Encounters**

- Period 2: Nov 10 - Dec 21, 2010: 4.3%
- Period 3: Jan 5 - Feb 15, 2011: 3.3%
- Period 4: Feb 16 - Mar 29, 2011: 1.8%
- Period 5: Mar 30 - May 10, 2011: 0.7%

Accreditation Reporting/Curriculum Mapping
As part of the OPAL curriculum management system, we prototyped a business intelligence / analytics dashboard, to
map the curriculum against the MeSH (Medical Subject Headings) controlled vocabulary, and to identify gaps and overlaps in the curriculum, relating to the LCME ED-33 standard. The prototype included a random allocation of MeSH descriptors to educational objectives, to demonstrate the analysis workflow. The “MeSH Summary Dashboard” shown below highlights the MeSH descriptors with two views:

1. The first view shows a browsable hierarchy of MeSH descriptors, with the number of sessions covering each topic.
2. The second view lists each MeSH descriptor and the number of sessions that reference that descriptor, sorted by the frequency that it appears in the curriculum. In this example, “Heart Diseases” is the most frequently occurring descriptor.

This dashboard allows the curriculum governance committee to view how often topics are taught, and to identify which MeSH descriptors are not covered in the curriculum. The curriculum governance committee can also use the MeSH Summary Dashboard to highlight topics of interest, for further analysis in the “Session Report Dashboard”.

The Session Report Dashboard, shown on next page, provides an interactive breakdown of which sessions contain, in this case, the “Heart Diseases” descriptor. Figs. 7, 8 This dashboard was designed to allow the committee to search, identify, and filter on who teaches each topic, when each topic is taught, where each topic is taught (block, course, and unit). This dashboard allows the committee to review how each topic is taught, by providing a mechanism to view the source data (including educational objectives and learning resources) behind this report. This dashboard also allows the committee to identify sessions that are incorrectly tagged with this descriptor.

**Conclusion of Quality Improvement Projects**

Web based Curriculum Management Systems (CMS) are increasingly utilized to deliver medical education across North American Universities. CMS can facilitate the delivery and broaden the capacity for tracking and reporting of teaching & learning across an institution, simplify and automate administrative and supervisory tasks, and serve a useful function for institutional accreditation. Some CMS are equipped with business intelligence tools to analyze data and create reports to facilitate curriculum governance and education delivery. These intelligence reports can improve curriculum governance and are expected to be immensely advantageous while preparing for medical school accreditation visits. At University of Manitoba, we have been using Online Portal for Advanced Learning (OPAL) to generate reports to find missing sessions, learning objectives, and resource uploading and instructor assignment during the preclerkship year. OPAL is powered to generate reports on accreditation standards and curriculum mapping as required by Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) and Committee on the Accreditation of Canadian Medical Schools (CACMS).

**IV. STUDENT AND FACULTY SURVEYS**

Independent and anonymous surveys of the faculty and students were conducted at 1 month and after each block. These surveys demonstrated that student evaluation was overwhelmingly positive and adoption was universal. The survey results from the students and faculty are as follows: Figs. 4, 5, 6, 9, 10

![Fig. 4](student_survey.png)

**STUDENT SURVEY**

Overall OPAL is quick, responsive and available when I need it

![Fig. 5](student_survey.png)

**STUDENT SURVEY**

OPAL scheduling software is convenient and easy to use

![Fig. 6](student_survey.png)

**STUDENT SURVEY**

OPAL will enhance our education
Fig. 7

Browseable hierarchy of MeSH descriptors, with the number of sessions covering each topic.

List of MeSH descriptors, sorted by frequency of occurrence in the curriculum.

Fig. 8

Dates when this topic is taught

Search bar to further refine the results

Button to access the source data behind this report

Instructors who teach this topic

Session data for the courses tagged with the "Heart Diseases" MeSH descriptor.
I logged on to OPAL and uploaded my teaching material

<table>
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<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2= Sometimes</td>
<td>70%</td>
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</table>

1= Never, 2= Sometimes, 3= Many Times, 4 & 5=Almost Always

I expect OPAL to enhance overall learning at U of M

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2= Sometimes</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1= Never, 2= Sometimes, 3= Many Times, 4 & 5=Almost Always

V. DISCUSSION OF LCMS/CMS

Myriad of CMS solutions available for medical education do have the benefit of reasonably large install bases, and they potentially allow the medical school to use the same solution as the rest of the university. However, the generic solutions have the disadvantage of not catering to the specific needs of medical education programs. Their target markets tend to be general higher-level education, as well as K-12, corporate education, sales and product education, and supplier and customer education. These domains all share common requirements to manage learning programs, but lack the sophisticated oversight and evidence requirements of today’s medical schools. This means that the schools which implement these solutions are faced with either implementing custom tools or manual processes to address the gaps.

MEDICAL CURRICULUM MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Through the years, Curriculum Management Systems targeted specifically at medical education programs began to emerge. These systems, including E*Value™ and one45 Software, provide functionality to support medical education accreditation requirements, such as understanding what topics are taught where and tracking educational objectives. The features in these solutions go much further than generic LMS’s in addressing the needs of medical education programs. Interestingly, only 14% of medical schools in North America use medical education CMS’s as their primary curriculum management system. According to the schools surveyed, two of the reasons for this – integration and customization – speak directly to the need for a solution beyond the typical CMS. Schools want to be able to integrate both the workflow and the reporting of their curriculum and quality management systems into their other in-house technologies and systems. And when they want to improve their processes, they need the products customizable to support the new processes. Neither of these capabilities exists in current CMS offerings, which has led most schools to look for solutions elsewhere.

OPAL - A NEW PHILOSOPHY IN CURRICULUM MANAGEMENT

Prior to the development of OPAL, we streamlined the entire user experience for students and faculty, taking what used to be several disparate systems and seamlessly integrating them into a highly efficient workflow. This has created a system that provides, in the current and upcoming releases, the most functionality for undergraduate medical education and the programs. All organizational reporting requirements requested by the deans and their staff led to the design of a comprehensive and integrated analytics and custom reporting system that is unmatched by any other solution on the market today.

QUALITY MANAGEMENT

The real challenge that medical schools face is managing and improving the quality of their institution. To accomplish this, they need complete and accurate information. This comes when students, faculty, and staff see their curriculum management system as useful and easy to use, leading them to use it more frequently and consistently. The result is dramatically improved data that is used to measure performance, compliance, and outcomes.

ANALYTICS AND CUSTOM REPORTING

OPAL, as a learning/curriculum management system collects a wealth of information for demonstrating compliance with LCME and CACMS accreditation standards and for improving the quality of the education. But the only way to get this information is to have a robust analytics and custom reporting system, helping with identification on opportunities for improvement in education. OPAL’s unique Reporting and Analytics modules can create the needed reports, add a business intelligence analytics interface, and provide educators the power to create their own custom reports. Whether a complete picture of the students’ performance is required to determine if they are meeting clinical requirements, or to see if outcomes vary by site, OPAL provides the information. OPAL’s reporting module collects information from school and national exams, clinical evaluations and logbooks, and even from students’ usage of the system, to provide with an integrated view of your curriculum, your students, and your school.

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EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES, CURRICULUM MAPPING, AND ACCREDITATION

Demonstrating compliance with LCME and CACMS accreditation standards is a critical component of quality management strategy for Canadian and American medical schools. OPAL is designed with a focus on helping to create, implement, and demonstrate the processes for accreditation. The goal is to make the accreditation process as smooth as possible by putting all the information that is needed at the fingertips, enabling the schools to easily demonstrate that they have quality programs and meeting accreditation standards. OPAL supports the accreditation activities in numerous ways:

- Complete the curriculum mapping loop: Map from objectives, through courses, events, and finally to outcomes.
- Identify gaps and redundancies in your curriculum.
- Easily access educational objectives from the calendar and the course descriptions.
- Track where each objective is taught.
- For any session, list the objectives that were taught previously.
- Search objectives for topics of interest.
- Oversee students’ clinical encounters to ensure educational objectives are met.
- Demonstrate exposure to required curriculum topics and learning across an institution, simplify and automate administrative and supervisory tasks. OPAL is equipped with business intelligence tools to analyze data and create reports to facilitate curriculum governance and education delivery. These intelligence reports can improve curriculum governance and are expected to be immensely advantageous while preparing for the medical school accreditation visits. We have been using OPAL to generate reports to find missing sessions, learning objectives, resources uploading and instructor assignment during the preclerkship years. OPAL is powered to generate reports on accreditation standards and curriculum mapping as required by the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) and Committee on the Accreditation of Canadian Medical Schools (CACMS).

VI. CONCLUSION

In summary, we at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Manitoba developed and implemented an electronic Curriculum Management System named ‘Online Portal for Advanced Learning (OPAL)’ [21,22]. All aspects of preclerkship medical education were impacted by the OPAL, these included, curriculum delivery, scheduling, sharing of information, collaboration and evaluation. OPAL is a locally developed, dynamic, scalable, integrated and functional system, was implemented in August of 2009 and was expected to significantly change the way medical education is delivered at the faculty. Fig. 11 In addition, OPAL brings a quality management approach to curriculum oversight and overall quality management of the medical education programs. OPAL is well positioned to facilitate the curriculum delivery, broaden the capacity for tracking and reporting of teaching and learning, and ensure that all required curriculum topics and learning objectives are met.

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REFERENCES


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