

Memorandum



To: Dr. Vahid Lotfi, Associate Provost
CC: Dr. Renate McLaughlin, Provost
Dr. Robert Houbeck, Director of the Library
Kathleen Conover, Director, ITS
From: Deborah Snyder, Director, Office of Extended Learning
Date: 11/18/2002
Re: Smart Carts

This memo is to support expansion of Smart Cart technology in the classrooms on campus. There are two perspectives I can offer for this support, (1) as Director of Extended Learning, and (2) as an adjunct instructor using the Smart Cart this semester:

1. The University of Michigan–Flint is experiencing significant growth in online courses as well as online course supplements to the traditional classroom. This semester, there are forty five online courses and more than one thousand students participating in online classes. Additionally, we serve more than eight hundred students and thirty plus instructors who use the Blackboard virtual classroom software to augment their traditional face-to-face courses.

It is anticipated that the use of Blackboard as a supplement to the traditional classroom will continue to grow as instructors become more comfortable with technology, in general, and with access to valuable classroom resources on the Internet, specifically. The Smart Cart technology in the classroom offers instructors a convenient means of using technology-enhanced classroom presentations as well as accessing information over the Internet and sharing it with their students.

I see the use of Smart Carts as a natural step toward encouraging instructors to add Blackboard as a supplement that they can share with students in the classroom. As you know, Blackboard courseware provides instructors and students with many technology tools that can enhance their educational experience. Archived lecture notes, slide presentations, threaded discussion based upon classroom lectures, assignments, glossaries, quizzes, etc. are available and easily referenced in the classroom when required.

As we continue to encourage instructors to use technology and web-based resources in the classroom to improve the quality of the educational experience, Smart Carts make access to Blackboard a more integrated piece of the course and thus, more likely. It may be noteworthy that many of the instructors now teaching online began by using the Blackboard course tool as a supplement.

2. As an adjunct instructor this semester, I am using a Smart Cart each time I teach. It provides a convenient way to use several presentation tools and allows access to Internet resources and examples. I was surprised to learn that only one of my students had ever taken an online course and many were unaware of the growing list of available online courses. The students were not opposed to using Blackboard as a supplement to the class and we made arrangements to create a course shell to house many of the materials we were using in the classroom.

We are half way through the semester and the students are now relying on the information posted in the Blackboard course. Using Blackboard as a supplement has greatly enhanced my ability to provide students with resources we are discussing in the classroom. The link to Blackboard that the Smart Cart affords is significant. I was able to show students what the virtual classroom was like on the screen in class. It gave me the opportunity to demonstrate all of the handy tools Blackboard could provide them. We now post all weekly presentation slides, announcements, assignments, grades, Internet links and references to outside articles on Blackboard.

Occasionally, students have had questions regarding assignment postings and we have simply connected to our Blackboard course in the classroom and shared the information with everyone. Without the Smart Cart, Blackboard as a supplement may be a more isolated experience for students who have chosen to take their courses in the classroom. Although the instructor can use the Blackboard shell as a supplement simultaneously to teaching in the classroom, the Smart Cart makes that a more direct connection.

Smart Carts provide a critical link to assisting instructors and students as they learn how valuable technology resources are to augment the traditional classroom. It serves as a window to technology resources and can be the first step toward migrating traditional courses to the online environment.