

Creating Your Course in MEonline

"Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world." -Albert Einstein

In this Guide, the following topics are covered:

- Introduction to Teaching with MEonline
- Setting Global Course Features
- “Create a Course” vs. Creating a course
- Setting Features for Individual Courses
- Adding Content to Your Course
 - Building Your Syllabus
 - Using Text Boxes
 - After the Syllabus
 - Working with the Outline
 - Session Creation Continues
- ‘Framing’ Communication and Collaboration in MEonline
 - Messages
 - Discussion
 - Chat
- Resources for Further Information

Introduction to Teaching with MEonline

The dynamic structure of the Web can help students to direct their own learning and take an active part in developing their own knowledge. MEonline’ course management system (CMS) can help you organize information into a logical framework and support students’ acquisition of knowledge. It can allow students to access the knowledge you have made available to them from any computer with an Internet connection. It can also facilitate interaction and collaboration among and between your students in a way that was rarely possible even in a classroom-based course.

Those who have done it know that making a transition from classroom-only to web-enhanced learning requires a different way of thinking about the way information is transmitted and knowledge is created. Resources that others have found helpful are listed at the end of this guide.

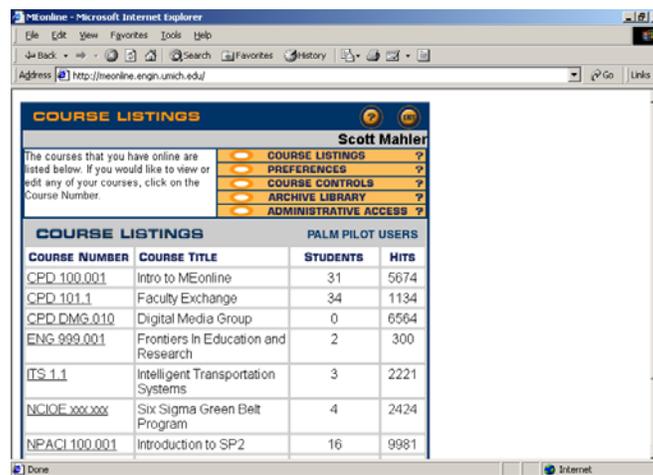
Before beginning, have on hand any teaching materials you feel you might need. These include course outlines and descriptions, references, textbook information, class plans, tests, and the like. It is also helpful -- though not absolutely necessary -- to have a basic structure in mind as you begin to develop a web-enhanced course. You will find that MEonline can help you do much more than you may have been able to do before. Think about what you wish you could do, and it is possible that MEonline can help you do it!

Setting Global Course Features

MEonline allows you to set certain features on a global basis. That is, you can set certain features to be the same in every course you create. (Settings for individual courses will be explained later.) These settings are accessed from your *Course Listings* page. To get there, **enter your username and password**.

Unless you have been 'added' to a course, no courses will be listed. As soon as you create a course, it will be displayed in this window, and you can link directly to it.

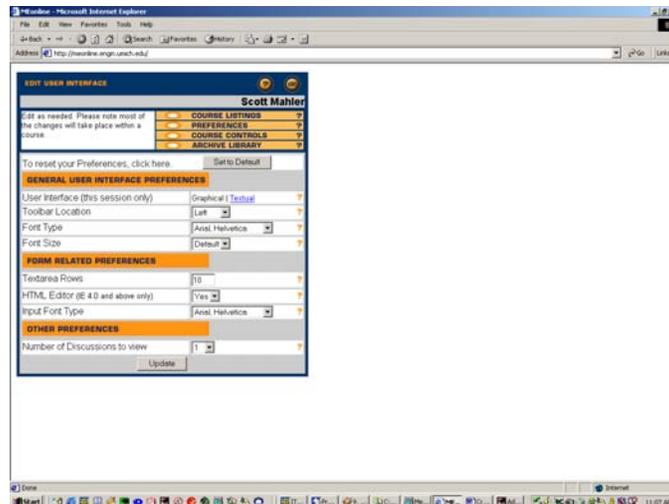
From *Course Listings*, click on 'Preferences' as shown below:



There are two areas in 'Preferences' which can be used to modify how content is handled and viewed. They are 'Edit User Preferences' and 'Advanced Course Controls'.

All MEonline users, including students, can edit their own user preferences. Only those with faculty and administrator access permission (built into your log-in) will have access to 'Advanced Course Controls'.

'Edit User Preferences' changes the way you see and manipulate content. It will not change the way others view the content you insert; it is tied to *your* log-in. When you click on the oval, you will see an interactive form like the one below (you will need to scroll down to see the entire screen):



Note the default choices. If you decide to return to those at any time, you can simply click on the ‘Set to Default’ button.

Most people use the graphical interface, since that gives you access to a greater number of features. If you would like to see the difference, however, feel free to choose ‘Textual’. You can always reset your choice.

In “General User Interface Preferences”, you can set how you view items. You can:

- Choose to have the toolbar display on the left (default), top, right or bottom of your browser window.
- Decide on the font you wish to view.
- Change the size of font. (This is especially helpful for the visually challenged and those with small monitors.)

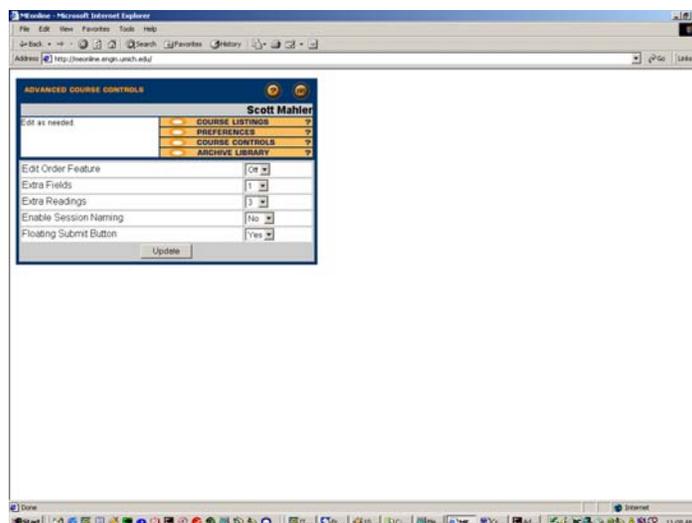
In “Form Related Preferences”, you can:

- Choose the number of rows that you can view at one time in any text box.
- Exercise the option to use a WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) HTML editor if you use the Internet Explorer Browser on a PC.
- Choose the font used for text you enter yourself.

Leaving the discussion viewing preferences set at ‘all’ will allow you to see all discussions, instead of just the last one entered.

Be sure to click ‘Update’ to save your changes!

The other area that affects global course settings is ‘Advanced Course Controls’. When you choose this oval, you will see a decision box like the one below:



In this area, you can control how you use the features in MEonline to build and view courses. Each option is detailed in the table below. Any choices can always be changed, so feel free to experiment!

| <i>Feature</i> | <i>Use</i> |
|------------------------------|---|
| <i>Edit Order Feature</i> | Allows re-ordering of content within each area. For example, you can shuffle ‘prerequisites’ and ‘objectives’ if you realize you want them in different places. Set this to ‘On’ to activate. |
| <i>Extra Fields</i> | By default, each time you open a page to edit it, an extra blank field is added. If you know you will need many extra fields, adjust this default here. |
| <i>Extra Readings</i> | Similar to ‘extra fields’, the system adds 3 readings fields by default. Select more or fewer as you wish. |
| <i>Enable Session Naming</i> | Each class unit is named a ‘session’ in MEonline. If you would prefer to enter your own titles for each lesson (for example, <i>Module one</i> or <i>Overview</i>), select ‘yes’ here. |
| <i>Floating Submit</i> | This setting allows the ‘send to database’ command to always be viewable at the bottom of your screen (for those forms that support it). Setting the floating submit button to ‘yes’ means that you won’t have to scroll to the bottom of the page to effect entries. |

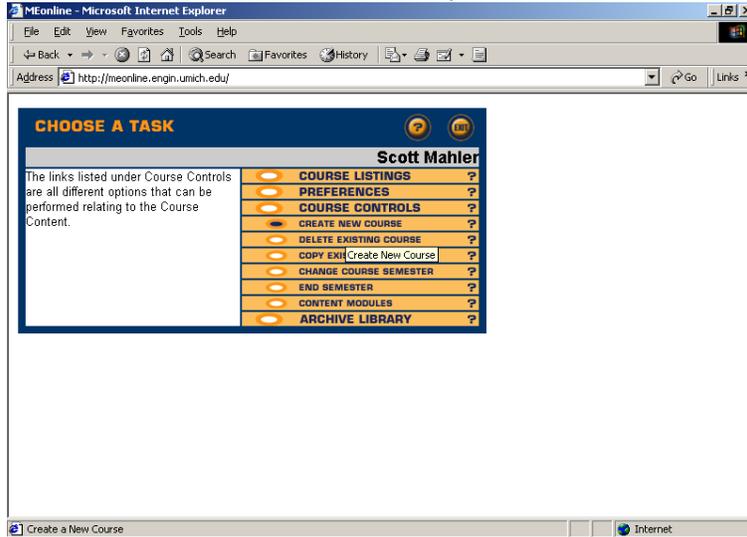
As noted before, there are other settings you can effect within an individual course. But before you can set them, you must create a course framework.

“Create a Course” vs. creating a course

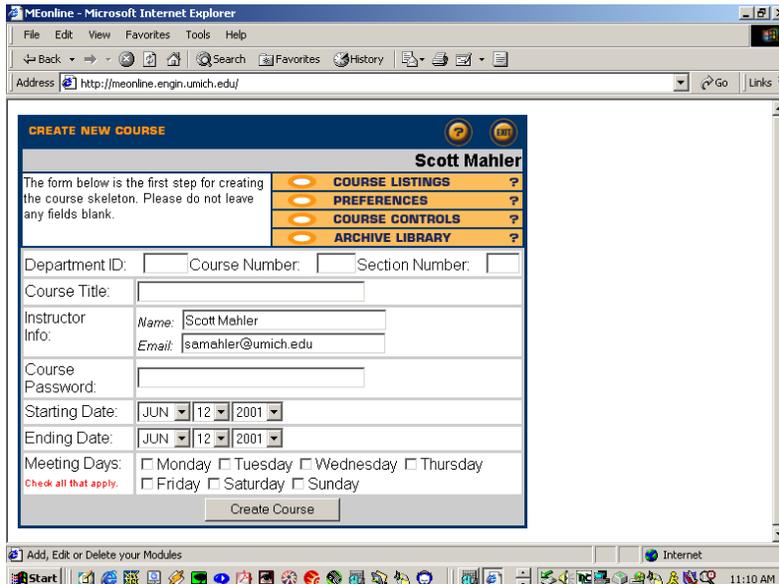
In MEonline, you can ‘Create a Course’. This is not the same as developing the content for an academic offering. In following the directions below, you will fill in web form spaces to create a course framework, or shell, into which you can place content.

To create a course shell, log in to MEonline with your user name and password. When you do, you will be directed to your *Course Listings* page.

Click on “Course Controls” and ‘Create a Course’, as shown here:



Clicking on the ‘Create New Course’ oval will reveal a web form like the one below:



From here, simply fill in the information that is needed for the shell of your course, including the title, duration and other information. The dates chosen will only help the system to construct a framework; and do not affect the display of the course to students. If you don't fill in all necessary information, MEonline will tell you what is missing, and give you the opportunity to correct it.

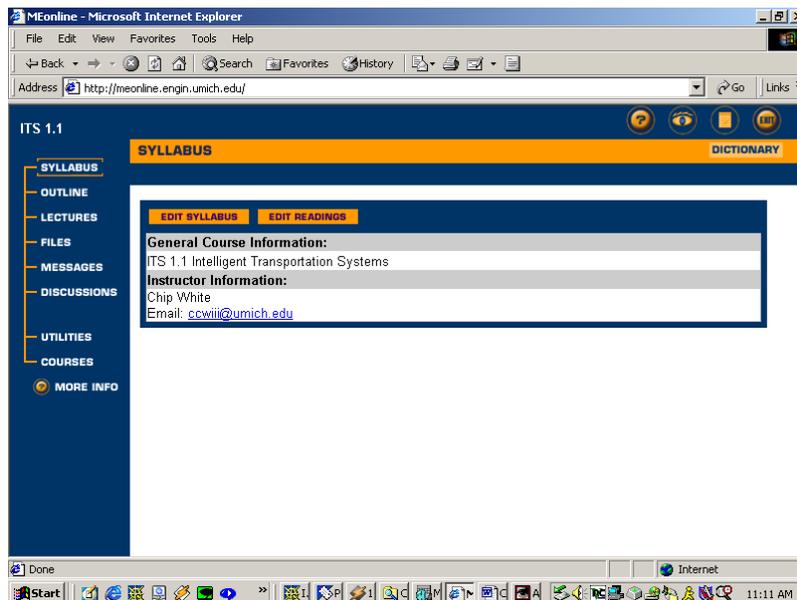
Be sure to click “Create Course” at the bottom of the page! This action sends the information and causes your class to be ‘created’

Note: Filling in this information will automatically create a ‘class meeting’ or session for every date that falls within the parameters you have selected. Individual sessions can be changed, re-ordered, added or deleted later.

When you click ‘Create Course’ a window will appear showing the information you have entered. To change, click ‘Make Changes’. If everything looks fine, click ‘Confirm’.

Pressing ‘Confirm’ will take you to a window that will tell you that a shell for your course has been created. It will provide you with a Course ID and the password you entered earlier. If students are expected to add themselves to a course, this is the information they will need. (You can always find it later, too, by looking in Utilities/Security.) If not, do not worry about this information.

At the bottom of the screen, you will see a note that says ‘To populate this course with content, click [here](#).’ Click on the word [here](#) to go directly to your new course shell. It will look something like this:



By default, all course shells are created with the following features, to which *you* add the content that you wish:

Syllabus - All information about the course, including description, learning outcomes, grading criteria and any other items you wish to include.

Outline – The week-by-week list of activities, created by the dates inserted in the course creation form.

Assignments – A space to define class or group Assignments.

Files – An area where you and students may place materials for the current course.

Messages – Your e-mail address book.

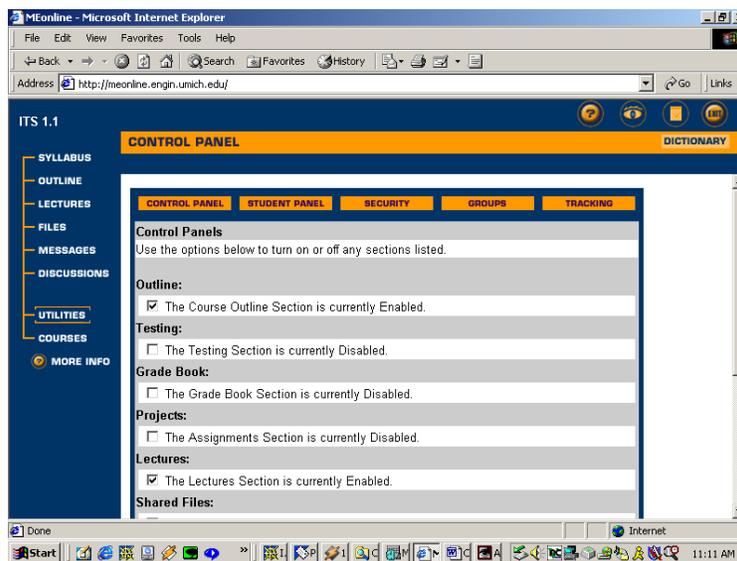
Discussions – The threaded asynchronous discussion area.

Utilities – The area where you manage and monitor the course activities, enter students, and create groups.

Setting Features for Individual Courses

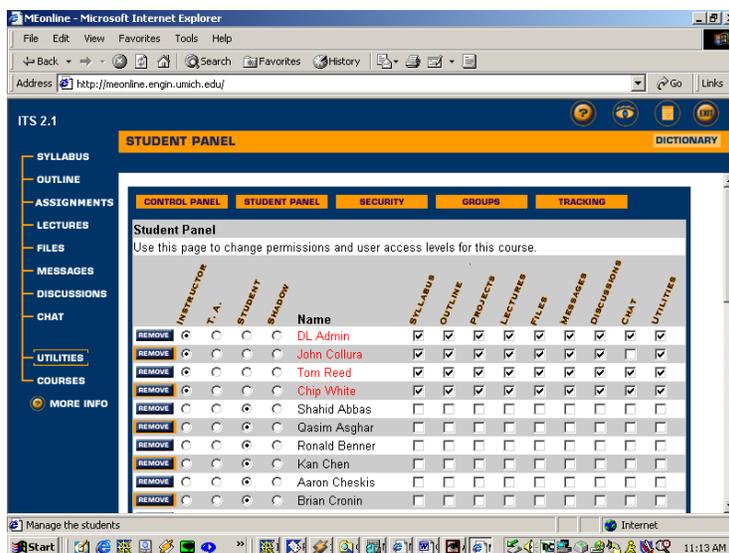
Once you have created a course framework, you can set features that are effective just for that course. Most of these are available in *Utilities*.

When you click on *Utilities*, you will go directly to the ‘Control Panel’ menu, which you can use to select (or deselect) areas that you wish to use in your course. It will look like this:



The options available beyond the defaults are *Testing*, *Grade Book*, *Lectures* and *Chat*. You can opt for using only a few features or all of them. The decision is up to you.

Also accessible from the *Utilities* area is the ‘Student Panel’, in which you can add and delete students, assistants and guests and set usage permissions for the course you are in. Here is a typical student panel in MEonline:

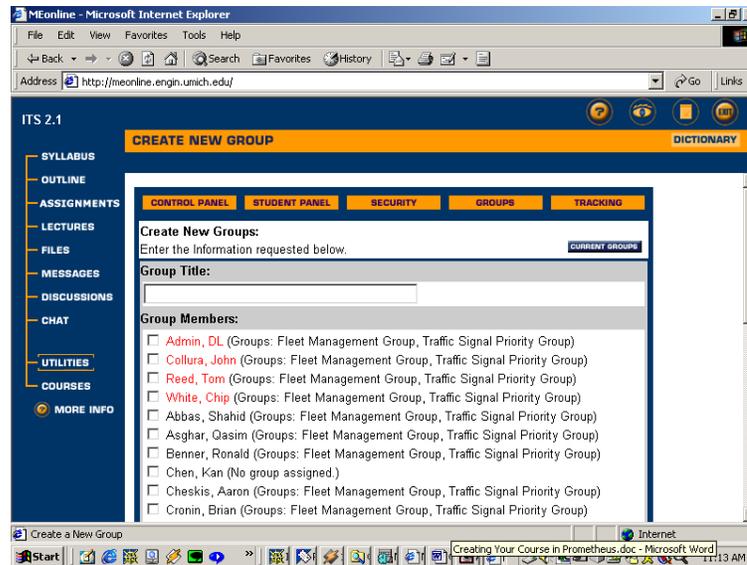


If your institution uses an electronic student management system, students will be added to your roster automatically. If not, these students must be added manually. If students already have an account in MEonline, they may be added here. Alternatively, you may give students the Course ID and password and have them create their own accounts. The course ID and password are shown by clicking the ‘Security’ button at the top of this screen.

Clicking on the different boxes will give those enrolled the ability to edit the areas you have checked. While you probably will not want most students to be able to edit the course, you may want to give this ‘permission’ to a teaching assistant in the *Grade Book* area, or grant editing permission to a co-instructor.

You can also designate a ‘shadow’ participant. A person in this role can view course activities, but no more. The shadow does not appear in the list of participants anywhere in the course, and cannot contribute to any discussions or chat. This role is appropriate for introducing colleagues to courses in MEonline or for deans or administrators to review course activities.

The ‘Groups’ button will lead you to an area in which you can assign students into task, lab or project groups. When you click on the ‘Groups’ button for the first time, you will see that you can create a new group or create random groups. Once you have created at least one group, additional options will appear to edit and delete groups. By clicking on ‘create group’, you will be taken to a form that allows you to choose group participants. A sample is shown below:



You can assign group members simply by checking the box next to their name. Students may belong to multiple groups. You will also be able to choose whether you will be able to view group activity or give the members of the group privacy to work unsupervised.

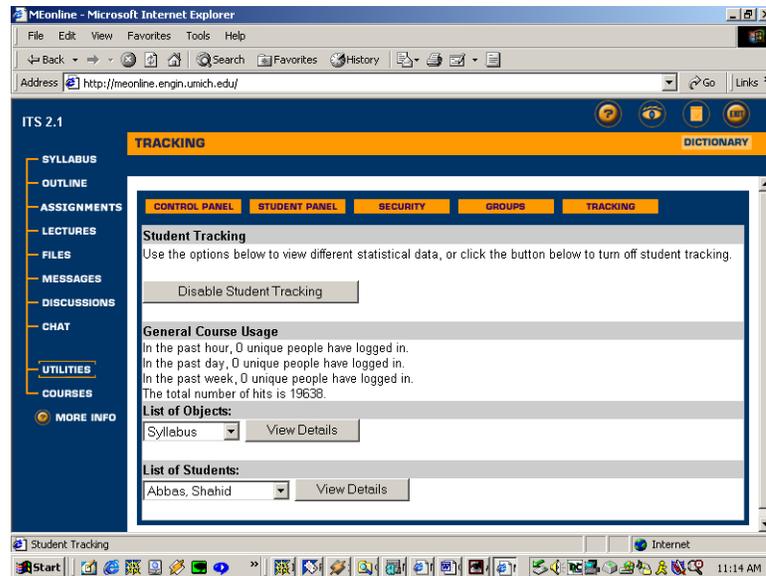
On clicking ‘create random groups’, you will be asked how many groups you wish to create and how many students should be in each group. Upon entering and submitting the information, the system will automatically create groups for you.

Group designations are automatically copied into the following areas:

- Messages (e-mail)
- Discussions
- Files

This will facilitate group collaboration in your course, automatically!

Perhaps the most powerful feature within *Utilities* is the ‘Tracking’ feature. The tracking function is disabled by default. If you wish to be able to monitor your students’ activities in the MEonline course, you will need to enable this feature. Click on ‘Tracking’ and ‘Enable Student Tracking’. You will then see a window something like this:



When tracking is enabled, you can view activity in your course by area or by individual student. Activity is also available at deeper levels, showing you which discussions were read and responded to, which files were downloaded and more. total time spent in each area or on each task is included. This information can help you to effectively manage all of your online students.

A final customization is accessed within the *Outline* section, which will be discussed further later. This option will allow you to remove the dates from the *Outline* screen, giving you more room to enter unit (*Session*) topics.

To remove dates, go to *Outline* and choose 'Order Sessions'. At the top of the window that appears, you can choose to answer **yes** or **no** to the question 'Hide display of dates?' Choosing 'yes' will prevent dates from appearing in the *Outline* page display.

You can make modifications in MEonline at any time. Making them before adding significant amounts of content will help to keep you – and your students – organized.

Adding Content to Your Course

Now you're ready to begin adding content to the course framework. Make sure you have your materials handy. If you don't have everything available, don't worry. MEonline allows you to store course information and make alterations whenever you wish. Because it is web-based, you can work on your course from anywhere you can access the Internet.

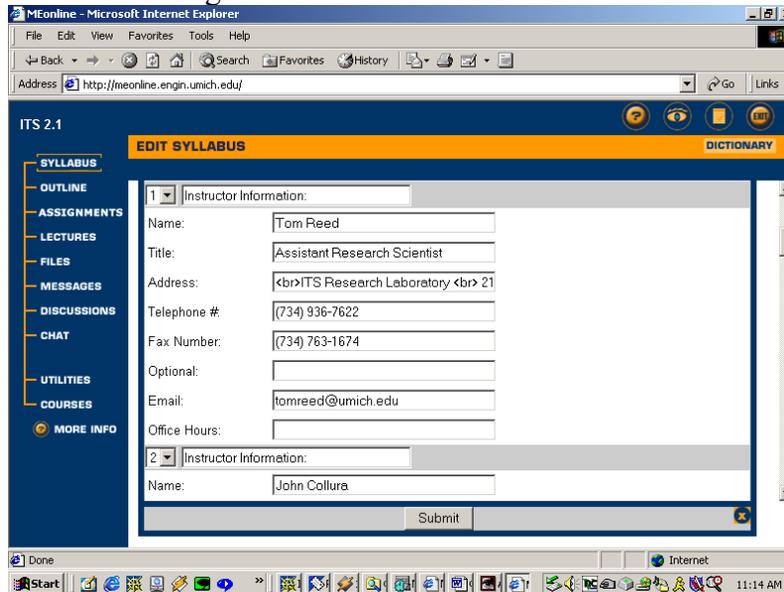
Tip: Uploading large files on a 'slow' modem connection can take time. If you plan to build your courses from home and do not have a fast connection, keep this in mind.

Building Your Syllabus

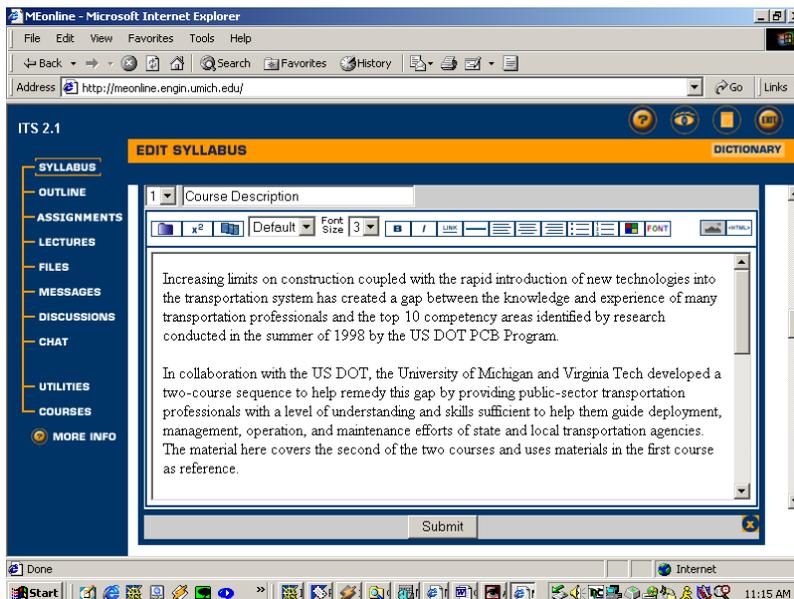
Every time you and your students enter the MEonline-based course, the first page you see will be the Syllabus page. This provides all information you wish to make available about the course, from learning objectives to grading criteria.

Note: You can always find help for the page you are in by clicking on  in the upper right corner of any page.

Select 'Edit Syllabus' at the top of the Syllabus page, and an edit-able form will appear. It will look something like this:



As you scroll down, you will see areas in which you can enter course information. After a series of small boxes like the ones in the picture above, you will come to larger text boxes, into which you can place course objectives, expected outcomes, etc. These will look something like this:



Several titles are provided in the Syllabus by default. These can be changed to anything you wish. Then, you can either type directly into a text box or cut and paste from an existing text document. If you don't want to have a box appear to the student, simply *put nothing in it*.

Using Text Boxes

Note: If you are building your course using the Internet Explorer browser on a PC, you will also have access to a WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) HTML editor. This allows you to create HTML coding without having to learn HTML coding. This feature is ONLY available for Internet Explorer on a PC.

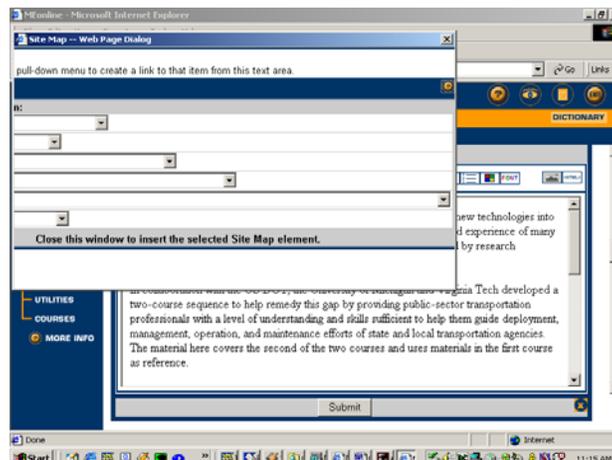
Throughout the MEonline course management system, title bars and text boxes allow you to add and manipulate content. So, once you get used to using them, you will be used to using a major part of MEonline!

Above every text box, you will see three icons:

The file icon () provides access to your File Collection (on the log-in page, under Preferences/File Collection). Using the files areas is discussed in "Using MEonline – Information for Faculty". Anything you have placed in the Files Collection can also be duplicated here, or anywhere you see this icon.

The Equation Editor icon () allows you to create equations to add to your course. These are saved as graphics files, so you can create an equation just once and use it many times throughout the course, if you wish. You can also control whether your students can have access to the Equation Editor so that they can also create equations.

The site map icon () allows you to create hot links that connect students directly from one section of your class to another. For example, you can include a link from *Session 3* directly to a discussion topic in the *Discussion* area (bulletin board), so that students won't get lost looking for the place to post answers to questions and read the responses of others. When you click on the site map icon, you will see a form like the one below:



Here, the Discussions area drop-down menu has been chosen as the link. Any items (tests, discussion topics, Assignments, etc.) you have created will be available on the drop-down menu. Simply highlighting one area, close the window, and the link will be created.

It is a good idea to think in advance about what links you might create to help your students navigate through your course.

After the *Syllabus*

The flexibility built into MEonline allows to you build a course in many different ways. You can approach construction in a linear fashion, moving from Syllabus and through each *Session* in the *Outline* in turn. Or, you can build one complete feature at a time, constructing all quizzes first, for example. You can link from one area to another within MEonline, but in order to link to a specific area, say a particular discussion topic in the discussion board, *the topic has to have been created*. Take this into account when you are creating or converting your course. See the section called 'Framing Communication and Collaboration in MEonline' later in this guide for more information.

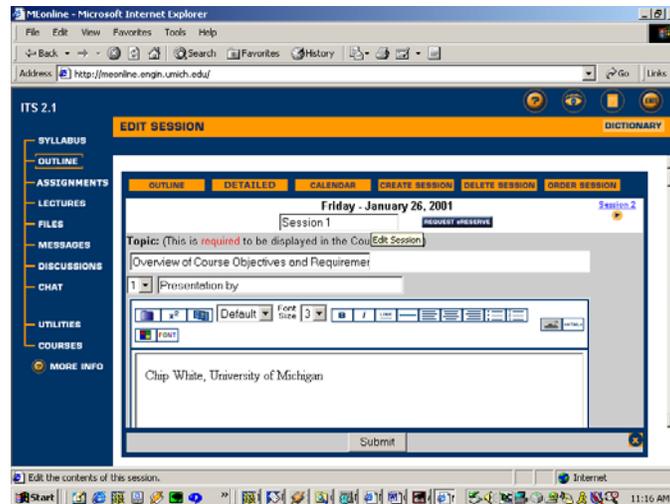
Your style of teaching is not quite like anyone else's; your style of course building is likely to be a bit different from everyone else's, too. As you become comfortable with using the software, new ways of using it will occur to you. Your colleagues - and sometimes your students - will provide insights, as well.

Working with the *Outline*

As noted earlier, the *Outline* was created automatically when you created the shell of your course. This is simply a list of dates that fall within your specified parameters and correspond to 'class meetings'. Individual sessions (or whatever you choose to call them) can be deleted or added as you desire.

Be certain that there is no important information in any sessions you decide to delete. Deleting will remove all information in the session, as well as the session itself.

Click on Outline, then click on the Session you wish to add content to. Click 'Edit Session' and a edit dialog box will appear. It will look quite similar to the *Syllabus* form, like this:



Enter the materials you wish, including any readings. Be sure to scroll down to enter all materials. In addition to any files uploaded from the 'Files Collection' through the text boxes, you can upload multiple files which display at the bottom of the page. This is a particularly good area for class progress reports and any other material that you create during the course.

At the bottom of each *Session* page, you can choose whether you wish to hide this session or not. This gives you control over the order in which students see the session activities.

Don't forget to click 'Submit' to save your entries!

At the top of each 'Edit Session' page, you will note a **REQUEST RESERVE** button. If your institution's library participates in the e-reserve system, this will be your mechanism to add links to reserve documents directly into your course sessions. Clicking on the **REQUEST RESERVE** button will lead to a dialogue box into which you can enter the materials you want attached to your course. When your request is received, the librarian scans or tags it and attaches it, along with any pertinent copyright information. Once the reserve request is attached, an e-mail is automatically sent to you to confirm the action. Check with your support office to determine whether this feature is being used at your institution.

Session Creation Continues...

You can add any number of activities, lecture notes, files, readings or other materials to each session. Many more options are available than in a classroom-based course, so it is a good idea to set aside some time to think about what you want your course to accomplish.

Some questions you might want to ask yourself include:

- Who are my students? How will they be using this class?
- What functions can MEonline provide to help your students participate and collaborate?

- What areas might I want to link to within the course?
- What have I always wanted to do that I couldn't do before?

In other words, you should ask yourself, “*How can I use the features in MEonline to do what I want to do in this class?*”

Tip: You can choose to create Sessions that are hidden until you are ready for the students to see them. To do this, be sure to select 'Hide This Session' at the bottom of the *Edit Session* screen before submitting. To make the session viewable, simply open the *Edit Session* screen again, select 'Do Not Hide This Session' and submit.

MEonline can remove some of the burden of repetitive tasks. For example, if there are recurrent questions, you may want to provide a resource page of FAQs (Frequently-Asked Questions) for your course right in the *Syllabus*. If there are workshops or tutorials that you find yourself doing in every class, you might want to develop a module or a Powerpoint presentation that walks students through the necessary processes. Then, you will be free to use class time to teach!

A few general resources for considering the possibilities when using the Internet to enhance your courses are listed at the end of this guide. Specific training in creating and using online media can be arranged with your Instructional Technology department.

‘Framing’ Communication and Collaboration in MEonline

You can use the features in MEonline to enhance collaboration and communication in your course. You are well aware of the functions of e-mail *messages* in facilitating communication between and among students. Those who are less likely to raise their hands in a classroom will generally feel freer to contribute their opinions in an asynchronous *discussion* format. If students have trouble getting to on-campus advising sessions, you may want to institute ‘virtual’ office hours through the *chat* feature. Here, even students who can't get to a computer can read a transcript of the office hours session if you choose to create a log of it. *Chat* can also facilitate real-time learning with guest speakers who can't make it to campus, allow distance students to interact with you and their classmates, and enable small group discussion and transcribed presentations. The possibilities are numerous.

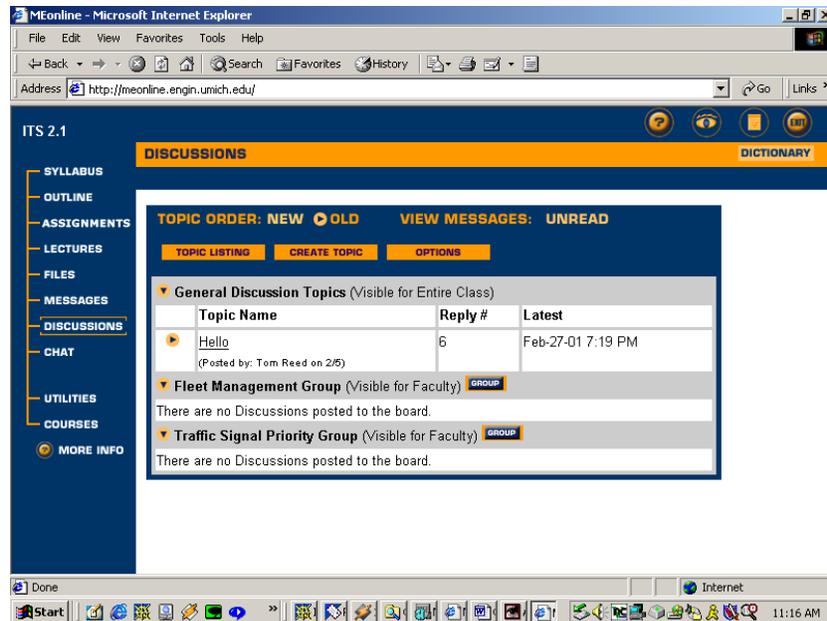
Messages

The *Messages* area is the e-mailbox, allowing you and your students to send e-mails to everyone associated with the class. When students are registered or added to your class, their e-mail information automatically populates this area. You can choose to send e-mails to individuals, groups that you have set up in the *Utilities* section, or to everyone (broadcast). You can also create announcements in this area. Announcements appear at the top of each class members' *Course Listings* page as soon as they log in to MEonline.

Discussions

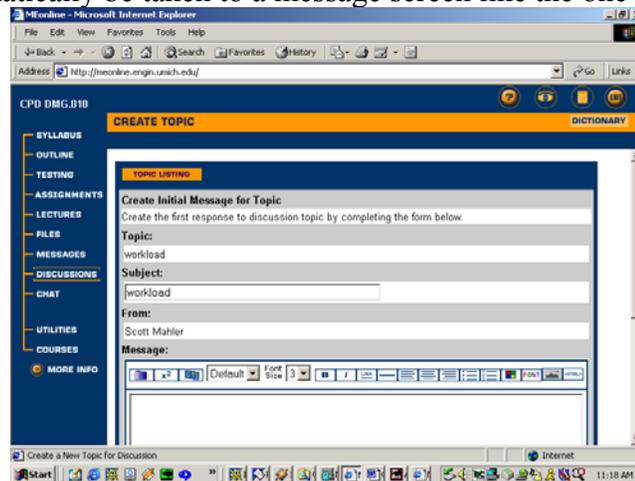
As part of course creation, you can prepare discussion topics and questions that are easy for students to find and use. This is easiest if done during the course creation process, and is required if you wish to build links to topics from one area of the course to another. (Of course, you can also create topics once the course has begun.)

To create a Discussion topic, choose Discussion from the navigation bar. You will see a screen something like this (without topics):



From the bar across the top, choose 'Create Topic' and fill in the name for the topic that you have chosen. *Be sure to click on 'Submit'!*

You will automatically be taken to a message screen like the one below:



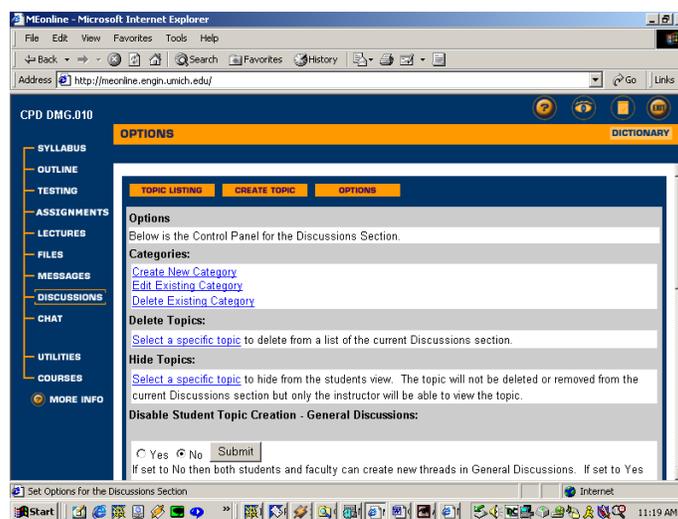
The topic you have chosen is filled in under both topic and subject. You can change the subject here, if you wish. For example, your topic might be 'Week One

Questions' and you might have several subjects under that topic for students to respond to.

You will also note that your name (as creator of the message) has been filled in, and that a text box is available with which to post a message responding to this topic. Just like every other text box in MEonline, it provides access to the *Files Collection*, the *Equation Editor* and the *Site Map*.

After you have entered a message, scroll down to the bottom of the screen and note that you can check a box that will cause an e-mail message to be sent to you whenever someone responds to this message. You can submit the message to the database by clicking on 'Submit Message'.

What if you make a mistake? The *Options* button, at the top of the *Topic Listing* screen will take you a page where you can make deletions and other adjustments. It will look like this:



Here, as you will see, you can work with categories and topics and set permissions for students working in the *Discussions* area. Scroll down to see the other options available.

Categories are areas under which discussion topics are listed. MEonline gives you a 'General Discussion Topics' category area by default; you can set up categories for project teams, discussion about the final, or anything else that meets your needs.

In this screen, you can delete or hide a specific topic. You can also choose to be the only person creating topics in General Discussions and/or in any Categories that are set up. You can also choose to disable student creation of topics in any group areas that you may have set up in the *Utilities/Groups* screen.

This is also the screen in which you chose whether or not students can edit their own messages or attach files to discussions. By default, both of these options are disabled. Finally, you have the option to select the number of threads a topic may contain. This pertains to subtopics, and not to individual messages, which are unlimited.

You may want to limit the number of subtopics created to manage discussions and keep them from wandering too far off the subject.

As with any other areas in MEonline, these can be set and re-set at any time during the course. Knowing where these features and options are and how to use them before problems develop will go far in helping you to manage the online portion of your course.

Hint: Make a list of communications functions you want MEonline to help your students participate in. These could be:

- discussions (asynchronous)
- chat (synchronous - group, virtual office hours, etc.)

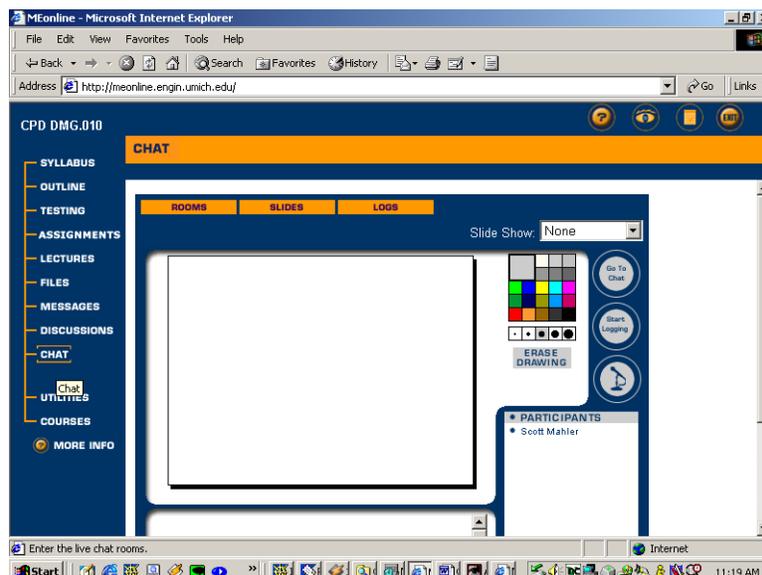
What other ideas do you have?

Chat

The *Chat* function in MEonline allows you to interact with students synchronously. Using this feature, you can hold virtual office hours, present slides and audio lectures while your students type responses, host special guests, and provide student project groups with virtual meeting rooms in which they can discuss group Assignments in real-time.

To use Chat, you and your students must download and install the Shockwave™ plug-in from the Macromedia website (www.macromedia.com). MEonline will search for and alert you and your students if the plug-in is not installed, and provide a hot link directly to the Macromedia website for download. This process takes just a few minutes, but it is important that everyone do it before a Chat event.

After the Shockwave™ plug-in has been installed, choosing the *Chat* area will open a window that includes a whiteboard, text areas, a participant list and several options. It will look something like this:



On the whiteboard, you can draw objects that are seen by anyone who is logged on and in *Chat*. You can also display slides (.jpeg and .gif files) that you have uploaded, and discuss those with your class.

On the right side of the window, you can choose to hide the whiteboard by clicking on 'Go to *Chat*'. This will expand the chat board so that more responses can be seen. You can also start and stop 'Logging', a feature that transcripts the chats as they occur, and saves them so that students who were unable to attend the chat event can later read what happened. Finally, you can activate the microphone icon so that you can speak to students. (Your computer must have a microphone and students must have speakers. All participants must have sound cards in their computers, a regular feature of most computers.) When you use the speaker option, you can verbally solicit and provide answers to questions that have been typed in by students.

The buttons across the top of the *Chat* window provide access to additional features:

- The 'Rooms' feature gives you the ability to create virtual areas where your students can interact in small groups.
- The 'Slides' area allows you to name and create slideshows to enhance your course. Once you have created a slideshow, you can choose to show it by selecting from the pull-down menu under 'Slides' at the upper right corner of the chat window.
- 'Logs' provides access to transcribed chats. These are designated by date and time.

You may want to experiment with the *Chat* area before deciding whether you will use it in your course. If you need any help, just remember that the question mark icon -



- at the upper left corner of the screen always leads to help text for the area you are in.

Resources for Further Information

Here is a short list of materials to help you plan the online portions of your courses reflectively. Your own institution can also provide guidance and support in making this transition.

“The Distance Education Handbook”

<http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/academic/ctl/DL/>

Prepared by Mesa County Community College to support its distance faculty, the online handbook contains easy-to-use processes for preparing, building and teaching your online courses, as well as sections on assessment, technical issues and an extensive bibliography.

“Electronic Collaboration – A Practical Guide for Educators”

http://www.lab.brown.edu/public/ocsc/collaboration_guide/

A complete how-to guide to designing and facilitating collaborative learning online. A joint project of Brown University and the U.S. Department of Education. Downloadable as a .pdf, as well.

Muskingum College's (OH) Learning Strategies Database provides bibliographies, content-specific and general learning strategies and concrete examples. Applicable to both on-line and classroom-based learners.

<http://muskingum.edu/~cal/database/database.html>

“20 rules for turning knowledge into learning” is geared toward creating learning materials and tests that are specific and focused:

<http://www.supermemo.com/articles/20rules.htm>

<http://meonline.engin.umich.edu>

Comments, questions and suggestions should be submitted to meonline@umich.edu