

Brown Gives a Green Light to Grouper



BROWN

At Brown University, students expect to access an integrated online learning environment. Staff and students collaborate in real-

time using a wiki. Audio and video for archived lectures, presentations, and more are now easily accessed through Apple's iTunes U. All stay connected via their email inbox using a mailing list manager.

But because each of these applications maintained their own group roster information, keeping the access rights consistent across these services became overwhelming. And with dozens of applications and thousands of courses and users across the Brown campus, management of groups quickly turned into a complex and growing challenge.

The Problem

Each student may be a member of a dozen or more demographic groups. Add 14 roles for each of the 4,500 courses, and the total number of groups tops out around 60,000.

Brown needed a groups management tool that could keep track of and provision existing group data for the applications, reflect new information and status changes from the identity management and course enrollment systems, and offer a customizable user interface for instructional technology administrators to define and update course groups. And all of this had to be driven by an integrated institutional policy.

The Solution

Brown chose Grouper Groups Management Toolkit to combine improved groups management capabilities with a better user experience. Using a course feed from the course enrollment system, the university uses a single interface – Grouper – to manage membership information and provide student

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data to various applications. For a system diagram, see: <https://wiki.internet2.edu:443/confluence/x/LUU>.

The initial Grouper deployment manages groups in support of WebCT course management software, Confluence wiki, Apple's iTunes U, and Majordomo email list manager. "Although the transition was transparent to students and faculty, Grouper allowed us to enable centralized course group management across our instructional technology applications," said James Cramton, lead programmer/analyst at Brown.

The Result

Since Grouper works across multiple applications, Brown University's Instructional Technology Group will spend significantly less time setting up and maintaining groups in different applications, particularly at the beginning of each semester.

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Additionally, the Grouper implementation allows Brown to support current services while they plan expanded support for additional applications or demographic groups, as needed.

About Grouper

Grouper Groups Management Toolkit development is a result of the efforts of the Grouper Working Group, supported with funding from NSF, Internet2, the University of Chicago, the University of Bristol and JISC. You can read more about Grouper on the back of this page and at <http://grouper.internet2.edu>.



Grouper Groups Management Toolkit

Giving Stewards Control of Groups to Manage Membership and the Resources They Access

Internet2's Grouper Groups Management Toolkit enables project managers, departments, institutions and end users to create and manage institutional and personal groups. It puts the control of a group in the hands of its steward and enables the person to manage the membership and the resources a group can access.

Why Should I Use Groups?

Separate applications may use groups to track an individual's role, or to determine which users are authorized to access the resource. Because groups are managed separately in each application, keeping the membership roster consistent across these services becomes very difficult. If a member leaves a project, for example, the group's email list, wiki space, calendar, research database and other shared resources need to be updated separately.

Grouper provides a way to define a group once and use that group across multiple applications.

Manage from One Location

Grouper consolidates group information and creates a single point of management. Membership changes are done once and provisioned to the applications. A group owner can define membership, create a group structure within a domain, or delegate all of this to someone else.

Distribute Control

Grouper keeps the group membership decisions in the hands of the business/group owners, access control in the hands of the application owners, and the technology management in the hands of the technologists. Individuals can also use the system to review their group memberships.

IT administrators are relieved from the burden of keeping up with the day-to-day group changes and Grouper increases the overall integrity of the policy and technology interaction.

Help Collaboration Happen

With Grouper, an owner sets up a group in one spot, feeding membership information to applications like

email lists and calendars. The owner needs no technical skills to create, change or delete groups or members.

For example, a researcher might create a group and enable members to participate on an email list or view a web site. Students use Grouper to set up and manage groups for similar applications as they work together on shared projects and class work.

Grouper enables group management institution-wide and on an individual level, providing more secure, robust and responsive methods to control access to resources.

Ease Staff Support Load

Grouper separates the management of groups from the technical system, so a change in technology has no effect. This reduces the end-user support calls associated with underlying infrastructure changes. Removing IT from the middle of managing groups will help ease your helpdesk headaches as well.

How Do I Get Started?

To learn more about the Grouper Groups Management Toolkit, visit the Grouper website (<http://grouper.internet2.edu>) and join the community by participating on the email lists and attending the workshops and presentations offered around the country.

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