



## Course Management Systems (CMS) Analysis

### 1. History of use of Etudes and Moodle at LAMC

LAMC has been delivering online classes since 2000. No course management system was employed in the early days. The first LAMC CMS was Etudes Classic in 2003. The offering of online/hybrid and web-enhanced classes grew as follows: (2003 (19), 2004(51), 2005(72), 2006(76). In 2006, LAMC started using Moodle for free along with Etudes Classic, and Coursecompass (Pearson Publishing, now Ecollege). In 2007, LAMC adopted Etudes NG. The costs of Etudes grew, and since the use of moodle was at first free, and very "cost effective" - the college did a Course Management Review ([FN-1](#)), and the DE, EPC, Academic Senate and College Council in December 2009 approved the adoption of Moodle as a single CMS (with the exception of Coursecompass/ECollege CMS for Sociology, Psychology, and English. This CMS is a textbook publishing website which students gain access to by paying an additional cost in addition to the costs of the textbook). The transition from etudes to moodle occurred during the Spring 2010 semester, and as of July1, 2010, the contract with etudes expired, and the college fully converted to using moodle.

Moodle then updated from 1.9 to 2.0 version in Fall 2012. Costs for moodle dramatically increased, and there were many problems in adopting the new version of moodle 2.0 including slow server speeds, unanticipated server interruptions, problems with synchronizing with the LACCD Student Information System (SIS), problems in running multimedia, and a host of other problems. At the end of Fall 2012, the DE Committee decided to participate in the Etudes Pilot Project ([FN-2](#)) to "test drive" the new developments in the improved Etudes NG CMS, and to then do an analysis of both moodle and etudes to decide if it benefited the college to convert from moodle to etudes starting July 1, 2013.

The Etudes Pilot provided the following components: one semester (free) use of etudes, and (free) training (Spring 2013). Faculty participated in workshops during the Spring 2013 semester in January, March, and May, and more than 60 faculty have trained in and received etudes certification ([FN-3](#)). This list includes all of our faculty teaching online classes and a majority of the members of the DE Committee, along with more than 20 faculty who are using it in their on campus classes to supplement or web-enhance 40 classes at Mission, and more than 1600 students. Such widespread training in a short time evidences the faculty support and "buy in" to move from moodle to etudes. One reason for the fairly quick acceptance of Etudes NG is the "hands on" training provided by the excellent Etudes support staff who are all faculty who have taught online.

### Costs

Another reason for converting is found in the "spiraling costs" of moodle. See the below comparison of costs. The District IT support person assigned to assist for moodle has been reassigned to work on the new Student Information System. As a result, each college which uses moodle must separately purchase, as part of the costs of moodle, support from the hosting company (Remote Learner). Etudes Classic and NG has always included support as part of its overall cost. In addition, Etudes NG includes, as part of the price, development programmers who customize the etudes CMS to fit the arising needs of the faculty.

### Costs of Etudes

Year	Cost \$
2006-2007	13,400
2007-2008	13,200
2008-2009	16,000
2009-2010	16,000

### Cost of Moodle

Year	Cost \$
2010-2011	9,000
2011-2012	11,000
2012-2013	15,000
estim. 2013-2014	35,352

### Cost of Etudes

Year	Cost \$
estim. 2013-2014	16,750
estim. 2014-2015	28,500
estim. 2015-2016	28,500

## **2. Features and Functionality - Etudes and Moodle**

The following is a functionality report prepared by our IT staff at LAMC ([FN-4](#)):

1. Moodle “default installation” is a loosely bound list of CMS functions that needs on site developers and tech knowledgeable instructors to pull it all together effectively. Moodle, in my opinion doesn’t make the last mile and can lead to poor instructional design.
2. Etudes is a finished online student learning environment. It has a clean consistent look, common course navigation, and smoother workflows to accommodate best learning practices.

The difference with Moodle is that it is completely open source. Cost wise it allows an organization like Mission College to quickly adopt and use the “default mode” product with little effort and no cost other than hosting. Etudes is also an open source project. However, colleges must pay an additional fee to the Etudes foundation. The foundation employs an instructional designer and developers to integrate the instructional tools for sharper workflow and a consistent learning environment in response to an active community of California community college instructors.

**Course functions and features** – Both systems have grade books, tests/quizzes, discussion boards, and assignment upload capability.

- **Grade book Workflow**
- **Modules functions** – Modules like Chat in Moodle have to be installed by the hosting provider to enable it for the instructors to place into their courses. In Etudes these modules are preinstalled in the system and the instructor can enable/disable them in the course menu.
- **Lesson building** – Etudes lesson builder is a kind of PowerPoint wizard crafted to make lesson plans. In Moodle the instructor mixes and matches course features by making web links on a web page. The emphasis is on, “how do I link this page together.” In Etudes the instructor is composing lesson plans.
- **Mobile device support** – Moodle offers multiple mobile apps for download. The Apple store, for example, has 4 apps 1 of which clearly states it is “unsupported”. Others only work for specific colleges. Each app has a separate support community. The apps are buggy having to accommodate a worldwide installation base. Etudes wrote inTouch for Etudes to work for their system and has one point of contact for support. A feature list and screen shots are included on the last pages.
- **Faculty support** – An online faculty support community is built into Etudes. The support discussions are monitored and common instructor questions are definitively outlined in the posts. When flaws are found they are reported directly to the developers and fixed. There is no centralized support community for Moodle instructors.
- **Student interface** -- Etudes places course elements like calendar and the message box are in a standard layout that all course home pages share. The syllabus is listed as a menu item. Etudes discussion threads are easy for students to scroll through and read. In Moodle it is a chore to click into and out of each post to read them all. In Etudes students gain confidence in their ability to participate in each online classroom they take. In Moodle each instructor manages home page layout and course

elements are often buried in the content.

- **Student online experience** - Etudes common placement and fill in the blank approach makes it simple to check for online compliance and reinforces best online practices. Moodle sites can be harder to evaluate and depend more on instructor technical ability and the student's web proficiency.
- In closing, Moodle expects instructors knowledgeable in technology and instructional design to construct online classrooms. The Moodle classroom functions require students to be more web proficient as well. The Etudes foundation provides a better online learning experience guided by an online community of instructors. New instructors and students will readily see the difference just by logging into Etudes.

### 3. Comparison of Etudes to Moodle (FN-5)

What are the advantages to using Etudes vs. Moodle? From instructors who have shared their experience with Moodle :

- No way to automatically enter a cut-off time for late accepted assignments in Moodle.
- No way to allow both submitted text and an attached file on assignment submissions in Moodle. Etudes allows unlimited attachments and you can paste text for your teacher.
- You cannot easily see when new assignments are turned in in Moodle. You must click on Assignments then click on "view # submitted" and then you can see if any assignments are not graded. This was comparing it to Etudes Assignment tool which shows you \*clearly\* if there are any ungraded as soon as you click on Assignments.
- You cannot see the number of points you assigned to an assignment from the Assignments area in Moodle. You must go to the gradebook. Too many clicks to find information. Students do not see the total points for that assignment prior to submitting the assignment, unless the instructor includes the point total possible in the assignment instructions. This allows for errors, since if you have to change the points possible, you must remember to change it in two places. In contract, in Etudes, instructors and students can see the points that an assignment is worth from Assignments.
- You cannot override points earned on quiz questions within the quiz itself in Moodle. To override a quiz grade you must override the entire quiz score through the GB. However that score is not reflected on the quizzes page so this can be confusing since the GB shows one score and the quiz page shows a different score. There is no tracking of your changes. In Etudes, you can override the quiz score in the quiz itself, and the change is reflected instantly (and points adjusted automatically) in the quiz AND the GB. Etudes allows the instructor to adjust grades for one student, if needed.
- Forums are kind of clunky to work with in Moodle. For an instructor to start a new forum (discussion topic) you have to make numerous selections (minimum of 10 choices must be selected). Etudes makes set up and grading of discussions so easy!
- Setting up multiple choice with multiple answers is difficult in Moodle, though it does provide more options. If you want to set it up so that each answer is worth the same number of points plus or minus depending on if they select it correctly, then you must make the calculations as to what that answer is

worth yourself. It is much easier to simply give overall points for the question and let the program calculate the percentage of the total points were earned on that question due to the selected answers (Example: In Etudes if you have a question worth 4 points and there are 4 possible answers and only two are correct, you don't do anything special other than mark which answers are correct. Then if a student selects every answer the student will get a total of 0 points for that because it calculates  $+2 + -2=0$ . To set up the question this way in Moodle, it is not that intuitive. To select your correct answers you would set them as 50% and to select the wrong choices you set them as -50%. I am still not sure if this is correct.

- Too much flexibility of setting up the course homepage of Moodle, which includes where navigation links will be located. If there is no standard way to set up the home page, students must learn the setup of each course. There will be no universal understanding of the students that the calendar is always here, or the messages box is always there. Etudes allows instructors to remove tools, but if they are enabled they always show up in a consistent location so students can find them if they are enabled. There are no technical support inquiries from students in Etudes, as a result. The system is very intuitive for students, and the consistency across courses helps learners.
- The way that forums are set up in Moodle makes it difficult to read the various posts, having to click back and forth on the links to read all of them. Students skip over them and not read them because of this. It seems to take away from the community building aspect. I didn't feel as involved, even though I went into the forums daily. It was that the posts were separate, and not viewable all on the same screen. In contract, in Etudes, you can read all the communication in one page.
- No bookmark capability for discussions in Moodle. Etudes supports bookmarks.
- No way to automatically set up a forum to open or close. Etudes offers this not just for forums, but also for topics. It is a great functionality that automates this tedious work.
- Cannot lock a forum in Moodle. Etudes allows manual or automatic lock (on a date).
- Adding equations is difficult (but I don't know of any online method yet that is easy).
- You can't set early to automatically open forums on certain dates or close on certain dates in Moodle. This must be done manually. Etudes supports open and close dates in forums and topics, and the discussions open, close, and get locked automatically.

**Testimonials - Below are testimonials from faculty who have used Moodle and were getting trained in Etudes:**

- “The gradebook of Moodle is totally unusable. My faculty can’t figure it out. The Etudes GB is nice and simple by comparison. Not many bells and whistles, but it does the job, and it’s easy to use!”
- “Wow! The discussion tool of Etudes is impressive. I am finding that my peers who use Moodle avoid group work and collaboration because it’s not easy to grading. What a shame to not assign graded discussions because of this, when it’s the heart of online classes. I am excited about the grading of discussions functionality of Etudes. So easy!”

- “I like that Etudes includes the ability to view all the assignments in one area, all the lessons in one area, all the discussions in one area, etc. and not just have one main list of the schedule by week, with everything together. The schedule helps, but it’s nice to see that Etudes offers the Course Map, but also allows students to view all tests, all assignments, all lessons in one spot.”
- “This may be a minor point, but I do think that impressions count. I think Saturday morning cartoons when I am on Moodle. I don't think it is an appropriate ‘atmosphere’ for teaching college-level reading, writing and critical thinking. I can't imagine getting into the higher level cognitive functioning using it.”
- “The community of practice (Users Group) that ETUDES offers is a huge asset for online faculty. Yes, Moodle has its own community, but it is worldwide and I think the efficacy of a community of practice is hampered when it gets too big. Etudes offers intimate support for its college faculty.
- “ETUDES is being designed specifically for and serves California Community Colleges, which may not have glaringly different requirements from other schools, but some subtle yet important differences. Add to this the fact that as an ETUDES faculty member, you do actually have input as to how ETUDES features and the tools used in it evolve.”
- “I found Moodle has a steeper learning curve (this is subjective of course). I think it is more difficult to do certain things with Moodle (more clicks and more settings to set).”
- “I've been taking a four week course on Moodle--not the best in the world. I don't think that it's that hard a program, but so far, there's a lot of things I haven't a clue about. Vivie Sinou and the ETUDES training facilitators were exemplary when it came to course layout, instruction, and support, especially in answering questions, some of which I now realize had obvious answers.”

**A matrix of features of Etudes is very comprehensive and can be found at [\(FN-6\)](#)** - Prepared by: Vivie Sinou, Exec. Director

**Below are Twenty (20) Reasons Why Etudes: [\(FN-7\)](#)**

**Twenty Reasons why Etudes**

1. Non-profit, 501 (c)(3) organization – “mission is the benefit of its members; not profit”
2. Etudes focuses on the needs of California Community Colleges. A decade of proven record.
3. 99.999% system availability.
4. Enterprise quality platform. Etudes offers a super reliable and stable environment.
5. Stability of pricing. No more than 3% increases per year.
6. Quality faculty support and responsiveness, 24/7.
7. Quality student support and responsiveness, 24/7

8. User communities of best practices for faculty to exchange ideas.
9. Active user support forums where faculty seek support and input on teaching practices.
10. No technical staff or programmers required by DE programs. Etudes handles all technology.
11. Roster importation and site installations included in hosting fees. No additional charges.
12. Superior, polished CMS product (see Matrix of Features herein).
13. Student Centered product, aid in promoting student success and retention.
14. Faculty have input in new features and tools. They drive the evolution of the product.
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16. Professional development opportunities for Etudes faculty in tools and pedagogy.
17. Annual "Users" conference for faculty to share best practices in online learning.
18. Free "Train the Trainer" Certification program for DE Coordinators.
19. Unlimited storage in course sites.
20. Generous data retention policy. 3 1/2 years of course content always available.

3. **Survey** - Users (Students and Faculty) will be surveyed regarding their satisfaction with the CMS systems Etudes, Moodle, Ecollege, or "other" and the survey results will be included and documented herein to support the DE Committee recommendation in this report.

1. **Master Plan for Usage** - Whichever, course management system LAMC chooses, either to continue with moodle or to transition to etudes, there must be careful future planning with the utilization and usage of the college CMS. All too often, faculty enthusiastically get trained in etudes, and then use the system to just post their syllabus and a few URL/websites. This is not an economic use of our CMS. Faculty who need to post their syllabus and a few links should use the faculty portal. The costs of our CMS increase with the number of faculty and student users. Therefore, it is important to develop a usage policy and plan to maximize the use of the CMS and to control the increasing costs. DE will develop a Master Plan for Usage of its CMS during the Fall 2013 semester, and will have it reviewed and approved through the EPC, Academic Senate and College Council.

**Budgetary Line Item for our Campus CMS** – During the ACCJC visit, the accreditation team asked the Technology resource people on Campus who had completed the report on Technology (Hanh Tran, Curtis Stage, Paul McKenna, and Danny Villanueva) why the 3 year replacement cycle for computers

was not included as a “line item” in the yearly fiscal budget. This same inquiry form ACCJC applies equally to all of the required technology expenses, including the yearly funding of the CMS. In fact, our Self-Evaluation report included an Actionable Improvement Plan on the same issue of funding technology. Our campus VP of Admin Services, Danny Villanueva has agreed that budgeting and funding of our campus CMS should be included as a “line item” and not go through the discretionary Budget Committee process as a “above baseline expense”. A proposed 3 year budget for Etudes was submitted to the office of Administrative Services so they could plan and include funding for our CMS for the upcoming fiscal year(s).

5. **Support Issues** - One reason which compels the review of moodle occurred over the last year (2012-2013) with the "roll out" of moodle's new 2.0 program. Moodle 2.0 substantially increased its features to "stay competitive" with other CMS. In doing so, it required much more attention, support, and implementation, resources, and server capacity. At first, moodle 2.0 was "buggy" and very slow. Remote Learner (the current hosting company for our moodle 2.0 implementation) changed its servers several time in response to the "slowness" issues. Also, LACCD IT personnel and Remote Learner attempted over two semesters, with many problems, to synchronize the student information system student data base and moodle 2.0. For at least one semester, manual uploads were used to act as a "work around" and DE coordinators were required to do the “manual uploads” on a daily basis while encountering many problems and issues. Synchronization was accomplished at the last minute by LACCD IT, literally a week before the ACCJC visit to LAMC and Pierce which uses moodle. The current moodle synchronization, still **does not remove students** who drop the class leaving moodle faculty with the monumental task of removing students in their respective moodle classes. Etudes synchronization avoids this problem with etudes programming staff personally handling uploads every night, which includes uploading all new students, and removing students who have dropped or been excluded by faculty in the LACCD student information system.

Another “sticky issue” concerns removing students from the CMS and then re-instating students to the CMS. Although this does not occur regularly, it is an important feature, since reinstated students need to have all of their previously submitted work, re-uploaded to the CMS. Moodle 2.2 no longer supports this feature with a “one click” return of grades and work of the reinstated work. A complex set of programming language is required to reinstate students into the moodle class which is beyond most faculty. Etudes, on the other hand, provides this feature. Such customization is a “hallmark” of etudes programming, and does not leave the faculty in the “lurch” when the CMS upgrades to a newer version.

Further, the LACCD IT person, responsible for moodle issues has been reassigned to work on the implementation of the District student information system creating a "lack of necessary support", and dramatically increasing the costs of moodle (see above) for Fiscal Years 2013-2014 as each college will be required to pay an additional and costly expense to the hosting company (Remote Learner) for support of moodle on their campus. The above quote for moodle 2.0 for Fiscal 2013-2014 includes a limited amount of support (just 12 hours per month).

## 7. **Transition Issues**

A. **Backup** - The DE Committee determined that two years back up is sufficient. That would be from Spring 2012 to Spring 2013. For the most recent year (Fall 2012-Spring 2013 which is located on the



moodle 2.0 server, our faculty will be responsible to save their course content and materials on their local computers for upload and integration into etudes. This MUST BE DONE no later than June 30, 2013.

For the previous year ( Fall 2011- Spring 2012), faculty need to contact the DE Coordinator before the expiration of the moodle contract on 6/30/13 and request the DE Coordinator to back up course materials from either Fall 2011 or Spring 2012.

B. **Conversion**- Etudes has developed a "simple - one click" conversion tool along with video and text instructions ([FN-8](#)) for moodle faculty converting their moodle shells to etudes. This will greatly assist with converting and transitioning our moodle faculty over to etudes for Fall 2013. Etudes programming staff took the time, energy and efforts to produce this tool, and only reflects their "level of support" we can anticipate in the future, compared to the lack of support we have faced with converting from moodle 1.9 to moodle 2.0 over the last year.

c. **Training** - By the end of May, the Etudes Pilot Project will have trained over 60 of our faculty, including all of our faculty teaching online with both moodle and ECollege. The certification process created by Etudes is a model "best practice" and again is a "deal breaker" since Etudes training staff, and the Director, herself, provided "on campus", "hands on" training for "free" during January, and our faculty fully embraced the pilot project by participating in the training.

d. **Approval of our current 38 Online Moodle** – The DE Committee decided that transition to Etudes NG for Fall 2013 would require all online faculty to upload their moodle content into an etudes development shell and to have it reviewed and approved by their respective Department Chair and Dean by 6/30/13. Once the DE Committee reviews, and adopts the recommendation to transition to Etudes, the recommendation will be presented to EPC, Academic Senate and College Council for review and approval by the end of May, with the signing of the etudes contract thereafter. Etudes development shells will be provided to faculty shortly after the end of the Spring 2013 semester (beginning of June), and with the "one click" conversion tool in place, our online faculty will have their shells ready to review by mid-June, giving Department Chairs and Deans sufficient time to review and approve the upload of content. Note that all 38 online classes we reviewed by the DE Committee as part of the Substantive Change Approval in Fall 2011 ([FN-9](#)), and was approved by ACCJC in June of 2012. Therefore, there is relative certainty that our online classes in moodle are "robust and rigorous" and deans and chairs need only verify that content has been uploaded into the etudes development shells, and do not have to re-verify the rigor of the content of our online classes.

#### **Footnotes**

**FN-1 - [Course Management Review](#)**

**FN-2 - [Etudes Pilot Project](#)**

**FN-3 - [List of Etudes Certification Graduates](#)**

**FN-4 - [IT Report – Etudes v. Moodle](#)**

**FN-5 - [Advantages of Using Etudes vs. Moodle](#)**

**FN-6 - [Etudes Matrix of features and functionality](#)**

**FN-7 - [Twenty \(20\) Reasons for Etudes](#)**

**FN- 8 - [Etudes Conversion tool for moodle shell contents](#)**

**FN- 9 – [Substantive Change Proposal](#) (page 36 & 89)**

**updated: 4/15/13 – Monday @ 10:41 am CMSA-16**

