

# About Moodle

## First, what is a course management system?

A Course Management System, or CMS, is simply described as a web service that provides an easy way for faculty and students to accomplish some common course related tasks in secure, easy to edit, structured, course-based web sites.

## What is Moodle?

Moodle is an open source CMS. It is different than a commercial CMS in the sense that it is not marketed or sold by any company. It was created by many like minded educators from all over the world and is distributed for free. By design, it is modular and extensible. The Moodle web application is written in PHP, a widely-used general-purpose scripting language that is especially suited for web development.

## What is the difference between CommonSpot and Moodle for course web sites?

The ITS department at Colby traditionally provided some CMS-like functions to faculty and students through CommonSpot, the College's Content Management System. It is important to note that CommonSpot itself is not a course management system in the traditional sense. CommonSpot is an application best described as an enterprise web content management system. "Content management system," confusingly, shares the same initials as "course management system" but content management systems are designed primarily to manage the data and workflow of large web sites. ITS developed tools to provide some of the functions typically offered by a traditional course management system within CommonSpot. This arrangement for course web sites in CommonSpot has worked well for some and will continue to be available for those who wish to use it for existing sites, but others find the CommonSpot feature set incomplete and some of the technical hurdles too great for their course web sites.

## Why Moodle?

In the Spring of 2008, Academic ITS worked with a group of faculty to look at possible CMS applications that might be a good fit for our faculty and students and Moodle was chosen. Moodle seems to be an especially good fit from a technical and functional standpoint for colleges similar to Colby. For example, Colby is a member of the Consortium of Liberal Arts Colleges (CLAC), a group of 62 similar schools. Of the [62 CLAC members](#), 23 have adopted Moodle as their CMS.

Moodle is very easy to use, provides a set of valuable common tools and, thanks to the Administrative ITS group, is well integrated into our environment.

## How do I get a Moodle course site?

Moodle course sites are created automatically each semester using the enrollment data to determine who can access them. Log into [moodle.colby.edu](http://moodle.colby.edu) to see your course sites. All course sites are created in a state that makes them to be unavailable (invisible) to the students enrolled in the course. This is so students will not see empty or unused course sites and so faculty may build out a course site before students gain access.

## What happens to my course site at the end of the year?

Course sites will be archived so faculty will be able to access old sites but fresh ones will be created each semester. It's pretty easy to backup content from old course sites and restore it in new ones. Instructions will follow.