

Feature Focus: Room Management

In the article “Feature Focus: Room Management,” Beth Moorhead offers an overview of room management functionality in Web-based learning management systems. She begins the article by describing room management features that are useful to both programs that have a direct hand in scheduling rooms and those that don’t. Moorhead details each different feature within an advanced room management module and showcases how it helps program staff in creating classes, managing registrations, communicating with interested parties and reporting. She concludes by detailing more advanced uses in room management that can benefit any lifelong learning program.

Abstract

With nearly all lifelong learning programs, there is a need to share limited community resources with other programs. Regardless of whether you run a continuing education program associated with a college or university, a community education program or a for-profit program, the majority of your resources will be tied up in creating classes, managing registrations and promotions. It can be a drain to find and compete for rooms and other resources needed to run a class. The room management functions of your learning management system can alleviate much of the burden of room scheduling and finding the right room for the right class.

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It is important to realize that room management modules contain many features beyond just basic room scheduling. You will find most room management functions useful even if you do not control the scheduling of a specific room.

Room management functionality is meant to be useful in each step of room scheduling. The first step in room scheduling is usually finding potential rooms for your class. You can search for a room based on the criteria that is important to your program.

Once you establish a set of classrooms associated with a set of locations, you open up the scheduling possibilities of each class. One of the most basic functions of room management is to help identify all of the options for a class location based on seating requirements. For each class, you will have several viable options for room scheduling, so that if one room has a conflict, you can schedule the class in a different room.

Room management allows you to reserve a room when adding a class by selecting a room from a generated list of “best matches.” If you don’t find the right match at first, you can revise the search criteria and run your own

search. Many of your classes probably have specific requirements for room resources, especially for computer, crafts or job training classes. You can also build a customized inventory of the “room features” that you want to search and track. After you have set the list of features, you can then use room management to search for appropriate locations for a class with a specific requirement, such as kitchen facilities.

After you find a match and tentatively schedule a room for your class, you need to contact the person who manages the room. Room management features on a Web-based management system are extremely helpful in communicating scheduling needs to outside parties. When a class is created, you can automatically send an email request to the room contact or print out a request to send by mail.

If there is a conflict with a room you have scheduled or if you need to cancel a class, the room reservation functions allow you to send automatic reservation cancellation requests. For both reservation and cancellation notices, you can set up contact information that is unique for each room or use the default location contact information.

One of the most basic functions of room management is to identify scheduling conflicts. With room management, use the Scheduling Conflicts feature to avoid double booking your own classes. If you have accidentally double booked a room, you can change the room with the Scheduling Conflicts report to resolve rooms and change the desired reservations to alleviate the conflict.

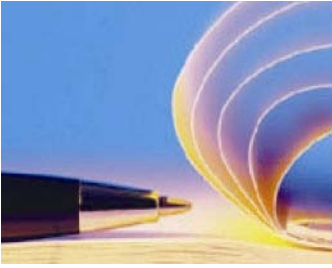
The reverse is also true. If there is a class that doesn't have a room assignment, Web-based management systems will flag the class and compile a report of classes that need room assignment. Use the “Classes without Room Assignments” report to remind you of those classes that don't have a room and create a reservation from that report.

Room reservations can be made for all meetings of a class at once, creating time savings for busy staff. However, room management functions also have the flexibility to respond to modern class needs – and they allow for reservations to be made for each separate meeting of a class.

Similarly, once a series of reservations is made for a class, you can change any aspect of the reservation while editing a class schedule. The same function allows you to track whether or not a confirmation has been received for the use of a specific room.

One of the best attributes of room management is the flexibility that it gives you when setting up a class. If unforeseen circumstances arise, the room that a class is held in can be changed before the class starts. Each function in the room management module is meant to work together, but with enough autonomy that you can use separate reservation management functions to conduct a search for a room, cancel a room reservation or change a room reservation.

You can also track events that are not related to classes that you have scheduled. The “Room Blocks” function lets you set up a reminder that blocks use of a room for a specified period of time so that no reservations are accepted. For example, this feature can block off a period of time while a room is being renovated and make sure that no classes are booked in it.



Similarly, you can use the “External Reservations” function to track contact information for external organizations that have room reservations in the same rooms that you use. You can schedule reservations for these external reservations to track when the room will not be available for use or to flag potential scheduling conflicts. External reservations appear on the same schedules as room reservations for easy reference when scheduling.

If several different classes take place in the same room over the course of a week, the room setup is bound to change. Each class will have different seating or AV requirements. To ensure that the room is set up just right for each class, you can specify set up requirements when you add or edit a class and then use the “Room Setup” report to remind you of which rooms need set up.

You can also use the room management module to create printable room schedules that are suitable for posting outside a room by using the room scheduling report. You can specify as long or short of a time period as you need to create the schedules.

Room management has a wide variety of functions with multiple uses. The features of room management are extremely flexible so that using room management can be of benefit to all lifelong learning programs, regardless of their room scheduling needs.