



Wave of the future

Educators see teaching tool in new Google program

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Some local college officials are jumping on board "Google Wave" to see what the new technology might mean for education.

This jazzed-up version of e-mail provides a centralized Internet location to write, edit and even translate text to or from foreign languages, as well as deposit photos, videos, maps and more. People can collaborate live on the same "wave," or string of communication, and can watch each other type.

The University of Wisconsin-La Crosse could use Google Wave to build on its international education goals, allowing discussion with classes in other countries using the translation tool, said Jim Jorstad, UW-L director of educational technologies.

"In teaching and learning, imagine what this could offer students," he said. "It will create a much more collaborative environment."

Most instructors aren't yet using the technology, which still is under development. The University of Illinois at Springfield was among the first colleges to use Wave for online teaching since the preview version became available in September, according to the Chronicle of Higher Education.

An Internet in American Life class collaborated with another class on energy studies at Ireland's Institute of Technology. They created a "wave" to discuss the effect of the Internet on energy sustainability, according to The Chronicle.

The technology is great for conversations among a few people, and students potentially could use it to work on a class project together. But too many users makes the tool "unwieldy," said Tom Hausmann, director of instructional and information technology at Viterbo University.

Western Technical College is exploring Google Wave as a way to share ideas among marketing departments in 16 technical colleges statewide, public relations specialist Julie Lemon said.

Many colleges, including Western, have outsourced in-house student e-mail service. UW-L and Viterbo are considering going to providers such as Google mail, which could save money and offer more storage space in accounts. The main concern is data security and ensuring student and staff privacy, said John Tillman, UW-L chief information officer.

If UW-L decides on Google e-mail, Google Wave would be a natural extension, said Jorstad.

"It isn't just about teaching and learning. It is going to transform how we communicate," said Jorstad. "It's a wave of inspiration, you could say."