

Web-based Courseware Application Usability

Courseware packages are software applications that facilitate distribution of information from professors to students, as well as communication among students in a class. Most commercial off-the-shelf courseware solutions are web-based and do not require client-side installation of additional software packages. While the web-based interfaces provide nearly ubiquitous access, they have disadvantages. First, web browsers were never intended to be application platforms. Second, a web-based interface requires that all data processing short of the final rendering of the information be completed on the web server that supports the application. In the case of a courseware application, the limitations of the web-based interface usually require that the information accessible through the interface be divided into unnatural partitions, making the application difficult to use to its fullest benefit. This position paper describes a new courseware interface without the problems of the web-based paradigm. My solution makes use of the XML User Interface Language (XUL), which allows us to harness the power of the client machine for tasks such as filtering and sorting of displayed data, allowing a radical reorganization of the presentation of data in the courseware application. I describe my courseware solution, Theory, and present results from a comparative user study.

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