

ABOUT MERLOT

MERLOT, Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching, consists of several interrelated parts. The key features are the abilities to browse/search materials and members. Visitors can locate learning materials within their disciplines as well as locate colleagues who share their discipline/interests.

- MERLOT is a place for teachers and learners worldwide to join an academic discipline-based online community where they can:
- Discuss teaching and learning issues with colleagues located anywhere
 - Collaborate with colleagues by creating and sharing materials, comments and reviews
 - Find learning materials for teaching and learning
 - Find learning materials that have been peer reviewed
 - Find learning materials that have assignments attached
 - Find learning materials that have user comments attached
 - Add learning materials
 - Add assignments to learning materials
 - Add user comments to learning materials

Why MERLOT?

The heart of MERLOT is the collection of learning materials and the communities of people. The collection of learning materials is constantly growing. To ensure high quality items, these materials are reviewed by discipline faculty using review techniques based on the peer review of scholarly materials model. Eventually, the peer reviews will be added to the learning materials screen. Other features that help in the selection process are the assignments and user comments. As faculty use the learning materials, successful assignments can be added to the learning material thus sharing "what works" with the MERLOT community. Faculty, students and others can add user comments to share their experiences of how effectively the learning material worked for them. All of this information assists the user's decision to select items.

People are also an important aspect of MERLOT. Members can find others with similar interests and skills to share information, discuss strategies, and exchange experiences. Discipline communities are forming to facilitate communication among members. These communities will allow discipline-related materials, papers, news, and events to be shared. Going beyond the scope of an individual campus increases the possibility of discovering the very best in teaching and learning materials as well as the best strategies available.

Why join? As a member, you can not only locate teaching and learning materials within your discipline and colleagues who share your interests, but your colleagues can also find you. Becoming a member increases dialogue, discussion, and debate among discipline community members. You can also contribute materials, add assignments, and add user comments. If you have created a learning material or have used an educationally effective web site, you can share that item with the educational community through MERLOT. As materials are developed, used and/or tested, effective assignments for a specific level can be shared. Also, you can attach comments on the quality of content, effectiveness, and usability of any used learning material.

Where do the learning materials come from?

- Individual web site developers
- MERLOT member contributors
- MERLOT staff contributors

What are MERLOT's policies? The information within MERLOT is public and open to anyone. The links to the learning materials are in MERLOT to help users find these web sites. MERLOT is not responsible for the content or the practices of these sites. Anyone can join MERLOT. To become a member, only your last name and e-mail address are required. Minimal other information is optional; it is designed to give other members a sense of your role and your subject interests in the educational community. This information is posted on each member's profile and in that way is public. MERLOT does not share this information beyond this use.

MERLOT policies on intellectual property are simple:

The rights to learning materials pointed to by MERLOT remain with their owners.

The rights to use ratings, reviews, and assignments developed by faculty working in the discipline groups are assigned to MERLOT.

The details of MERLOT's intellectual property policies is explained in the MERLOT Participation Agreement at: <http://taste.merlot.org>.

How did MERLOT get started?

In 1997, MERLOT started as an idea to respond to academic technology initiatives of the California State University (CSU) system: the Distributed Learning and Teaching Initiative and the Multimedia Repository Initiative. The CSU's Center for Distributed Learning (CDL) was given the responsibility to implement these initiatives. MERLOT is a derivative of the NSF funded project, "Authoring Tools and An Educational Object Economy." In 1998, a State Higher Education Executives Organization/American Productivity and Quality Center benchmarking study on faculty development and instructional technology selected the CDL as one of the nation's six best practices centers. This selection initiated a collaboration among the CSU, University of Georgia System, Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, and University of North Carolina System, creating a consortium. MERLOT continues to grow, adding more partners and becoming a non-profit organization with the CSU/CDL providing the core operational products and services for the digital collection, user-interface, and peer review processes.

Frequently Asked Questions

How is MERLOT different than other Internet sites that collect materials?

Most web search engines (e.g., Yahoo) can lead you to sites on a particular topic, but rarely to the depth of information teachers and scholars need. MERLOT collects web-based materials from selected disciplines, evaluates them, and attaches learning assignments. By searching through MERLOT, faculty members can easily identify materials that are appropriate for them to assign in their courses.

What are "learning materials"?

Learning materials can be used as components of a course, but are not complete courses. Learning materials found through MERLOT will include high quality visual simulations, animations, tutorials, and other structured learning material.

Is MERLOT a repository?

It functions as a repository, but goes much further. It currently includes more than 4,000 modules (2,100 in Science & Technology of which 300 are in Biology, and 300 in Teacher Education) from many institutions. An important part of the project is to find additional material and systematically add to this collection. In the process we expect to identify critical shortages in learning materials which we can then encourage faculty to develop and commercial publishers to support. In addition to functioning as a repository, MERLOT facilitates communication and collaboration among people with common interests. Online "communities" are built around disciplines, with connections to the discipline's professional organizations.

How will users know if the material they are accessing is of high quality?

MERLOT's discipline communities are selecting and evaluating learning materials using a process modeled on the peer review of scholarly work. By supporting this activity, MERLOT helps build faculty collegiality in teaching by (1) developing professional standards for online learning materials, (2) engaging faculty in peer review, and (3) providing a mechanism to validate and share high quality work.

How will a faculty member find and select a learning module?

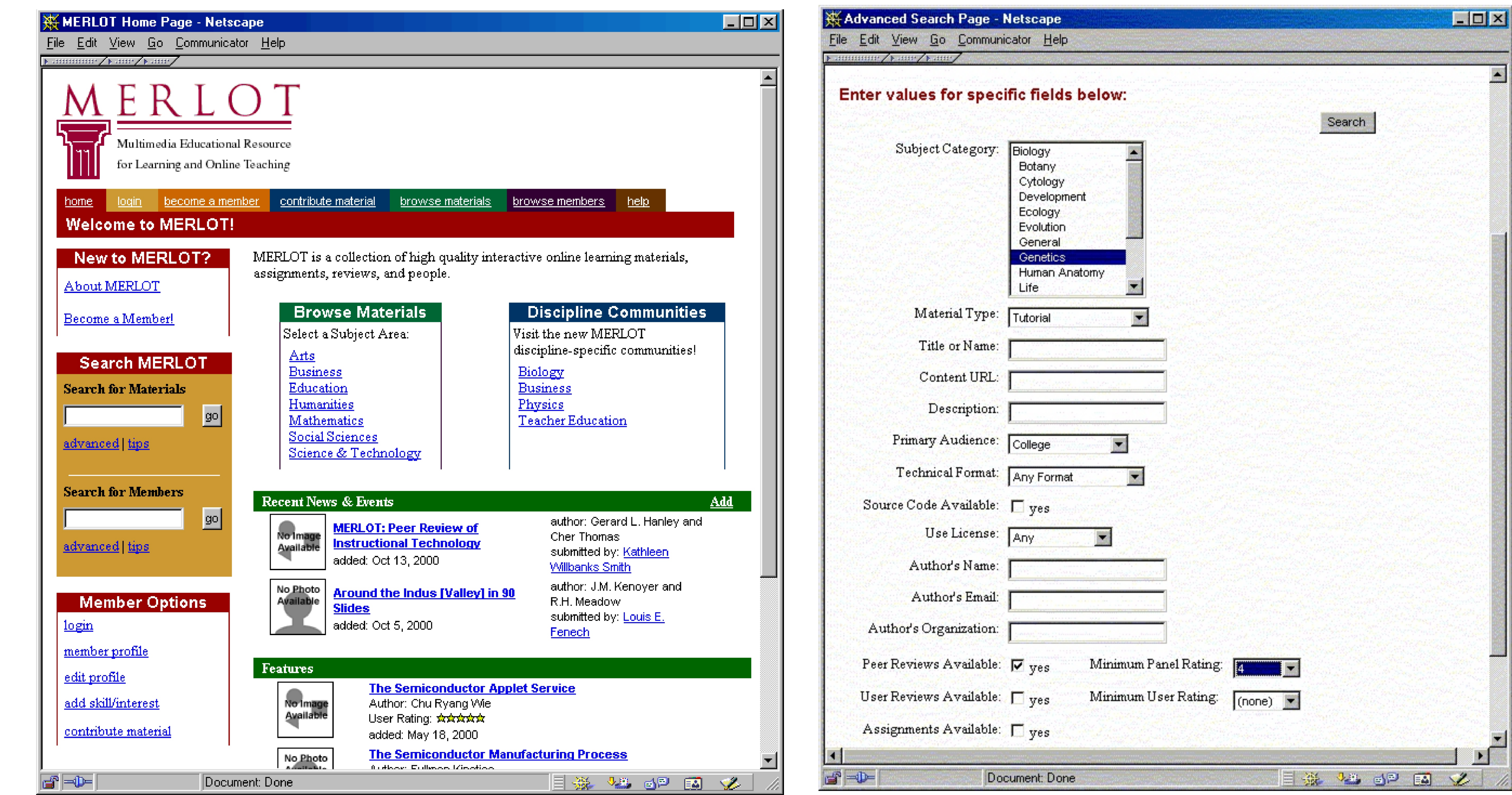
As an example, a biology professor goes to MERLOT Biology Community to find a set of materials dealing with "Introductory Genetics." She types "Genetics" into the search box and finds 60 modules listed, she narrows her search by going to "advanced search" and looking only for those modules that include "Mendelian Genetics" have received five "stars" or higher from the Biology Review Panel.. This produces a more manageable list to examine in depth. The listing for each module has information about learner characteristics (e.g., introductory, lower division, upper division, high school AP), skills that can be acquired through use of the module, sample learning assignments, hardware and software requirements, and both faculty and student "user reviews." The biology professor decides one of the modules will be useful for her class and bookmarks the URL.

How can I get involved in MERLOT?

The learning materials listed on MERLOT are available to faculty and students throughout the nation and world. The materials can be used in face-to-face classroom settings and in web-based courses. Anyone can post a module, along with supporting material, to MERLOT. Currently, 23 of higher education are supporting faculty participation in the discipline communities.



Faculty at a recent workshop on developing evaluation standards. The author is seated third from the right.



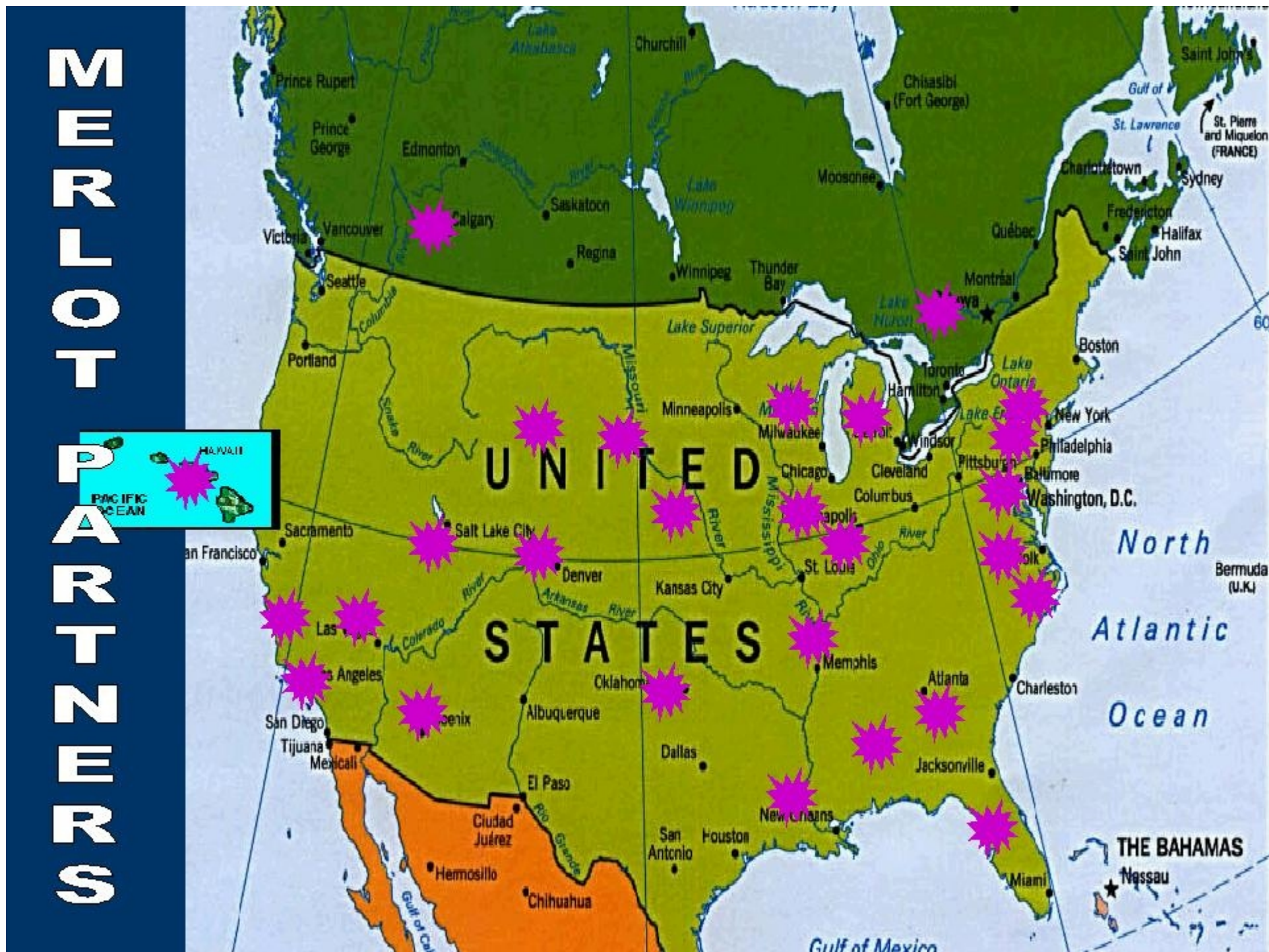
Merlot has browsing, simple search, and advanced search capabilities



Multimedia Educational Resource
for Learning and Online Teaching

www.merlot.org

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Association of Jesuit Colleges & Universities-Distance Learning Education Network
California Community College System
California State University
Canadian COHERE Project (University of Alberta, Guelph, Waterloo, and York University)
Canadian CAREO Project (University of Alberta and Calgary)
Council of Independent Colleges, Foundation for Independent Higher Education, and National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
Florida Board of Regents and Florida Community College System
Illinois Board of Higher Education
Indiana Commission for Higher Education
Board of Regents, State of Iowa
Louisiana Board of Regents
Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education
South Dakota Board of Regents
State University of New York
Tennessee Board of Regents and University of Tennessee
Troy State University
University of Hawaii
University of Michigan
University of North Carolina
University of Wisconsin System
Virginia Community College System
Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications (representing Universities of Utah, Nevada-Las Vegas, Wyoming, Arizona State University, Community Colleges of Colorado, Weber State University, and the University of Alaska System)

MERLOT'S MISSION is to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning by expanding the quantity and quality of peer-reviewed online learning materials that can be easily incorporated into faculty designed courses

MERLOT Products and Services

1.The MERLOT Website

The website for MERLOT (<http://www.merlot.org>) serves as a portal and community for faculty who are seeking to enhance their courses through web-based teaching and learning materials. Faculty may search for and sort through learning materials according to subject areas and quality ratings. The national website contains the main database of URLs, which point to the learning materials that reside elsewhere. The learning materials or objects are not courses, But materials that can be included in courses.

2.Quality Rating System — Discipline-Based Peer Review Process

Peer review processes are the cornerstone to developing and maintaining high quality scholarship and research within a discipline. A Biology group has been formed and begun its review process. Participating states have contributed faculty leaders and "editorial board" members.

For the state and multi-campus systems that are participating in MERLOT, the peer review process is in itself a faculty development activity, which helps state systems meet their goals of engaging faculty interest in instructional technology. MERLOT will host a national meeting and a series of workshops designed to help each discipline group begin or continue its work in selecting and evaluating online learning materials; (2) develop leadership and facilitation skills for faculty leaders.

Rating System

The MERLOT peer review process results in ratings that contain:

A.Description of the learning material composed of the faculty reviewers' summary of the material. The summary description will include:

- Learning goals: Concepts to learn, skills to acquire, attitudes to develop
- Targeted student population(s) and teachers who would find materials most useful
- Prerequisite knowledge/skills required to use the learning material
- Type of learning material (simulation, tutorial, animation, etc)
- Learning environment (Would the software be used in a supervised laboratory setting, in in-class demonstrations, in self-paced, home or lab setting)
- Procedures for using the software. Summarize steps to perform tasks.
- Technical requirements (HW/SW/network)

B. Evaluation of the learning materials, composed of the faculty reviewers' judgement of:

QUALITY OF CONTENT: Evaluation of the accuracy or validity of the curriculum. Does the software present valid (correct) concepts, models, and skills? Evaluate the importance of the content for the discipline.
POTENTIAL EFFECTIVENESS AS A TEACHING-LEARNING TOOL: Based on expertise as a teacher, faculty member will (1) Evaluate the effectiveness of the presentation of the content. Does the software illustrate the concepts effectively so the students can successfully achieve learning goals (learn concepts/acquire skills)? (2) Will the students learn the concepts and skills by using the software?
EASE OF USE: Evaluate how easy it is for teachers and students to use the software. How much instruction would be needed for most students to successfully use the software?

Review Process

Faculty selected to participate in MERLOT will perform reviews of the learning materials. Each discipline group has project leaders and will be supported by the MERLOT administrative team. Discipline groups will (1) develop evaluation standards; (2) select materials for evaluation; (3) conduct evaluations; and (4) report results. The project team has agreed upon elements, including seeking permission from authors before reviews are conducted and posted. While the final rating scheme has not been determined, a number of options are under consideration. For example, MERLOT may post only "three star" ratings or higher (good, very good, excellent) and is likely to include substantial "profile" information so that potential users can consider the learning context in which the module might be applied most effectively.

3. Descriptors, Assignments, and User Reviews

In addition to the quality ratings, MERLOT will include other "wrap-around" material that will be attached to the learning materials listed. Every learning module in MERLOT has a descriptor record which includes the name of the author, subject, a description of the module, technical requirements, whether or not it has been reviewed, and whether or not it has assignments and may have "assignments" and "user reviews".

Assignments

A barrier to faculty using web-based learning materials in the classroom is that the materials, if found, are rarely presented in an appropriate pedagogical context with suggestions for integrating and using them in a course. An important way in which MERLOT adds value to web-based learning materials is through assignments. Assignments may be created by the peer-review panel,or by any user of MERLOT.
User Reviews
Individual faculty (and student) users are able to provide comments and observations using a structured feedback form in MERLOT. User reviews may be posted by anyone with a member profile in MERLOT, much in the way Amazon.com offers user reviews of its books.

This poster would not have been possible without the assistance of Ms. Tanya Mantooth