

MELROT: Multimedia Educational Resources for Learning and Online Teaching

This document is intended to provide an introduction to the Merlot community. The document will collect background information, describe the repository, how it functions and key features, and provide pointers to further resources.

Introduction and Aims

Merlot was founded at California State University in 1997 and evolved into a co-operative venture soon after involving The University of Georgia System, Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, and the University of North Carolina System. By 2000, significant sums were pledged by the four partner institutions and funding was used to develop evaluation standards and a comprehensive peer review processes. Other partners (academic institutions, professional bodies and corporations) have joined in the intervening years. This business model, with partner institutions contributing financially, and 'in kind' seems sustainable, though the web site claims that Merlot is continually looking to expand its partner network and investigate new revenue streams. From their site:

- “**MERLOT** is an international cooperative that provides the academic community of teachers, students, librarians, technology staff, and administrators with an online community library where they can freely share high-quality educational resources that improve learning and teaching.”
- “**MERLOT's strategic goal** is to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning by increasing the quality of peer reviewed online learning materials that can be easily incorporated into faculty-designed courses.”
- “**MERLOT's vision** is to be a premiere online community where faculty, staff, and students from around the world share their learning materials and pedagogy.”

http://jolt.merlot.org/vol1_no1_iiyoshi.htm

Merlot is an example of a repository which has grown organically over a long period. It was originally modelled on the Educational Object Economy initiative (Apple Corp.) and was originally single institution/multi discipline. It has evolved into an international repository, though governance remains with the founding institution and a small number of partner organisations ('pay to have a say').

Nature of Materials

The Merlot repository falls into the 'catalogue' category of repository, in that the content isn't held by Merlot itself, but resides on public web servers. Materials are not stored as content packages (IMS or SCORM). Merlot defines learning objects as 'anything that helps your students accomplish a learning objective in your course' and provide the following examples: a chapter from a textbook, an online simulation, a webcast from a guest speaker, or a PowerPoint presentation.

Content Profile

The materials in the repository spread across the whole curriculum (without reference to other data it is impossible to say whether some areas are over- or under-represented, but no grouping seems particularly unrepresented).

Discipline	Resources
Arts	602
Business	2501
Education	2476
Humanities	2462
Mathematics & Statistics	1251
Science & Technology	6296
Social Sciences	1408

It is clear that the focus for Merlot is College level content though there are significant collections of resources for all educational levels.

Level	Resources
Grade School	1331
Middle School	2038
High School	4454

College General	13792
College Lower Division	339
College Upper Division	339
Graduate School	2837
Professional	2503

Becoming a Member

Download of materials is open to all, but participation in the Merlot community and uploading materials is restricted to registered members. The sign-up process is simple, with only basic information required for registration. Your core discipline is recorded (and used to target information and content to you). Once registered, you can create a rich profile describing your experience, positions, affiliations, publications, honours, awards etc. Rich information about participants in the community is deemed an important element, and the member directory is a central element of the Merlot site. Individuals accumulate points for peer reviewing and achieve gold, silver and bronze starred reputations similar to those gained with eBay.

Activity of Repository

The Merlot repository is active, with around 15000 objects, growing at around 10 a day (based on 328 objects added in November 2006). Membership is 40,000, (grew 2.5% in November 2006). Approximately 1/3 of materials have been commented upon, and around 1/6 have been peer-reviewed. Activity with respect to peer reviews is around 1 per day, and comments around 5 per day.

The site provides a summary of recent activity (data recorded on November 30th):

	New in last 30 days	Total
Materials	322	15494
Members	1057	40394
Peer Reviews	24	2125
VSB Guest Experts	3	98
Comments	137	4665
Assignments	6	1036
Personal Collections	417	7825

Uploading Content

Uploading content is relatively easy. Initially, all you have to do is provide a Title and Location. Thereafter, you go through a further four steps providing a: description, category, author and optional information. Information about IPR and accessibility is collected, as are details of educational level (localised to US). Materials are classified according to a rather general taxonomy; however multiple classifications can be given allowing the same resource to be found by different routes. Ownership is attributed (and the author sent an email informing them that their content has been included in the repository. This email also asks that the authors provide Merlot with updated information should the resource be amended.

Finding Materials in the Collection


There are both simple and advanced search interface. The simple search interface allows keyword searching, searching either the entire repository or a single (discipline) category. The results can be ordered by title, author, material, date added or date reviewed, or an overall rating. The advanced search interface (Figure 1) provides a large number of options to narrow the search based on (for example):

- Audience (controlled vocabulary)
- Technical platform (controlled vocabulary)
- Language (controlled vocabulary)
- Copyright status
- Cost
- Accessibility (Section 508)
- Authorship
- Date.

As well as a number of options which allow selection on community features including:

- Has peer reviews (which can provide a measure of quality)
- Has member comments (a sign that the content has been used)
- Has assignments (a sign that the content has been used in teaching)
- Merlot award winner (awarded in a number of categories each year)

- Has personal collections (which may provide a stepping stone to other useful resources in the same educational domain)
- Has author snapshot (an author snapshot is a contributed overview of the materials)
- Overall rating.



Multimedia Educational Resource
for Learning and Online Teaching

Search Materials: **GO**
advanced search | search more digital libraries

[Home](#) | [Communities](#) | [Learning Materials](#) | [Member Directory](#) | [My Profile](#) | [About Us](#)

Material Advanced Search [Become a Member](#) | [Log In](#)

Find material by keyword:
Keywords:
 any words all words exact phrase

Find material by attributes:

Title:
URL:
Description:
Community: Any
Subject Category: **Selected:** All
All
Language: Any
Material type: Any
Technical format: Any
Audience: Any
Learning Management System: Any
 cost involved copyrighted
 section 508 compliant source code available

Find material by author :

Name
Email
Organization

Find material by community contributions :

has peer reviews MERLOT award winner
 has member comments has personal collections
 has assignments has an Author Snapshot

Date Range:

All
 The Past Days
 / / to / /

Sort results by:

Overall Rating

[home](#) | [communities](#) | [learning materials](#) | [member directory](#) | [my profile](#) | [about us](#)

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Questions? Email webmaster@merlot.org
Frequently Asked Questions - FAQ

Figure 1: The Advanced Search Interface

Beyond Merlot

Merlot offers a number of federated search options which allow co-searching of other Learning Object Repositories (ARIADNE, LORENet, EdNA etc).

The Community

“Community is at the core of MERLOT. The collaboration within and across the discipline communities that make up MERLOT has been the essential ingredient that has helped MERLOT meet the needs of the faculty and other MERLOT users. MERLOT is designed to support communities of faculty and instructors working together to identify and use (as well as develop) good online resources for teaching and learning.”

Roles

Member, Partner, Peer Reviewer, Virtual Speaker
(individual and institutional roles, roles which go beyond administration, bringing and buying.)

Communities.

The main types of community explicitly supported by Merlot are discipline based communities, of which there are 16:

- Biology
- Business
- Chemistry
- Criminal Justice (new)
- Engineering
- Health Sciences
- History
- Information Technology
- Mathematics
- Music
- Physics
- Psychology
- Statistics
- Teacher Education
- Teaching and Technology
- World Languages

Merlot seems also to be pushing the development of other types of community and has structured its site to create a grouping for ‘Workforce Development’ in Fire Safety, and two partner communities: GLOBE (Global Learning Objects Brokered Exchange) and CATS (Community of Academic Technology Staff). The GLOBE and CATS communities in particular represent communities which Merlot recognises but which aren’t necessarily discipline based.

The Virtual Speakers Bureau.

Merlot extends beyond simple sharing of content by allowing members of the community to advertise their expertise and indicate their willingness to act as external, virtual speakers (providing preferred contact routes and indicating outline fee levels) to present to students.

Routes to the community:

- Conference (<http://taste.merlot.org/mic.html>- international, in that they held it in Canada this year)
- Journal (<http://jolt.merlot.org/>)

The Merlot Conference

The conference supports the community through:

- Showcasing how authors and faculty use MERLOT learning materials in their classrooms
- Enabling discipline communities to share information on teaching and learning with web-based materials
- Identifying, using and evaluating digital learning materials in practical, hands-on workshops
- Promoting discussions among shared content providers
- Sharing information on various technology tools for teaching and learning
- Providing a forum for presentations by organizational affiliates and institutional partners of MERLOT
- Disseminating information about MERLOT

JOLT: the Journal of Online Learning and Teaching

The Journal of Online Learning and Teaching (established in 2005 and now on to its fifth issue) addresses the scholarly use of multimedia resources in education. Although few papers are founded on content lodged in Merlot, it is clear that the focus of the journal is aligned with that of the repository. In addition, a case study section in the journal seems tailor made to take content from the repository and present it to a wider audience.

Stakeholders

Merlot themselves list a number of stakeholders: teachers, students, librarians, technology staff, and administrators (elsewhere referred to as: faculty, staff, students and institutions)

Community Dimensions

The following is a 3rd party analysis of the Merlot repository community.

Composition

What community(ies) is/are there? The key communities that Merlot recognises are discipline based, though there is also an attempt to bring together communities of educational technologists.

Purpose

Merlot communities exist to bring teachers of the same discipline together so that they may share content but it is implicit that they should also share educational knowledge – for instance through recommending resources. These communities may have existed before Merlot, but Merlot has provided a single locus to allow them to reach a critical mass where the repository becomes a useful place to go to look for materials and expertise or advice. Barriers to entry are low, so the community should be representative of the sector, though it will obviously be attractive mainly to those who are interested in using electronic resources in their teaching.

Dialogue

The community is online, and international. Merlot provides an opportunity for f2f contact through the international conference and encourages collaboration through the adoption of a social structure. Although there is little ‘social’ conversation, there is evidence of relationships developed around shared educational interests, and the use of reputation, along with comments and peer review ensures that there is both a social structure and opportunity for communication at different levels.

Roles

The main roles in the system are uploader and browser/downloader, but other roles are relevant: the peer reviewer role helps to ensure quality within the repository. The virtual speaker role extends the value of the repository beyond simple storage of learning objects.

Coherence

The community is loosely established, but those who use it consistently are likely to develop relationships through the repository (always using resources created by another user because they trust the content or know that the content is ideally suited to the curriculum they teach). Opportunities for active participation in the community are afforded by the annual conference.

Context

The individual community members get access to a free space where they can communicate with other teachers in their own discipline, with the key focus being resources that groups of teachers may be using or with to use. Beyond this, there is the infrastructure underpinning Merlot which allows the community to exist for free and with low barriers to entry.

Rules

The repository respects IPR as well as both free and paid access models. Its key purpose is to collect together multimedia educational resources, but also to encourage their use.

Pedagogy

Any content can be put up, as long as it is available online. There is an implicit assumption that the materials will be either an explicit learning resource, or a public resource with educational objectives supplied. There is no single pedagogic approach utilised by the materials in the repository.

Further Information

MERLOT: A Model for User Involvement in Digital Library Design and Implementation
<http://jodi.ecs.soton.ac.uk/Articles/v05/i03/McMartin/>