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# Fostering inter institutional knowledge sharing among students

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this research was to develop a system to allow students from various tertiary educational institutions, taking similar courses, to share common discussion forums. This was seen as important to enable larger communities of learners which could help each other, encourage discussion and give exposure to a more diverse range of opinions. In general to create a system that would make it easier to find knowledge in large networks of information and people.

For this purpose a special discussion forum system was developed that can easily be integrated with institutions existing software systems for course management. The system handles the inter-institutional communications transparently, and was developed to be flexible in how it can be installed on various server configurations. The special features of the system allow students to specify the type of message they are contributing, and the system then uses this information to adapt the user interface. For instance, when a question is added, the system searches for possible answers in the existing knowledge base and displays them.

An evaluation of the system in three tertiary educational institutions in New Zealand showed positive feedback from students, indicating they would use a system like this if it was made available to them in their future studies. An evaluation among teachers also showed a generally positive response. In the evaluation of the system's automatic answer finding capabilities, it was identified that this functionality should be improved to increase the effectiveness of how the system identified and highlighted possible answers.

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