ANGEL Upgrade, May 2009

General Background Points, 14 January 2009

A. We must upgrade because...
   a. ANGEL 7.2 (our current version) will no longer be supported by the vendor once 7.4 is released.

B. Summary of changes
   a. MSU will upgrade to either 7.4 (more likely) or 7.3 (less likely) on May 14-15 (version decision date tentatively set for 11 March 2009).
   b. New features (ANGEL version in parentheses; 7.3 changes are incorporated in the 7.4 release)...
      i. (7.3) New discussion forums that provide...
         1. Better threaded discussion
         2. Support for numerous discussion-based pedagogies
         3. Improved grading of participation.
      ii. (7.3) The ability to encode algorithms and variables in assessment questions to generate unique problem sets and automatically grade quantitative problem sets.
      iii. (7.4) Grading rubrics that help instructors clearly communicate grading criteria with students and aid large scale instruction when multiple graders must assess to the same criteria.
      iv. (7.4) Appearance and style managed using Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) rather than frames; simplifies the ability to modify course styles, and improves accessibility.

C. Areas of concern & cause for optimism...
   a. The last upgrade, May 2007, exposed dozens of software defects for the first time when MSU deployed. Each of these flaws resulted in painful problems for MSU faculty, staff and students.
   b. ANGEL Learning has revamped their product development and release approach, improving quality control, and this should result in a more stable product.
   c. MSU is participating with ANGEL Learning in a Limited Field Trial using 7.4 this Spring. Four classes are being taught using ANGEL 7.4. This will help MSU faculty and staff better understand 7.4, prepare documentation and training materials, and result in more robust software for the MSU upgrade in May -- the general release ANGEL 7.4 software that MSU will likely implement in May 2009 should already incorporate two rounds of fixes.
   d. ATS has already upgraded hardware for hosting ANGEL and the system has adequate resources at this time.