CourseForum User's Guide

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1. Introduction

This chapter provides a quick overview of CourseForum, explaining what it is, and how it can help course members interact and collaborate with each other.

What is CourseForum?

CourseForum is software that supports collaboration between members of a course.

CourseForum is web-based e-learning software that makes it easy for you and your students to interact, whether to create, post, share or discuss course content.

Designed for today's online and face-to-face courses, CourseForum is easier to use and more interactive than conventional forum software. You and your students can use it to create, share and talk about lecture notes, Q&A, discussion topics, research, student portfolios, group projects and more.

An Easy to Use Web Application

CourseForum is an easy to run web application, used through standard web browsers, that lets you and your students host discussions and share knowledge, adding interaction to your courses. Because it is web based, there is no need for students to install any software; they use the web browser already running on their home computer or school computer lab.

CourseForum is a type of software called a wiki. But unlike wiki's that you may be familiar with such as Wikipedia, it is designed for sharing within courses, not the whole world.

In CourseForum, you and your students choose what to post, what to share, what to discuss, and how to organize it all. Create whatever new pages you need for new topics. Each page is fully editable by *everyone*, right from the browser. No special tools are needed, nor knowledge of complicated markup languages such as HTML. It is easy enough for everyone to contribute, adding their own material, commenting on existing material, or helping to organize it all. At the same time, pages can be locked down to prevent changes, and because all changes are recorded, you can easily track participation in your class.

CourseForum is centered around simple free-form text, making it easy to understand, and easy to work with — creating or modifying content within the course is as easy as writing an email message. There's no complex interface, set procedures for working, or complex web forms to navigate.

It doesn't matter what web browser (Internet Explorer, Safari, Firefox, etc.) they have, or if they are running Windows or Mac; CourseForum looks and feels just like any other web application.

Basic Concepts

This section describes the basic concepts underlying CourseForum, highlighting the overall structure of the system.

A CourseForum Server Holds Courses

Because CourseForum is web based, the CourseForum software is installed on one central machine, which acts as a server. The single CourseForum server can host many different courses, so nobody else has to install any software. Everyone will use CourseForum through their web browser running on their own machine.

Courses Contain Forums

Each course consists of one or more forums, including a main forum that is automatically created and used by everyone in the class, and optionally one or more smaller project forums, that may be used by smaller groups, such as for project work, or a private instructor-only area.

Forums Contain Pages

Each forum is composed of any number of different pages, each page holding a specific lecture topic, discussion, home page, etc. Pages are easily created and edited using just a normal web browser, and consist primarily of free-form text, but can also hold file attachments, images, and more.

Everyone can Modify Pages

Everyone in the course, instructors and students alike, can create new pages, modify existing pages, and post comments to any page in the forum. There are mechanisms to prevent certain pages from being modified, and passwords can be used to protect the forum.

Pages Contain Links

Pages contain links to other pages in the forum, and can also contain links to other information on the web. Links provide an easy-to-use but powerful means to bring in related information.

No Fixed Organization

The organization of each forum, including what pages are created, and how they are linked together, is entirely up to the people in the course. Forums can be structured according to the class's unique needs, and this structure can change organically as the class's needs evolve.

No Set Content

Like the forum organization, the content of any page is entirely up to the people in the course. Contributions, comments and corrections to pages are all encouraged. Information goes where it makes sense; there's no need to put files in the special "file" area, presentations in the "presentation" area, dates in the "calendar", discussions in the "bulletin board", and so on. If things make sense all on one page, they can be put there.

Common Uses

This section describes a few potential uses for CourseForum in your own courses. Remember that CourseForum offers you the flexibility to set things up how *you* like, so consider these as starting points only. We'll go into greater depth on many of these in Chapter 10, "Best Practices".

Lecture Notes

Add a page for each lecture, along with an index page that points to all of them. Add the PowerPoint file from your lecture as an attachment to the page. Let students add their own notes, follow-up questions and comments. Post links or files related to the lecture's topic.

Student Portfolios

Let students start their own pages, with their own personal information, or notes on the course. They can use these pages to share presentations, documents and research they've prepared. Create an index page that points to these portfolios, and let each student link their own work.

Group Projects

Create separate forums for smaller group projects taking place in the course. Students in the group can password protect the project so nobody else can see what they're working on. In the project forum, they can store drafts of reports they're preparing, and post comments on these drafts. Keep a "to do" list so that everyone in the group knows what's left to be done and who is doing it. Brainstorm new ideas. Keep track of relevant bookmarks and other research.

Course Announcements

The "Home" page of the course is important because it's normally where people will enter. It's therefore a good place to put announcements, links to important information, and links to current discussion topics you'd like students to participate in.

Information Pages

CourseForum is a convenient place to store information pages, things like contact information, a syllabus, assignments, etc., like you'd post on any web site. Because editing such pages is easy, it makes it convenient to keep them updated.

Discussions

You can use the "Post" features to add comments or have discussions on any page in the forum. When you want to discuss a topic in some depth, start a new page just for that topic. Add a paragraph to introduce the topic, and invite students to add their comments. Encourage them to include links to other forums or other web pages that are relevant to the discussion.

Questions and Answers

Start a page for questions and answers. Let students post any questions they have — and get answers (and opinions!) from yourself, teaching assistants and other students.

2. Quick Start

This chapter will get you started with CourseForum, from launching the software, doing any needed configuration, and then creating and setting up your first course.

Starting the CourseForum Software

Only one person, known as the "Site Administrator", needs to worry about running the software, since one running copy can be shared among many courses, and everyone in those courses. If someone else is doing this for you, please feel free to skip ahead.

As the Site Administrator, you will run the CourseForum software, so that everyone in the courses you support can use it. Here, we'll get the software started.

For more details, please see Chapter 12, "Site Administrator Tasks", or the CourseForum web site (http://www.courseforum.com). There you will find a number of frequently asked questions and other documents about selecting the right setup for your needs.

Pick the Server Machine

Pick the machine that will run the software (the "server"). This needs to be a machine that stays on all the time and is always connected to the network. Make a note of this machine's Internet hostname or its public IP address, which will be needed by others to communicate with the server. Download the software from the CourseForum website to this machine.

Launch the Application

Launch the CourseForum application that you downloaded. This will start the software running. Like a web server, the software will listen for connections from people running their web browser. By default, CourseForum will listen for these connections on port 3455.

To verify this, on the same machine, open your web browser and type in the address "http://127.0.0.1:3455" (on the Windows and Mac OS X versions, you can also use the "Open in Browser" button to accomplish this). You should see the CourseForum home page (also known as the Course Directory page), as shown in Figure 2-1.
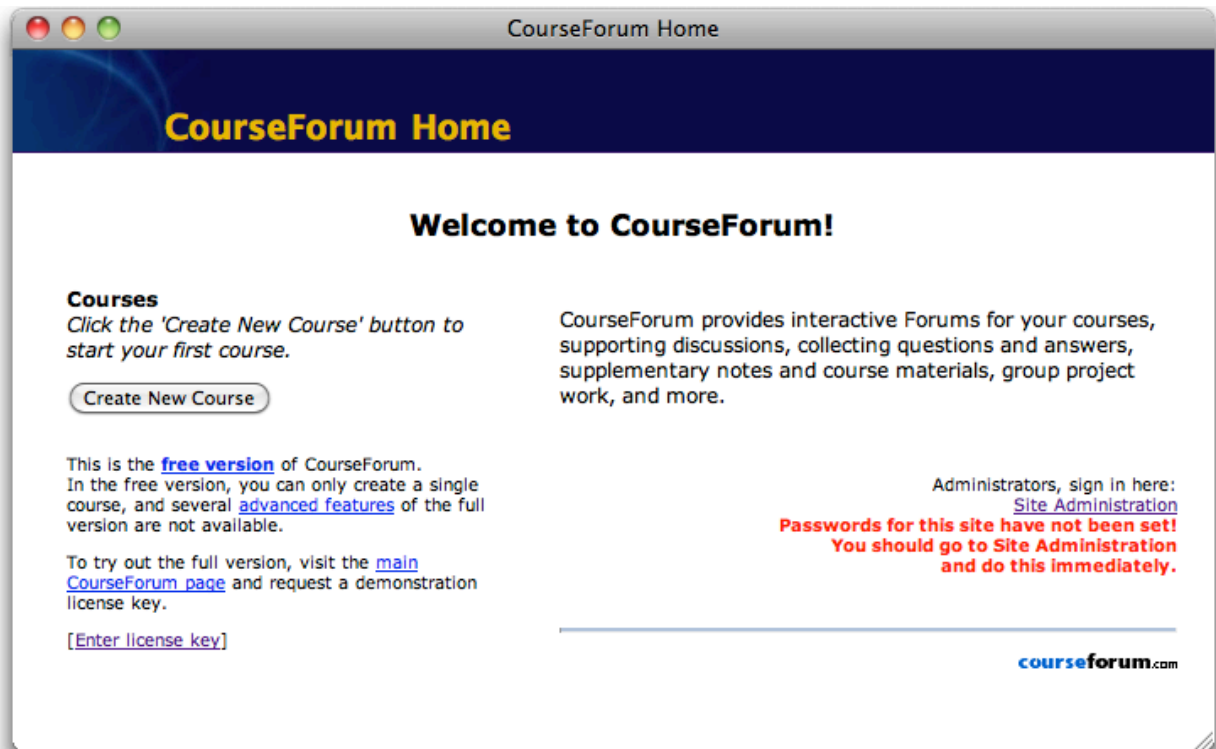
Figure 2-1. Initial CourseForum Home Page.

Next, verify that you can connect to the CourseForum home page from another computer. On that machine, you'll open the web browser, but instead of using the address "http://127.0.0.1:3455", you'll want to substitute the server machine's hostname or IP address for the "127.0.0.1". So this might look something like "http://www.mysite.edu:3455" or "http://192.168.1.120:3455". Don't forget to include the ":3455" at the end. As before, you should see the CourseForum home page.

Set the Site Administration Password

Click on the "Site Administration" link on the right side of the home page, which will load the "CourseForum Site Administration" page (see Figure 2–2). Choose an administration password, which will be used to control access to all site wide CourseForum administration areas. Enter this password (and confirm it) in the "Administration password" fields, and press the "Save Changes" button.
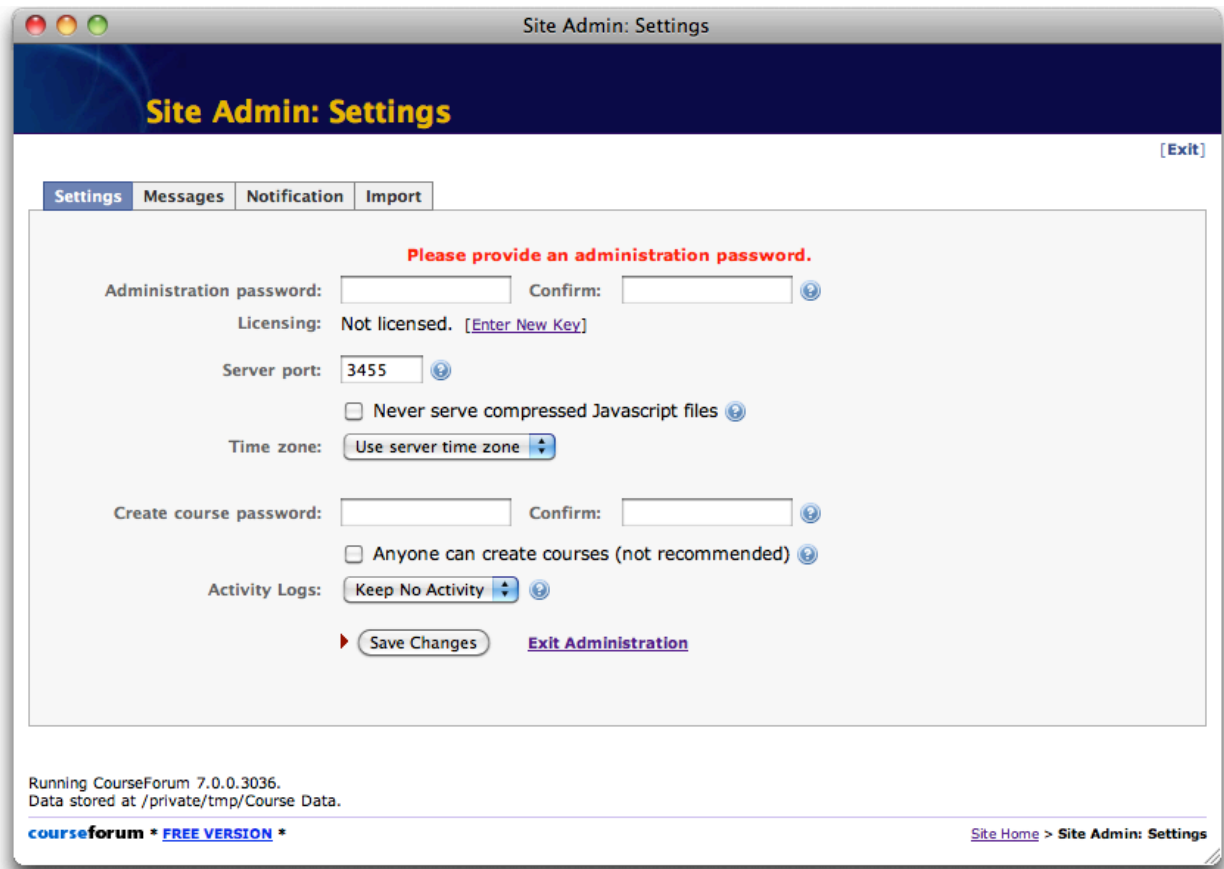
Figure 2-2. CourseForum Site Administration page.

Enter a License Key

Without a license key, CourseForum runs in "free" mode, where a number of features are not available. To remove these restrictions, you will need to obtain a license key. License keys can be purchased, or temporary demonstration keys requested, from the CourseForum web site.

To enter your key, follow the "Enter New Key" link next to "Licensing". On the subsequent screen, enter the license key that you received.

> The remainder of this guide describes CourseForum using the regular licensing model. There is also a "Campus" license option available, which changes some aspects of CourseForum, particularly in the area of user passwords, access control, etc. Differences between the two licensing models are detailed on our website.

You'll also notice that after entering your license key, that a few more options have been added to the "Site Administration" screen, reflecting the additional features available in the full version of CourseForum (Figure 2-3).
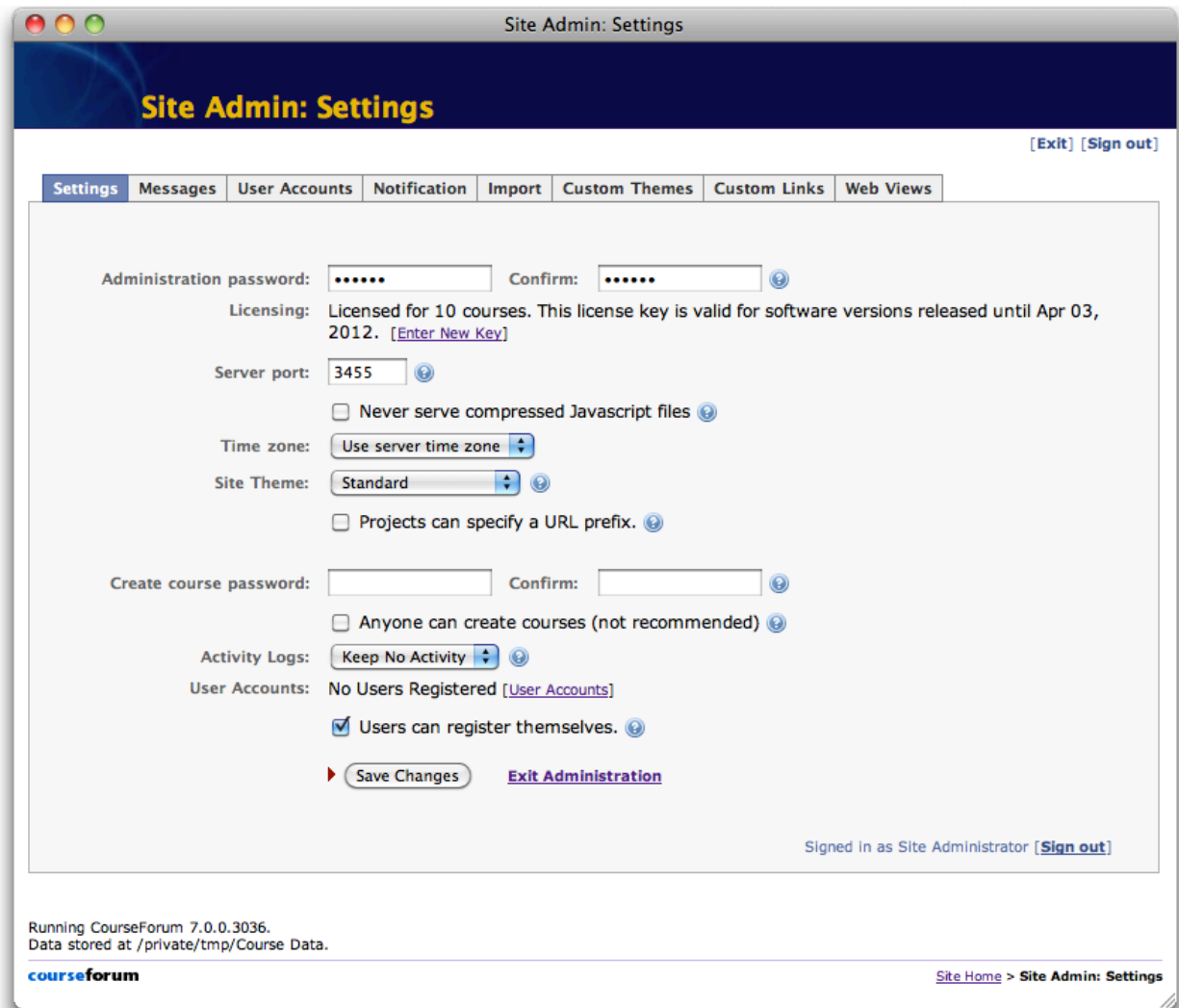
Figure 2-3. Site Administration screen with full version features.

Select a Different Port (Optional)

You may want to run the server on a different port than 3455. For example, you might want to select port 80 so that users do not have to type the ":3455" at the end of their URL's.

If you want to change the port that CourseForum runs on, you can enter the new port in the Site Administration screen, and press "Save Changes".

In the Windows and Mac OS X versions, you can also change the port in the application's interface; press the "Stop" button, change the port, and then press "Start".

This is obviously a decision you want to make sooner rather than later, so that the URL's your users use to access CourseForum won't change.

> If you're already running a web server on your server machine, you won't be able to *directly* run CourseForum on port 80, since the existing web server will already be using it. However, there are several ways to integrate CourseForum with your existing web server. See the CourseForum web site for several options.

Select a Time Zone (Optional)

On some systems, you may also be able to change the time zone that CourseForum uses. By default, the time zone of the underlying server that is running CourseForum will be used.

Select a Course Creation Password (Optional)

You'll also want to think about who you want to be able to create new courses, whether only yourself or the instructors. By default, only the CourseForum Site Administrator (i.e. you) will be able to create courses.

If you want to change this, you can do so on the Site Administration screen. You can choose to let anyone create new courses (which is in all likelihood probably not a good idea). Instead, you can set a password that will be required to create new courses, which you can then give out to instructors wanting to use CourseForum. As always, press "Save Changes" after making any changes.

Enable or Disable Site Wide User Accounts (Optional)

You'll learn more about user accounts and preventing access to groups in Chapter 8, "Protecting your Course". However, if you know now that you won't be using site-wide user accounts, or if you won't want your users to register themselves for them, uncheck the "Users can register themselves" box.

Exiting Site Administration

When you're done with making changes in the Site Administration screen, click the "Exit Administration" link (next to the "Save Changes" button) to return to the CourseForum Home page.

After you first entered the Site Administration password, a new message, "Signed in as Site Administrator" appeared near the bottom of the page, with a "Sign out" link beside it. You can also exit from the administration area by clicking this "Sign out" link; you will then need to re-enter the Site Administration password to return to the Site Administration page.

For convenience, you will also find "Exit" and "Sign out" links at the top right of the page.

Creating Your First Course

> If you are not the course's instructor, or the Site Administrator has already created and setup the course for you, please skip ahead!

The course instructor (or the Site Administrator, on behalf of the instructor) will need to first create a course. The various administration duties related to the course may be performed by the course's instructor, the Site Administrator, or others (e.g. a teaching assistant). Therefore we generally refer to the person doing this work as the "Course Administrator".

To create a course, open your web browser and visit the CourseForum home page (the Site Administrator will need to provide you with the URL). On the left side, you will find a "Create New Course" button. Press that, and a new course will be created. You will then be taken to the Home page for the main forum of that course, as shown in Figure 2-4.
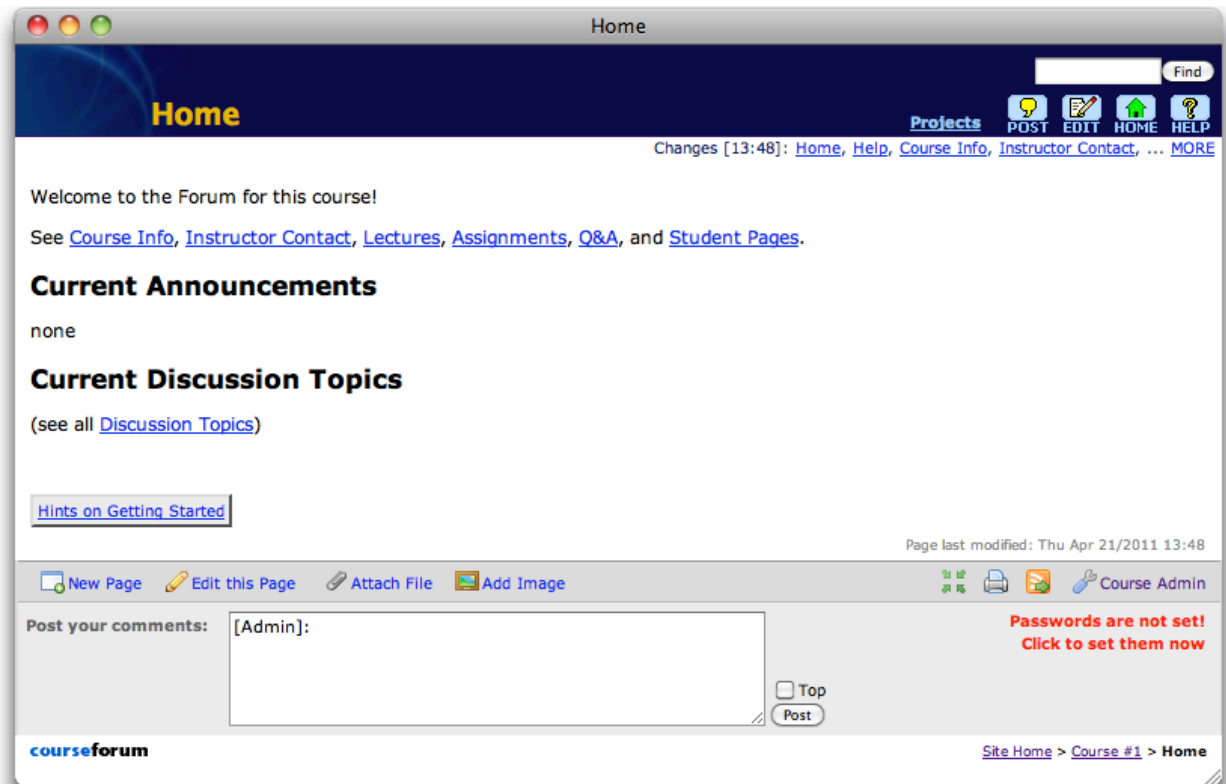

Figure 2-4. Home page of main forum in the course.

Set the Course Administration Password

Click on the "Course Admin" link near the bottom right of the page. This will load the "Course Admin Settings" page (see Figure 2-5). Select an administration password, which you will use in the future to enter this area and perform administrative functions. Enter the password (and confirm it) in the "Administration password" field.
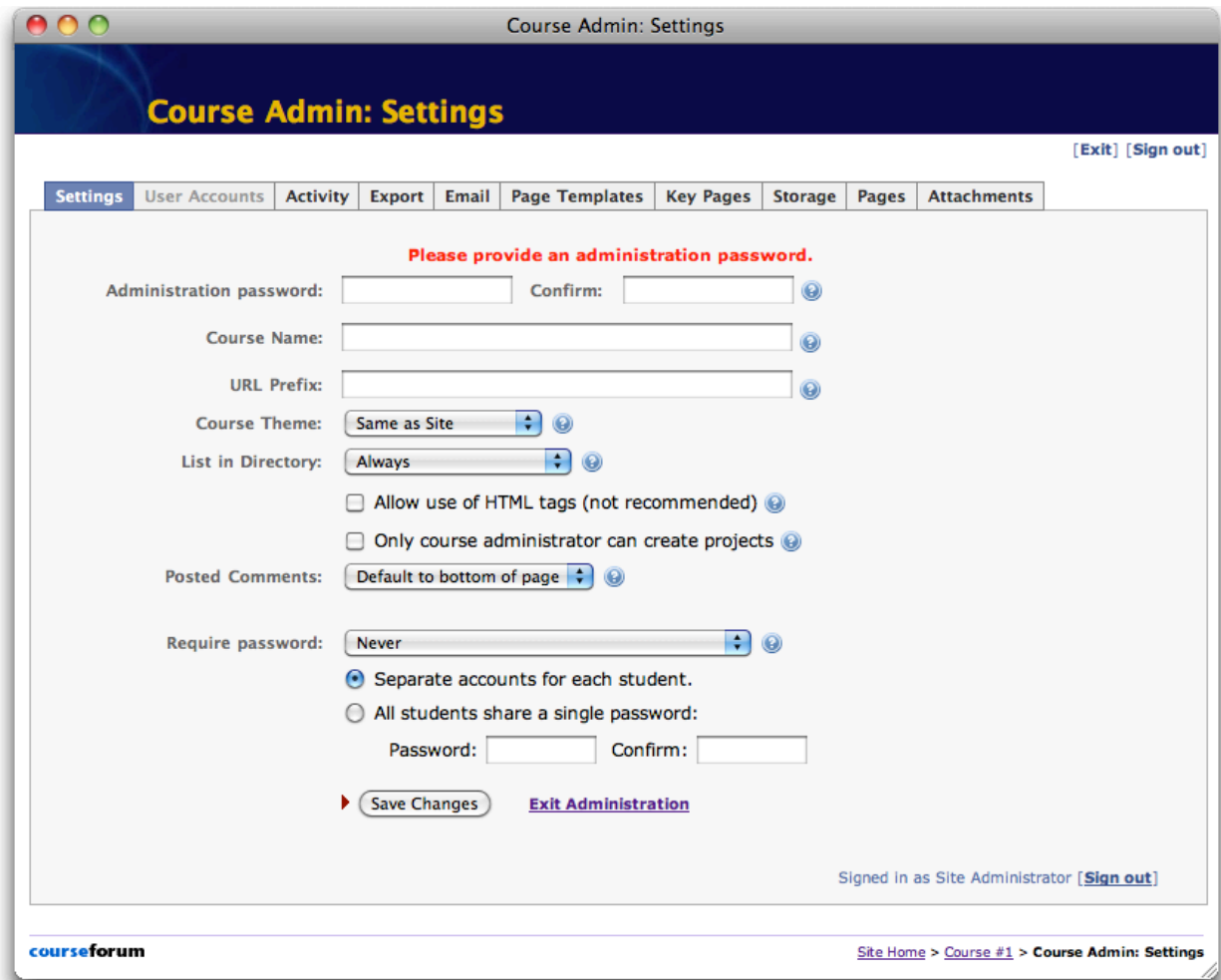
Figure 2-5. Course Admin Settings page.

Set the Course Name

You will probably also want to specify a full name for the course. This will be shown in the title area of all pages in the course, and is also the name that shows up in the course directory. Enter the name in the "Course Name" field.

Set a URL Prefix (Optional)

If you look at the URL shown in your web browser, you'll see it looks something like "http://www.example.edu:3455/1/", followed by "admin/setup.html". The first part (up to and including the "/1/") would be the URL that you would give out to your students so that they could use the course's forum. The "1" is what uniquely identifies this course from any others that are being run on the same CourseForum server.

You have the option of choosing a more meaningful prefix to replace the number, which will make an easier to remember and more meaningful URL for the course. This prefix should be

short, contain only letters and numbers, and must be unique across all courses. An example would be "ed345" for an "Education 345" course.

If you decide to set this, it's best to do it earlier rather than later, so that you're not changing the URL's for the course mid-way through.

Set Passwords and Accounts (Optional)

By default, anyone will be able to see the pages in your course's forum, post comments, and edit the pages. If you would like to restrict this, you can either provide a forum-wide password, or create individual accounts for all your students. Please see Chapter 8, "Protecting your Course" for more details.

Exit Course Administration

When you are done making changes in the "Course Admin Settings" screen, click the "Save Changes" button to have them take effect.

To exit the administration screen, and return to the Home page for the group's main forum, click the "Exit Administration" link.

As with the Site Administration screen, an additional message will appear after the course administrator password is entered, indicating you are signed in as the Course Administrator, and offering you a "Sign out" link. Of course, if you are already signed in as the Site Administrator, you will be able to use the Course Administration area, even if you're not also signed in as the Course Administrator.

Again for convenience, there are "Exit" and "Sign out" links at the top right of the page as well.

3. Forum Basics

Now that the software is running, and a course has been setup, it's time to actually start using it. This chapter provides a quick overview of the main features that students and instructors alike will use to work with the course's main forum.

Basic Concepts

Before delving in too deep, let's quickly review the basic concepts behind CourseForum:

1. The single CourseForum server can host a number of different *courses*.

2. Each course consists of one or more *forums*, including a *main forum* and smaller *project forums*.

3. Each forum is composed of any number of different *pages*, each page holding a specific lecture topic, discussion, home page, etc.

4. Everyone in the course can *create*, *modify*, and *post comments* to pages (unless they are protected).

5. Pages contain *links* to other pages in the forum, or to other information on the web.

6. The *organization* of the forum (what pages are created, how they are linked together) is entirely up to people in the course.

7. The *content* of any page is entirely up to the people in the course: contributions, comments and corrections to pages are all encouraged.

Entering the Course

In this chapter, you'll be exploring the main forum for your course (when you get to use project forums, you'll see they work almost identically). The first step though, is actually "getting into" the main forum for your course.

The course's instructor should have provided you with the Internet address (URL) for either the entire CourseForum server, or the specific URL for your course inside that server.

In either case, open up your web browser and type that URL into the location bar.

Course Directory

If you were given just the URL of the entire CourseForum server (handy also if you're in several courses), and not the specific course, you'll find yourself on the Course Directory page. This will look something like the page shown in Figure 3-1.
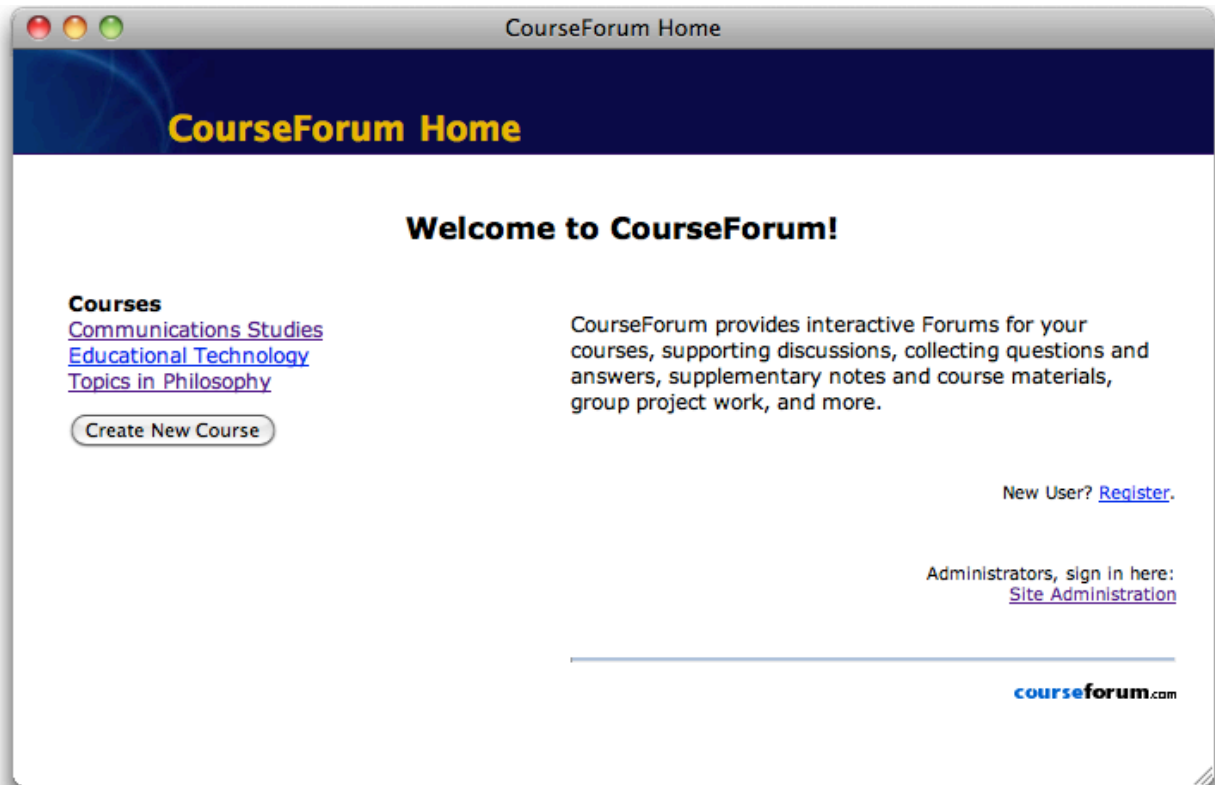

Figure 3-1. Course Directory.

Find the course you'd like to enter in the list along the left-hand side of the page, and click the course's name to go to the course you want.

> If the Course Administrator has set up passwords for the course, you may be asked to enter your name and the password assigned to you before entering the course.

If you ever want to get back to this directory page, you'll find a link named "Site Home" at the bottom right of every page in the course.

> If there is only a single course on the CourseForum server, going to the main URL of the entire CourseForum server may redirect you straight into that one course. You can still get to the Course Directory by clicking the "Site Home" link.

Course Home Page

If you followed the link from the Course Directory, or navigated to the course directly, you should start on the Home page of the main forum of your course, which might look something like Figure 3-2.

Figure 3-2. Home page of course's main forum.

Anatomy of a Forum Page

Before going further, here is a quick overview of the main areas of the page that you're seeing. We'll go into details of these in the remainder of this guide.

> The pages may look quite different from those in the figures if the instructor has chosen to use a different *theme* for the course.

Title Area

The bar along the top shows the name of the course (at the top, if the instructor provided it), and the name of the current page (below that).

Find Pages

At the very top right of the page is an area allowing you to type in a search phrase, and then look for all pages in this forum containing that phrase.

Action Buttons

Below the find area at the top right are four buttons for frequently used tasks. "Post" will allow you to add comments to the bottom of the page. "Edit" will allow you to directly modify the existing content on the page, or add new content. "Home" returns you to the Home page of the current forum (i.e. where you started out when you first entered the course), and "Help" takes you to a Help page for the forum.

Key Pages

To the left of the Action Buttons are one or more links to important pages in the course, or other websites. These key pages may be modified by the course's instructor.

Recent Changes

This area, just below the colored area at the top, shows you the pages that were most recently changed in this forum.

Page Content

The bulk of the page (most of the parts with the white background) is made up of the actual content for this page, which is different for each page. All this content is fully editable by anyone; we'll spend a fair bit of time explaining exactly how to do that soon.

Last Modified

At the bottom of the page content area you can see the last time this page was modified, and often the name of the person who modified it.

Other Commands

The text and image links just below the page content ("New Page" through to "Course Admin") let you perform other operations.

Post your Comments

This area allows you to quickly add a comment to the end of the page. If the course requires you to sign in to use it, this area will also show the name you are signed in under, and provide a link for you to sign out.

Page Footer

This area at the bottom right of the page shows you where you are within the site, and allows you to quickly navigate back to the Course Directory, or to the Home page of the course you're currently in.

Creating and Editing Pages

Creating and editing pages is at the heart of what you'll be doing with CourseForum. Create new pages to hold new notes, topics of discussion, course information, or any other content. Edit existing pages to modify or extend their content.

Creating a New Page

Let's start by creating a new page called "Graffiti" that we will use just to mess around with. Towards the bottom left of the page, click on the "New Page" link. The page shown in Figure 3-3 will then appear. Type the name of the page you want to create ("Graffiti", without the quotes), and click on the "Create" button below it.
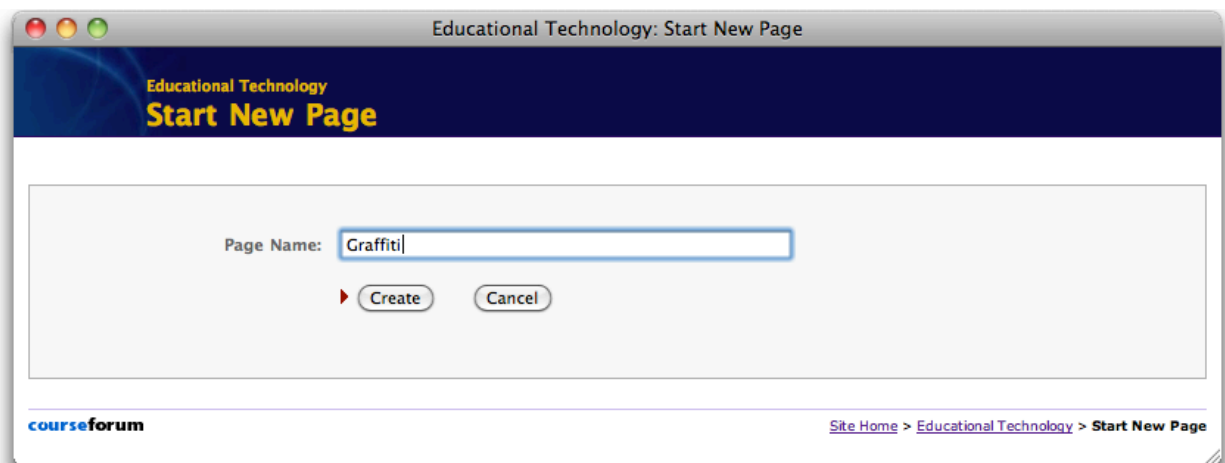

Figure 3-3. Start New Page.

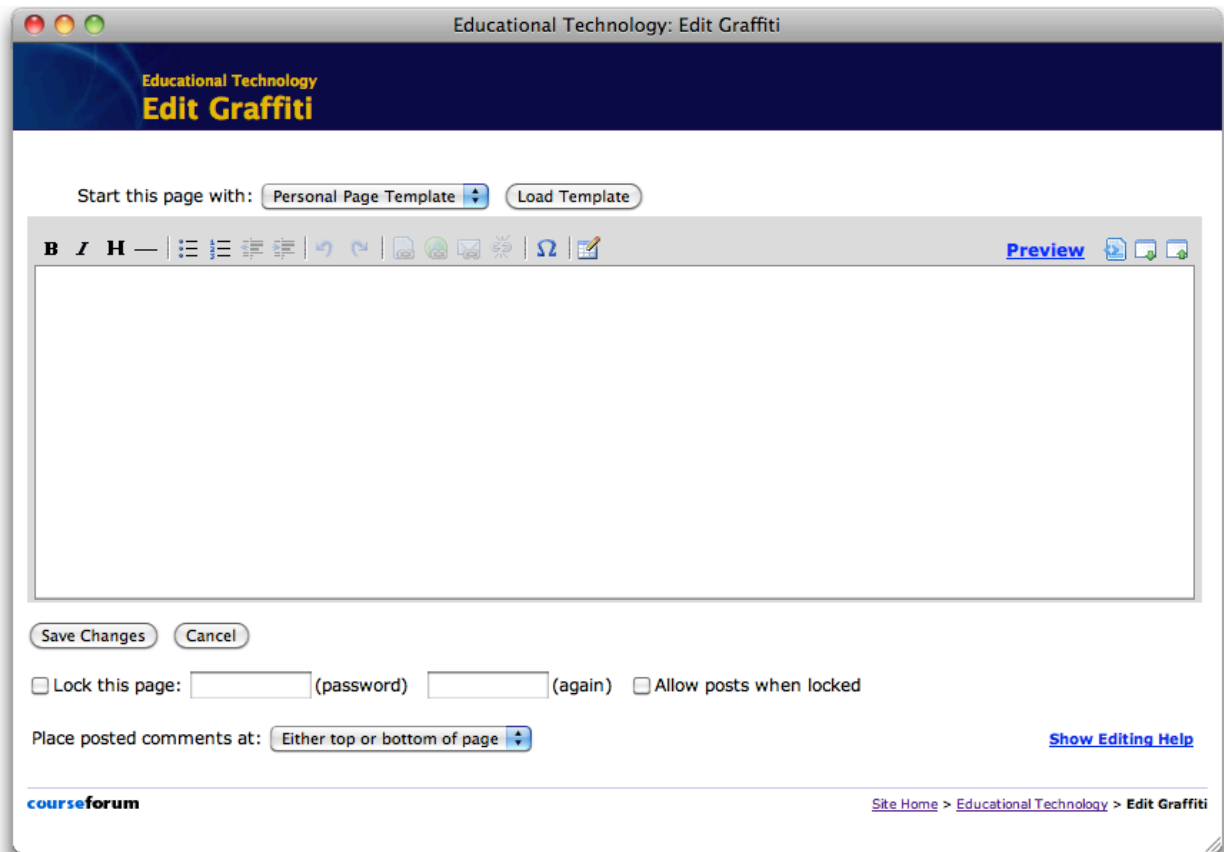You should then see the "Edit Graffiti" page, as shown in Figure 3-4.

Figure 3-4. Edit screen for "Graffiti" page.

The large text area in the middle of the page is where the content of the page will go. Because this is a new page, it will start out blank. For now, just ignore the rest of the stuff around it on the page; we'll get to it shortly.

> Did you instead get a page that looked more like the page that you were just on? If you try to start a new page with the name of a page that already exists in the forum, you'll be taken to that page, rather than creating a new one.

What we'll do next is just add some simple text into this Graffiti page. Type in some text, just like you would into an email, hitting the Enter or Return key at the end of each paragraph. An example is shown in Figure 3-5. When you're done, press the "Save Changes" button.
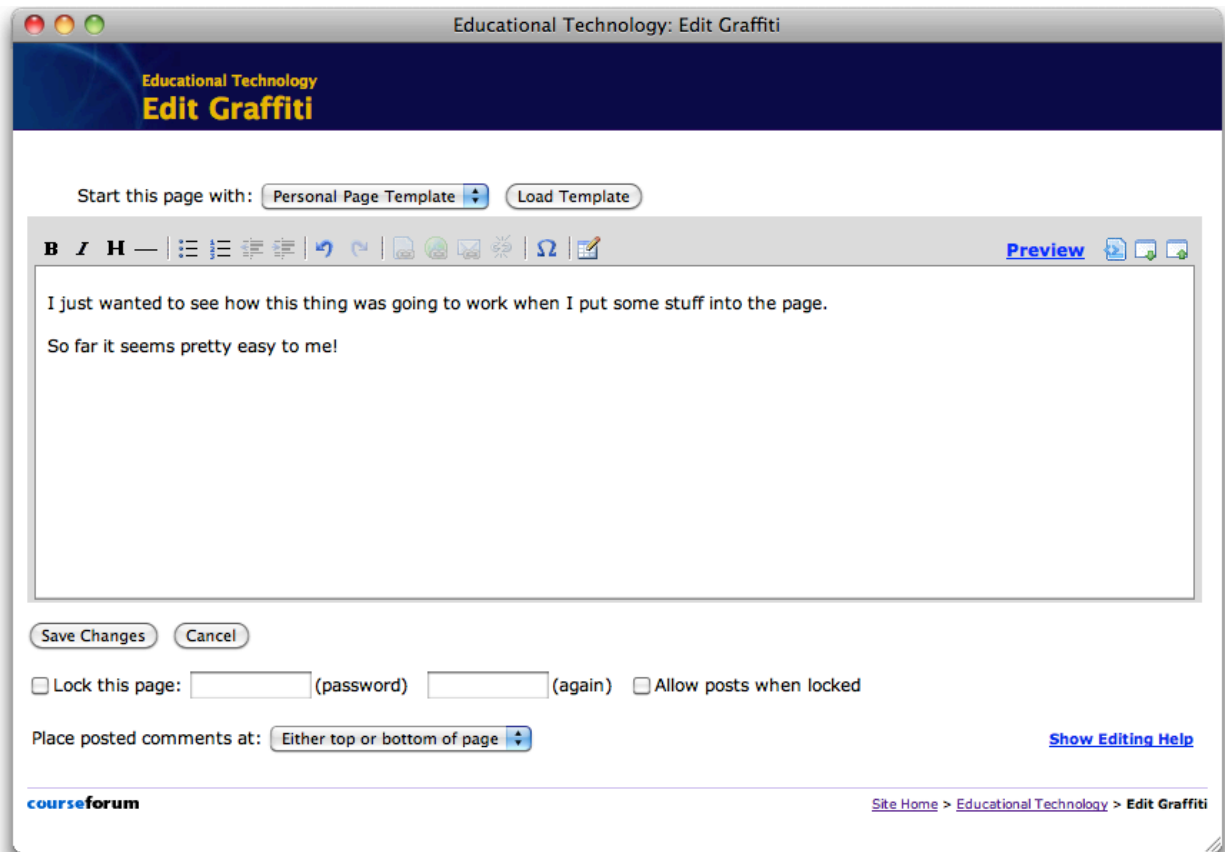
Figure 3-5. Editing the "Graffiti" page.

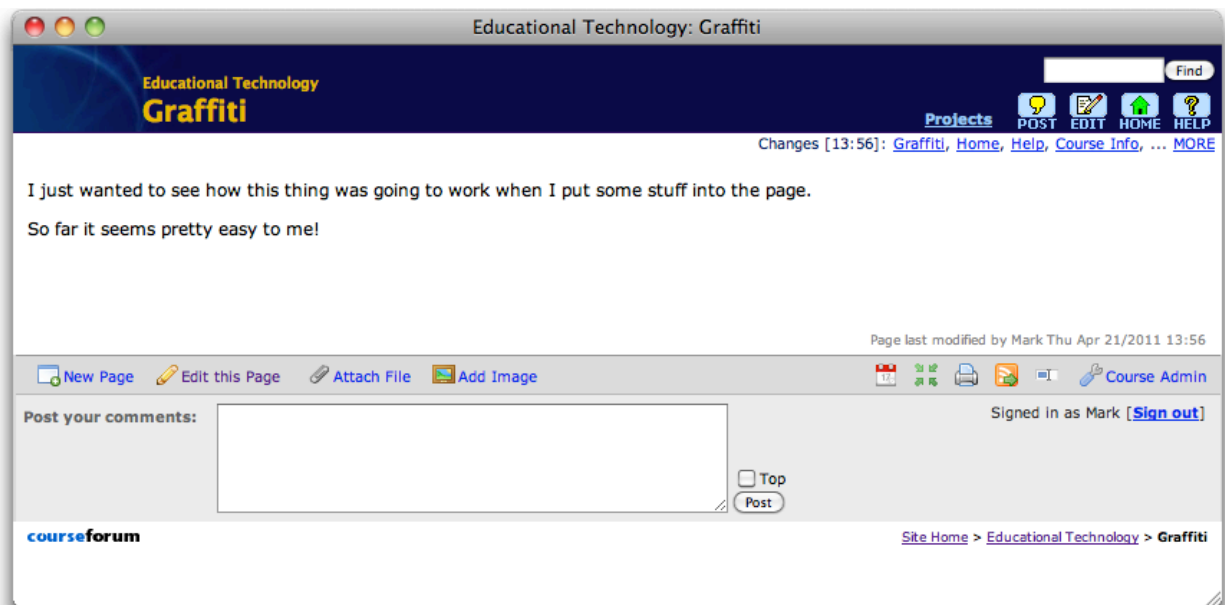You should see the new Graffiti page, complete with your changes, as shown in Figure 3-6.

Figure 3-6. The new "Graffiti" page.

Editing a Page

Want to make more changes? Just click on the "Edit" button at the top right of the page, or alternatively, the "Edit this Page" link at the bottom left. You'll return to the same "Edit Graffiti" page that you were on before. Makes your changes, and again, hit "Save Changes".

The same thing works for every page in the course's forum, including both the pages that were automatically created with the forum (e.g. "Home" or "Help"), and ones that you create. Each page has an "Edit" button.

In fact, *everyone* has the ability to edit and change every page in the forum. Pages are truly a shared resource belonging to everyone in the course, allowing anyone to make corrections, additions or changes to them. (If you're not entirely convinced yet that this is a good idea, you may want to sneak ahead to Chapter 8, "Protecting your Course").

Anatomy of the Edit Page

Besides the large text area holding the content of the page, and the buttons allowing you to save or abandon your changes, there are a number of other parts to the edit page.

Formatting Toolbar. At the top left, just above the text area, are a number of icons which help you format material in the page. Formatting is described in detail in the next chapter.

Grow and Shrink Buttons. At the top right, again just above the text area, are two buttons allowing you to make the text area larger or smaller. Clicking the button will increase or decrease the size by a single line, so click repeatedly to get it to the size you want. This size will be remembered in the future.

Page Locking Controls. These are located just below the "Save Changes" button, and are described in Chapter 6, "More with Pages".

We'll look more at editing and formatting in the next two chapters.

Posting Comments

In most courses, soliciting comments from students is a main motivation for using online collaboration tools. CourseForum makes it very easy for anyone to post comments, whether just adding an offhand opinion or clarification to a page of notes on a lecture, or contributing thoughts to a class-wide designated discussion topic. It's also very easy to review previous comments by others, because they are all visible on the page.

To post a comment on a page, click the "Post" button at the top right of the page, or just click on the text entry in the "Post your comments" section at the bottom of the page. Add your comments in the text area, as shown in Figure 3-7.
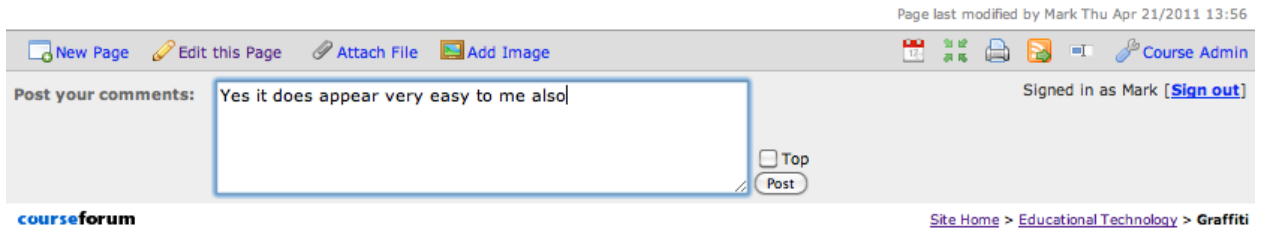
So far it seems pretty easy to me!

Figure 3-7. Adding a comment to the discussion.

When done, click the "Post" button to the right of where you've typed your comments. Your comments will be added to the bottom of the page, as shown in Figure 3-8.

Figure 3-8. The posted comment.

The date and your name will have been automatically added to each post.

If the course instructor did not set up individual accounts, you will have to provide your own name. To prompt you to do this, CourseForum will place your name at the beginning of the "Post your comments" text field, surrounded by square brackets. Initially, you'll see the phrase "Your Name", which you'll want to replace.

Weblog-Style Top Posting

You can also post comments at the top of the page, rather than at the bottom. This can be useful to construct "weblog" style pages, which contain a series of news items, the most recent at the top. To create such a posting, simply check the "Top" checkbox directly above the "Post" button. Note that if the page has been locked so that only comments can be added to the end, this checkbox will not be available.

The setting of the "Top" checkbox will be remembered, so for example if one person top posts, this will be the default for the next person as well. There is also a setting on the "Edit" page that allows you to force top or bottom posting if you wish, as shown in Figure 3-9.
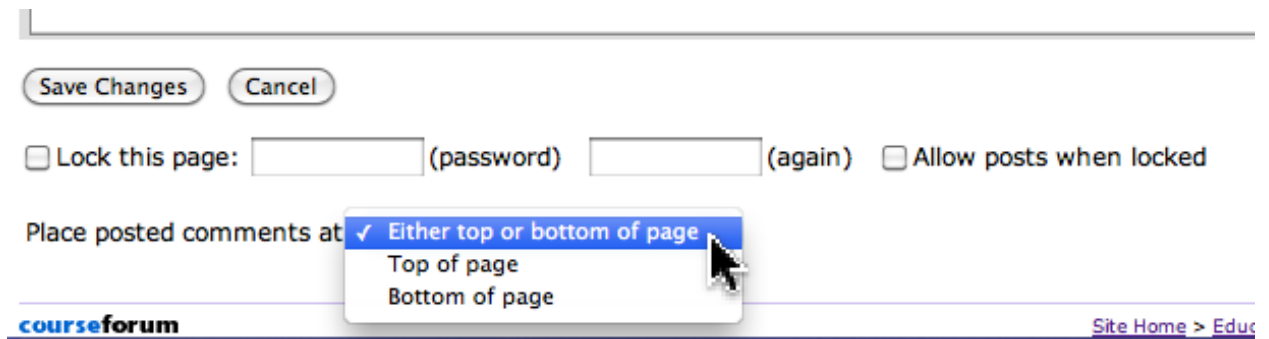

Figure 3-9. Setting where comments appear via the Edit page.

It is also possible to use top posted comments, where the most recent comment is at the top, but where all comments appear below a fixed part of the page, for example class notes on a course topic that is being commented on. To do this, place a line containing only "===comments===" after the fixed content on the page. All top-posted comments will appear below that marker.

Finding Pages

While you can navigate between pages in the forum by following links, often you want to look for pages containing particular content. You can do this using the "Find Pages" area at the top right corner of any page.

> Hint: If you know the name of the page, you can type it into the "Start New Page" box; we've already seen that if you put in the name of an existing page, it will take you to that page, rather than creating a new one.

To search for a page, enter one or more words you'd like to look for in the "Find Pages" area, and press the "Find" button. This will bring up a results screen as shown in Figure 3-10, in this case showing the results of a search for "Home".

Figure 3-10. Results of "Find Pages".

The results page contains links to the pages containing your search term, and the date it was last modified. You can click on any of these links to go directly to those pages. You can also refine your search directly from this page, by modifying the search field near the top of the page.

Selecting the "Include page contents in results" checkbox and then clicking "Find" will display not only the name of each matching page, but also each page's contents.

4. Using the Editor

This chapter goes into more depth on the features of the editing page, including the use of the richtext editor, the source markup editor, and edit preview.

Using the Editing Controls

Figure 4.1 shows you the normal editing page. This normal editor, because it shows you the formatting onscreen (e.g. bold appears bold), is called the *richtext editor*.
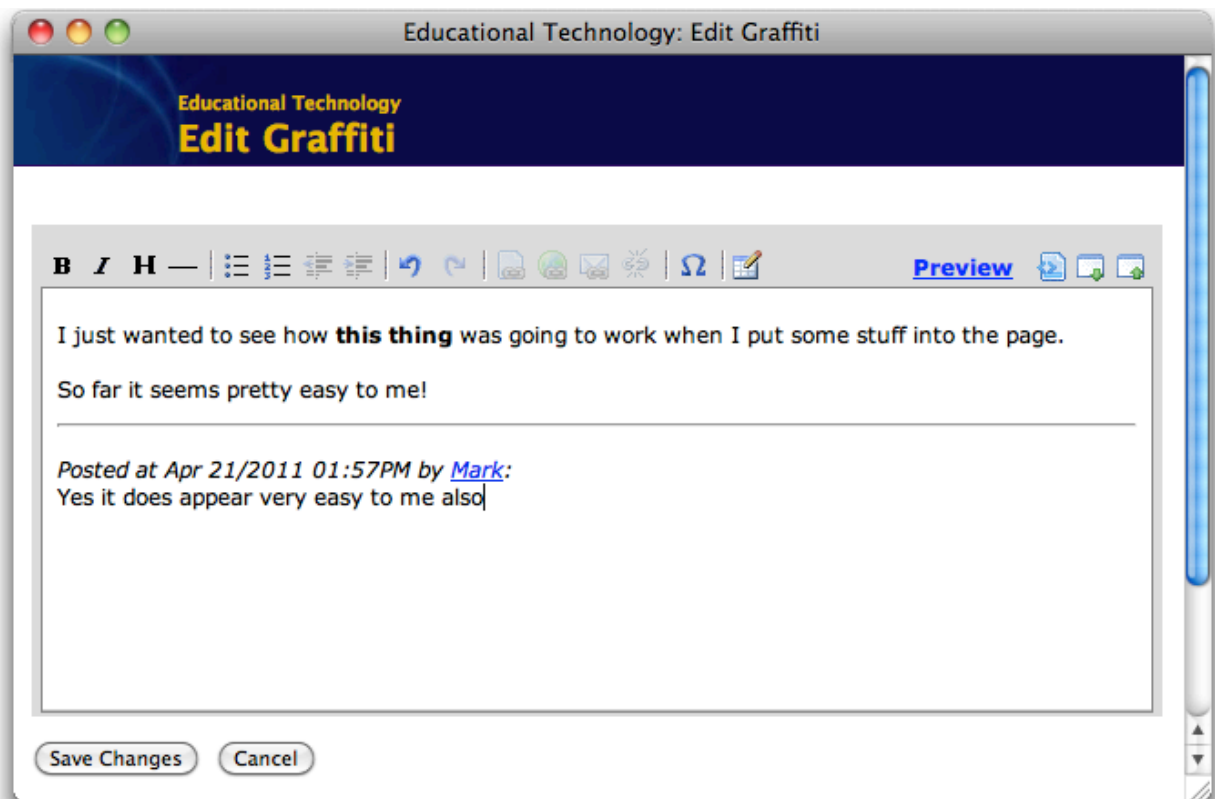

Figure 4-1. The richtext editor.

People using some older, mobile or unsupported web browsers won't be able to use the richtext editor, and instead will see the *source markup* editor, discussed in the next section.

Notice the formatting toolbar, shown in Figure 4-2.

Figure 4-2. The formatting toolbar for the richtext editor.

This allows you to format the contents of the page in a similar way to other web, email or document editors that you're familiar with. The icons are (from left-to-right):

- Make selected text bold
- Make selected text italic
- Make the selected line a heading
- Insert a horizontal rule
- Insert (or convert selected lines into) a bulleted list
- Insert (or converted selected lines into) a numbered list
- Outdent (reduce the nesting) of the selected list items
- Indent (increase the nesting) of the selected list items
- Undo the last operation
- Redo the last operation
- Make the selected text a link to another page
- Make the selected text a link to an external web site
- Make the selected text a link to an email address
- If a link is selected, remove the link
- Insert a special character
- Insert a table

Each icon also has a tooltip if you forget what it does.

If you insert a table, and have your editing cursor inside the table, some additional table editing tools will appear, as shown in Figure 4-3.

Figure 4-3. Table editing controls.

After the (now disabled) insert table icon, the rest are:

- Insert a column to the right of the column your cursor is in
- Insert a column to the left of the column your cursor is in
- Insert a row beneath the row your cursor is in
- Insert a row above the row your cursor is in

- Delete the column

- Delete the row

- Left justify the text of the cell

- Center the text of the cell

- Right justify the text of the cell

- Add or remove borders from the table

Those toolbar buttons, along with the usual things like Copy and Paste in your browser, will help you with the basics.

There are a number of more advanced things you can do that the editor doesn't give you formatting toolbar buttons for. These include things like linking to things other than pages or web sites, marking certain areas of the page as "already formatted", and more.

To add some of these more advanced features to the page, you need to know a little bit about the "source markup". We'll discuss the source markup editor in a moment, and the next chapter goes into detail on all the features available in the markup.

But, if you've peaked ahead, the good news is that you can actually insert most of the markup right into the richtext editor, by typing it in as you would in the source markup editor. When you save the page, CourseForum will recognize the markup that you've entered, and treat it accordingly.

One caveat though because of that. You'll see shortly that most of the advanced markup is enclosed in square brackets, i.e. "[" and "]". So to actually put a square bracket in the richtext editor, you'll need to double them up, i.e. "[[" and "]]".

Using the Source Markup Editor

You can switch between the richtext editor and the source markup editor. In the formatting toolbar, click on the icon just to the right of the "Preview" link—the one that looks like a document with a "<>" on it. Your page will then look like Figure 4-4.
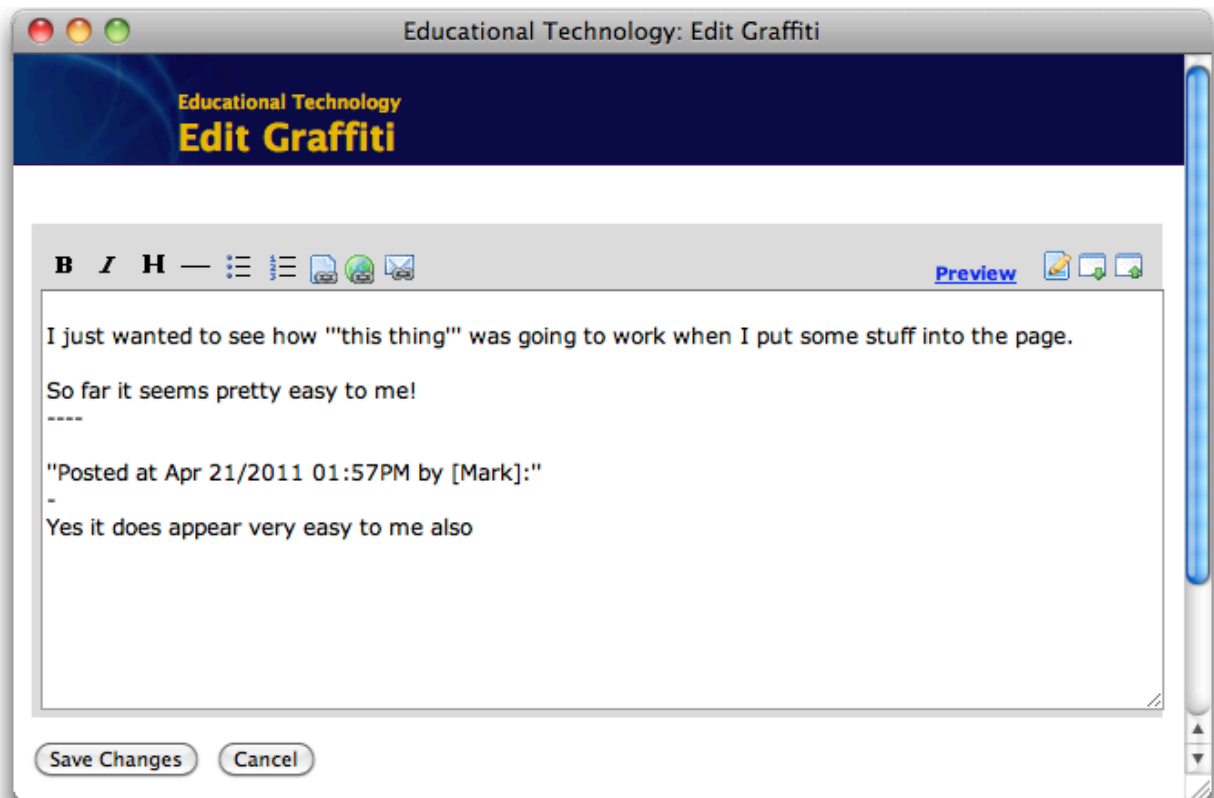

Figure 4-4. The source markup editor.

The contents of your page are still there, but all the formatting has disappeared. Instead, where the formatting was, there appears to be a combination of quotes and brackets.

What you're seeing is the "wiki source" or "markup" version of the page. This is how courseForum actually stores your page. If you're familiar with Wikipedia or other wiki sites, this should look quite familiar.

For many users, after a few minutes of learning, understanding and writing pages using this wiki source format is actually quite easy and fast. In particular, it's very good for simple formatting like new paragraphs (just put a blank line in between), italic and bold (surround the material to highlight with two or three single quotes, respectively), and placing links in the page (often just surrounded by square brackets).

There's a formatting toolbar in the source markup editor too, but as you'd expect, if you try it you'll find it adds the wiki markup for you, rather than changing the actual appearance of the text.

It's easy and fast because the range of formatting choices is fairly limited (e.g. you notice there's nowhere to change the font for a piece of text). Because CourseForum is a tool for collaboration and interaction, the most important priorities of easy editing and linking; having too many formatting choices gets in the way of that.

The next chapter will discuss how to use this wiki markup in detail; remember that you can use most of it from within the richtext editor too by just typing it in exactly as you would in the source markup editor.

You can also switch back and forth between the two editors as much as you want. From the source markup editor, again click the icon to the right of the "Preview" link, which now looks like a document with a pencil on it.

Previewing your Changes

As you've seen, the source markup describes what to put on the final page, but doesn't show it exactly the same. You'll see soon that the richtext editor, while it displays most formatting, does not display everything exactly as it will appear in the final page. For examples, images, included material like RSS feeds, and some other content appears in a stylized, less literal way. Again, this is done to make modifying and contributing faster and easier.

If you do want to see how things would look exactly before the page is actually saved, you can click on the "Preview" link near the top right of the toolbar. You'll see a page something like Figure 4-5.
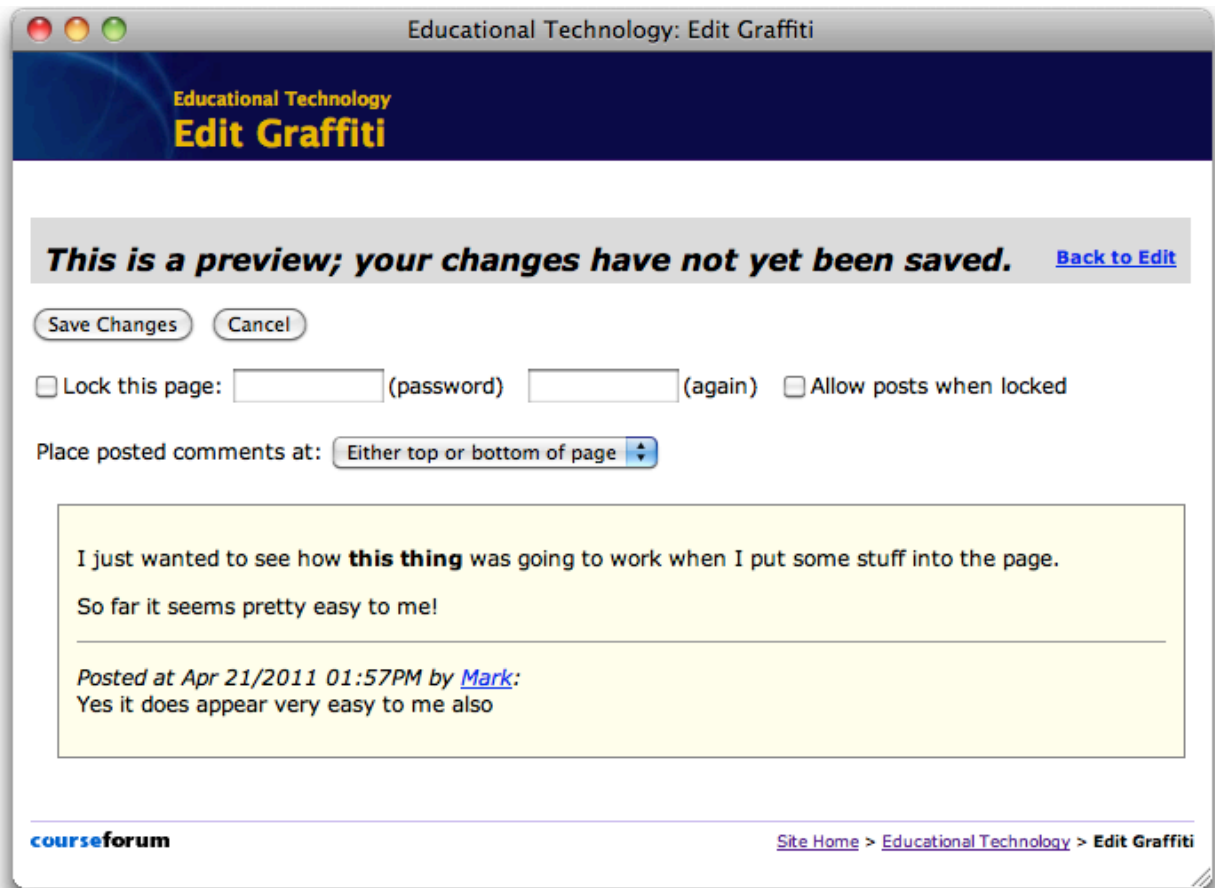
Figure 4-5. Previewing changes to a page.

From the preview screen, you can save your changes if everything looks fine, or click "Back to Edit" to hide the preview and continue making further changes.

Editing Conflicts

Because many people can be working in the same forum at the same time, it's useful to understand what happens when two users edit the same page at the same time.

Editing conflicts can arise when one user starts editing a page, and then a second user also starts editing the same page, before the first user has saved their changes. If the first user saves their changes, and then the second person does afterwards, there is a danger that the first user's changes could be discarded. This is because the second user never saw the first user's changes.

When this occurs, the first person is allowed to save their changes as normal. When the second person goes to save their changes, CourseForum first tries to automatically merge the changes together. This handles situations where for example one user is editing a page and another adds something to the end (or posts to the page). If the automatic merge succeeds, the second user's save proceeds as normal, with the resulting page containing both users' changes.

If the automatic merge cannot be done, CourseForum will notify the second user that someone else has saved the page before they have, and present them with several options. Most simply, the second user can simply abandon their changes and start over. They can also view the currently saved version of the page and perhaps manually integrate the first user's changes into their version before saving. Finally, they can decide to simply save their version as-is, without trying to incorporate any of the first user's changes. In this last case, the final version of the page will have the second user's changes, but not the first. Of course, the first user's changes can still be found via the page version history.

In practice, most page edits in CourseForum are fairly brief, as opposed to sitting in the edit page for hours on end, so conflicts tend to be quite rare.

5. Markup in Depth

The previous chapter described the richtext and source markup editors. This chapter details the wiki markup used in CourseForum to describe the content of pages. This can be used in either editor to add simple formatting, a wide range of resource links o a range of various other features to the page.

Formatting

As we've seen, pages in CourseForum are made up of regular text, just like you'd enter in an email message.

Pages do however support a simple and natural "markup language", allowing you to add simple commands into the page to cause the text to be formatted. These are much simpler than markup languages you may know about like HTML, which often require experts or special tools to create. The markup language in CourseForum is simple enough that anyone can use it, without distracting from the content of the page.

The online help that is located at the bottom of each "Edit" screen provides a convenient "cheat sheet" of the markup commands described in this chapter. As well, the toolbar located just above the main editing area provides convenient access to some of the most common formatting needs.

Paragraphs

The bulk of page content, just like in email, will normally consist of numerous paragraphs of normal text. Type these as you normally would, either on one long line (that will wrap in the text area) or explicitly add a "Return" at the end of each line. CourseForum will treat this all as a single paragraph, wrapping the lines to fit the browser window when displayed.

To separate paragraphs, simply insert a blank line between them.

> Hint: Because everything in CourseForum is plain text, you can easily copy and paste from other sources like email, web pages, or other documents, right into CourseForum pages.

Headings

To create a heading on the page, put it on its own line, and put three asterisks at the start and end of the line. For example:

```
*** This is a heading ***
```

Italics and Boldface

To make text italics or bold within a paragraph, surround it with two (italics) or three (bold) single quotation marks. For example:

```
This is ''italics'' and this is '''bold''' text.
```

Lists

To create a bulleted list, just start each point with a single asterisk, followed by a space, and then type the entire point on a single line (it's okay if it wraps). For example:

```
* first point
* second point
* third point
```

To create a numbered list, do the same but starting with a hash sign ("#"):

```
# first point
# second point
# third point
```

You can also create nested lists (lists inside of lists) by placing multiple "#" and "*" at the start of a line, e.g.

```
# item one
# item two
#* first subpoint
#* second subpoint
# item three
```

Rules

To create a horizontal rule (a line going across the page, used as a separator) put four or more dashes alone on a line.

Line Breaks

To start a new line, but not cause a paragraph break, put a single dash on a line by itself.

Preformatted Text

If you have a block of text, where you want the spacing, such as line breaks or columns, to be preserved, start and end the block of text with three equals signs ("==="). The text will be displayed with a fixed-width font.

If you want to make sure that no other formatting is applied in the preformatted block (e.g. bold, italics, links), start and end the block with six equals signs instead ("======").

If the Course Administrator has enabled the use of HTML formatting in the course, you can include a block of HTML code in the page by starting and ending it with "===html===".

Tables

Tables can be used to format data in columns. Format tabular data by placing each row of the table on a separate line, starting and ending with the "|" character. Similarly, separate each table cell (column) from the next by placing a "|" between them. For example:

```
| Item | Quantity | Price |
| Eggs | 12 | 2.99 |
| Milk | 2L | 3.50 |
| Cheese | 454g | 6.00 |
```

By default, every cell in the table will be left-aligned. To center a cell, place two or more spaces between the "|" at the start of the cell and its contents, and also two or more spaces between the cell's contents and the "|" at the end of the cell. To right-justify the cell, place two or more spaces before the cell's contents but not after. For normal left-alignment then, use zero or one space around the cell's content.

Tables normally do not display their borders. To add borders, place this line before the table:

```
[tablestyle:borders]
```

To stop showing borders, use:

```
[tablestyle:default]
```

Links to Other Pages

Links are very important in CourseForum, because they are the main way that pages in the forum are organized. As with normal web pages, links between CourseForum pages help define the structure of the forum, relating together pages and topics.

Creating Page Links

Because links are important, creating them is very easy. To create a link from one page to another, simply surround the name of the page you want to link to with square brackets. For example, to create a link to the "Help" page, you would use something like this:

```
Find out more at the [Help] page.
```

That is literally all that is required.

Because square brackets are used for you links, if you want to have square brackets that are actually displayed in the page, you will need to double them up, e.g.

```
[[this is in brackets]]
```

Changing the Name of Page Links

To create a link to a page, but to have that link display as something other than the name of the page you're linking to, you can use the [page:] links, e.g.

```
Visit the [page:"Home" main page of the course].
```

You can also have links to a page display as an image; this will be described in Chapter 7, "Working with Files and Images".

Page Links for New Pages

What happens if the page you're linking to does not yet exist? That's just fine; follow the link and it will be created, just as if you had entered its name in the "New Page" screen. In fact, creating these links as you go is a handy way to remind you to go back and fill in some related information later on.

Whenever you create a page, it's a good idea to add a link from other related material to the new page, to help people find it (you can always use "Find Pages" too of course).

In fact, when you use the "New Page" feature to create a new page, you'll see that it leaves behind a link to the new page on the bottom of the page that you created it from. You can either leave the link there, move it to a more appropriate spot on the page, or delete it entirely if that's what makes sense.

Find Pages Linked to a Page

Wondering what other pages in the forum are linked to the page that you're currently viewing? Click the "References" link at the bottom of the page (just above the "Post your comments" area), and you'll get a list of every page that is linked to the current one.

Links to Other Web Sites

You'll also want to include links to other web pages that are not part of your course. This allows you to point to news articles, research materials, or other material that will be useful within the course.

To link to other web pages from within a CourseForum page, all you need to do is type the address of the web site, including the "http" part. CourseForum will automatically recognize this and display it as a website link. For example:

```
Find out more at http://www.yahoo.com
```

If you don't want the URL to display in the page (for example, if its very long), you can enclose it in square brackets and it will be replaced with the word "[link]". For example:

```
Find out more at [http://www.yahoo.com]
```

You can also provide a different name for the link, which will be displayed in the CourseForum page instead of the web site address. To do this, put a space after the web site address and follow that by whatever name you'd like to display. For example:

```
Find out more at [http://www.yahoo.com Yahoo Home]
```

As with page links, these web links can also be displayed as an image; this will be described in Chapter 7, "Working with Files and Images".

Email Addresses

Similarly, to provide a clickable link to someone's email address (which you might include on a personal home page in the course's forum), just preface it with the word "mailto:". For example:

```
You can send me email at mailto:student@ourschool.edu
```

Again, enclosing the mailto: URL in square brackets will cause it to be replaced with the word "[email]" in the page. You can also specify the name to display in the page by putting a space after the email address followed by the name you want to show, just before the closing square bracket.

Other Types of Links

As with [http:] and [mailto:] links, you can create links to many other types of services that your browser knows about. These include: [https:], [ftp:], [news:], [rtsp:], [telnet:] and [webcal:].

Including Other Pages

Rather than linking to another web page, you can actually include the contents of that web page directly into your forum page. To do this, create a link, starting with "include:" and then the address of the page to include, e.g.

```
[include:http://www.google.com/support/]
```

You'll probably only want to do this with certain specific pages. When you're doing this, keep in mind that complex pages (those with a lot of images, styles, menus, etc.) may not be designed to be included into other web pages.

You can also include the content of another page from your forum, by just typing the name of the page after the "include:", e.g.

```
[include:Contact Info]
```

This is handy for building up more complex pages out of snippets from other pages, especially when several pages may include the same snippets.

If you want to include a small snippet within an existing paragraph, use [inline:] instead of [include:]; it works exactly the same way, but won't force the included material into its own paragraph.

Including RSS Feeds and Forum Changes

You can also include the RSS feed for websites that have one, which includes all CourseForum courses. By just including the address of the RSS feed, CourseForum will automatically go to the website associated with the RSS feed, and pull out the latest headlines from that site. This is a convenient way to include up-to-date news from other sources into your courses, e.g.

```
[rss:http://www.scripting.com/rss.xml]
```

A slight variant of this will also show the first bit of the description associated with each news headline:

```
[rsslong:http://www.scripting.com/rss.xml]
```

Another variant will show the complete description, including any HTML formatting in the description:

```
[rssfull:http://www.scripting.com/rss.xml]
```

Note that both the regular and the RSS includes presently only work with "http:" websites, not "https:" (secure) sites.

Atom feeds can also be included in exactly the same way, using [atom:], [atomlong:], and [atomfull:].

While you could use its RSS feed to display the most recent changes for the forum, there is a slightly easier approach:

```
[recentchanges:]
```

A similar option shows the first little bit of each page in the changes list:

```
[recentchangeslong:]
```

Category Pages

You'll notice one of the pre-defined templates is called "Category Template"; this helps you create category pages. Category pages are a useful way to help you organize your forum, by

pointing to a set of other pages that all relate to the same topic. For example, you'll also find that there is a page called "Category Help" which points to all the other pages in the forum that contain help information.

You can create these sort of index pages explicitly of course, by adding a set of links to the page. This is known as "top down" style, where the index page specifies what pages belong to the category.

Category pages just provide a different way to do the same thing, but in a "bottom up" style. Instead of specifying what pages to link to in the category page itself, every other page can make a link to one or more category pages (usually these links appear at the bottom of the page). If you look at one of the category pages, you'll see it contains a line saying "[references:]", which automatically creates a list of all pages that link to that page—so the category page gets built for you.

Both top-down manually created index pages and bottom-up category pages essentially do the same thing, and each have their place. Different groups will prefer one or the other (or both, depending on the situation).

Page Lists and Tables of Contents

To add a list of all pages in the forum to a page, use one of the following two lines (the first will sort alphabetically, the second by modification date):

```
[pagelist:]
```

```
[pagelist:bydate]
```

To generate a table of contents for the page, based on the headings that are included in the page text (via "*** Heading ***" lines), use one of the following (the first gives a vertical list, the second horizontal). Each entry in the table of contents will link to the appropriate part within the page.

```
[toc:]
```

```
[toc:horizontal]
```

Redirecting to Another Page

Sometimes you may want to have a page that doesn't need its own content, but should really just forward people onto another page. For example, you might have a page named "International Order of Wiki Experts". But, most people might refer to this by its abbreviation "IOWE"; this is also a lot shorter to type when creating links to this page.

Create (or edit) the page named "IOWE", and place the following in it (must be the very first thing in the page, and usually it would be the only thing in the page).

```
[redirect:International Order of Wiki Experts]
```

Now, anyone who visits the "IOWE" page will automatically be redirected on to the "International Order of Wiki Experts" page. There will be a small note just under the page title saying they were redirected, and allow going back to the "IOWE" page (for example, to edit it and remove or change the redirect).

Footnotes

You can create footnotes within a page using the following:

```
.. as shown in[footnote:start]Buggles, Smith and Foote
(1999). Answers to everything.[footnote:end].
```

Everything between the [footnote:start] and [footnote:end] will be replaced with a footnote marker, e.g. "¹". And the reference itself will appear in a list (along with any other footnotes) at the end of the page.

You can also refer to the same footnote multiple times, by giving it a simple name, and then referring to that name later on.

```
..[footnote:start everything]Buggles, Smith and Foote
(1999). Answers to everything.[footnote:end].

As we saw before[footnote:ref everything], ..
```

Finally, if you'd like the list of references to appear somewhere other than right at the end of the page, you can place the following at your chosen location:

```
[footnote:display]
```

Mathematics

You can display very nicely formatted mathematical equations within a page. To do this however, you need to know a math typesetting language called T_EX.

Explaining how that works is well beyond the scope of this manual, but here is an example of how you'd include an equation within a page:

```
[math:a=n \times \sum sin(\theta)]
```

Before you can use this however, your site administrator will need to install some extra software on the machine running CourseForum; details can be found at the CourseForum web site.

Slideshows

You can create simple slideshow presentations from specially-formatted CourseForum pages.

To do so, select the "Presentation Template" when creating a new page. This will insert a simple presentation into the page, as well as the instructions for modifying the presentation and a button to view the presentation.

6. More with Pages

This chapter explains how you can use page templates, lock pages to prevent changes, keep track of changes others make, and see what has changed over time.

Page Templates

In your course, you may have many pages that are similar. For example, each course lecture may have a page assigned to it. If you're going to be creating many similar pages, page templates can help you to save some time.

When you first create a page, rather than starting completely from scratch, you may have the choice of several page templates to use. If they are available, there will be a popup list at the top of the edit screen, as shown in Figure 6-1.
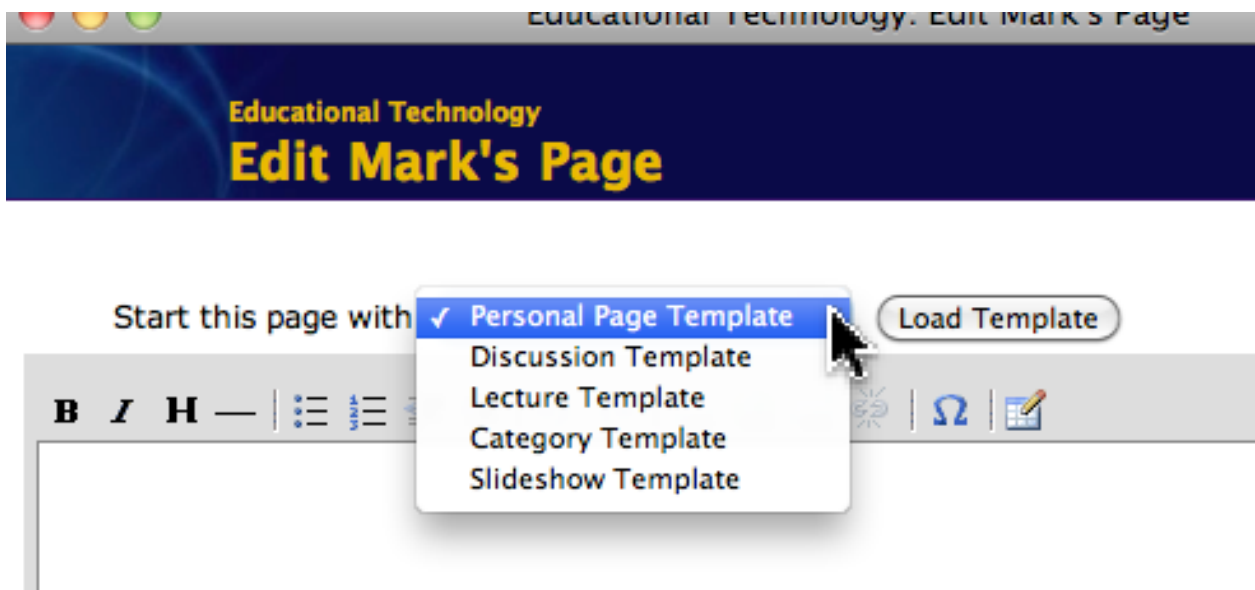
Figure 6-1. Choosing a page template.
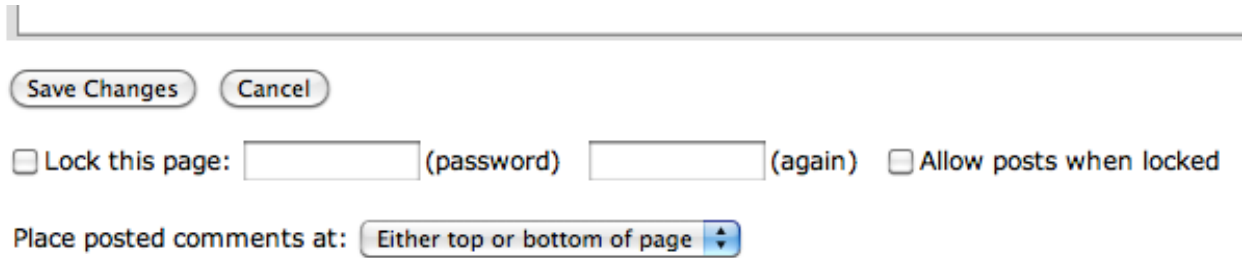
If you'd like to use a template, choose it from the popup list, and click the "Load Template" button. The template will be loaded into the editing area, and you can begin to modify it. If you don't want to use a template, just ignore that area and start editing from scratch as usual.

CourseForum comes with several templates by default, but the instructor or Course Administrator can modify or replace these with others, as described in Chapter 11, "Course Administrator Tasks".

Locking Pages

You'll see in a later chapter how to restrict who can access a course. But sometimes you just want to lock down a single page so that nobody can modify it. CourseForum allows anyone to lock down a particular page with a password, so that it cannot subsequently be changed without entering that password.

To lock a page, go into the "Edit" screen for the page by clicking the "Edit" button or following the "Edit this Page" link. Below the large text area, you will see a set of controls like that shown in Figure 6-2.

Figure 6-2. Lock Page controls.

Locking the Page

To lock the page, check the box at the very left, and then enter the password you'd like to use to lock this page in the two boxes to the right. This password can be anything you'd like. Then click the "Save Changes" button. You will be returned to the regular view of the page. You or anyone else will no longer be able to edit the page, or post comments to it.

Editing a Locked Page

To make changes to the page, you will have to supply the password. Click the "Edit" button again. While the normal edit screen will appear, you'll notice that just below the text area is a notice that the page is locked, as shown in Figure 6-3.

Figure 6-3. Page is Locked notification.

To make any changes to the page, you'll need to make the changes in the big text area as usual, and also enter the password you used to lock the page where it is asked for below. If you want to

keep the page locked afterwards, keep the "Keep page locked after save" checkbox checked. Then hit "Save Changes".

> If you are signed in as the Course Administrator, you can still make changes to the page, even though it has been locked.

Unlocking the Page

To unlock a locked page, click the "Edit" button to go to the normal editing screen for the page. Enter the lock password as before, but uncheck the box reading "Keep page locked after save". Then hit "Save Changes". The page will be unlocked.

Posting to a locked page

To post comments to a locked page, users will first have to enter the lock password, as shown in Figure 6-4. They can then proceed to post as normal.
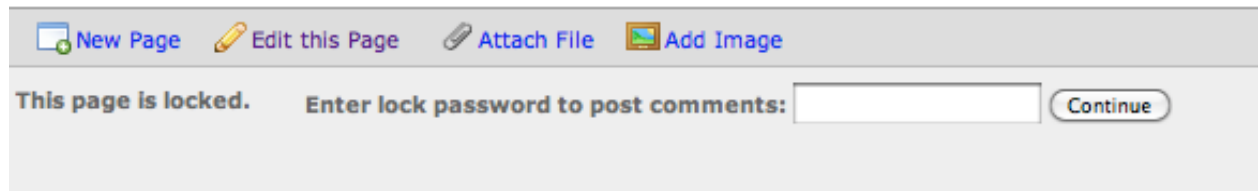
Figure 6-4. Lock Password Needed for Posting.

You can also lock a page to prevent changes to the page (such as people modifying existing page contents), but still allow people to post comments, without needing to enter the lock password first.

To do this, you would lock the page as normal by providing a lock password, but before clicking "Save Changes", you would also check the checkbox labeled "Allow posts when locked". That will keep the page locked, but still allow comments to be posted.

This is extremely useful for running discussions on a topic as you would with many other forum tools, providing a way for many people to just express their opinion. To set this up, simply create a new page for the discussion topic, add a small preamble at the top introducing the topic and asking people to add their comments, and lock the page so that it cannot be edited, but that posting comments is still allowed.

Tracking Changes

Trying to follow what might be going on in an active course, where everyone can be changing everything, could be challenging. CourseForum provides you the tools to easily find out what's being updated. This allows you to find out where the "hot spots" are, see what is new, and contribute to the active discussion.

Recent Changes

On every page, you will find a "Recent Changes" area just above the content of the page, as shown in Figure 6-5.

Figure 6-5. Recent Changes area of page.

This area shows you the names of the last few pages that were changed. Clicking on one of the names will take you directly to that page. You can also move your mouse over the name of the page, and a tool-tip will appear showing you when that page was last modified.

You can also click on the "MORE" link at the end of the list to get a much larger list of changes than is displayed on an individual page.

For the current page, you can also see the time it was last modified and by whom; this is shown at the bottom right of each page, just below the content.

Just below that, you'll find a "Track Changes" button, which looks like (you can see what each of those image buttons does by moving your mouse over them). Click on that to find out two more ways to track changes, via RSS or email.

RSS

Figure 6-6 shows the "Track Changes" page, accessed via the "Track Changes" button.

Figure 6-6. Track Changes page.

If you happen to use a *news aggregator* application or service, such as NetNewsWire, FeedDemon, or you use an RSS-capable web browser such as Safari or Firefox, you'll want to click on one of the two "RSS" icons on the "Track Changes" page.

These applications use an XML format called RSS to help you very easily keep track of changes on frequently updated web sites. They work by regularly asking each website you tell it about for changes and displaying them, rather than you needing to visit each website individually.

On the "Track Changes" page, you'll find an RSS feed for the entire forum (which will help you monitor changes for all pages in the forum), and a separate one for just this page. Subscribe to one of these feeds using your news aggregator or browser, either by clicking on the appropriate RSS icon, or copying the URL of the feed (linked to from the icon).

You can find more information at http://www.courseforum.com/rss.html.

Email

If the Site Administrator has it setup, there are also options on the "Track Changes" page to notify you by email when changes are made; again, you can watch for changes to any page in the forum, or just this particular page.

To be notified of changes, enter your email address, choose how often you want emails to be sent to you, and then click "Add Email". If you no longer want to be notified by changes via email, enter your email address and click "Remove Email".

Page Version History

CourseForum actually maintains a *complete* history of all changes to pages. That means, that every time a change is made, that change is recorded, along with the person who made the change, and the time the change was made.

This allows anyone in the course to see older versions of pages. Content on these older pages can then be copied from them and pasted into the current page. An older version of the page can even be used to entirely replace the current version (very useful when a page's entire content is accidentally deleted).

To view older versions of pages, click on the "Versions" button, which appears on the bottom right of pages after at least one change has been made. This is shown in Figure 6-7.
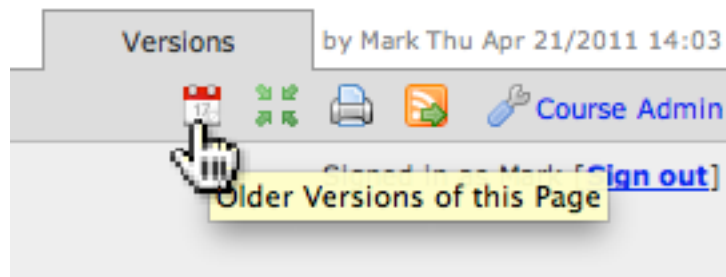
Figure 6-7. Versions link in pages that have been changed.

Clicking on that link will take you to page where you can browse through all the versions of the page, as shown in Figure 6-8. Each version will highlight what changed from the previous version (in this case, a new comment was posted to the page).
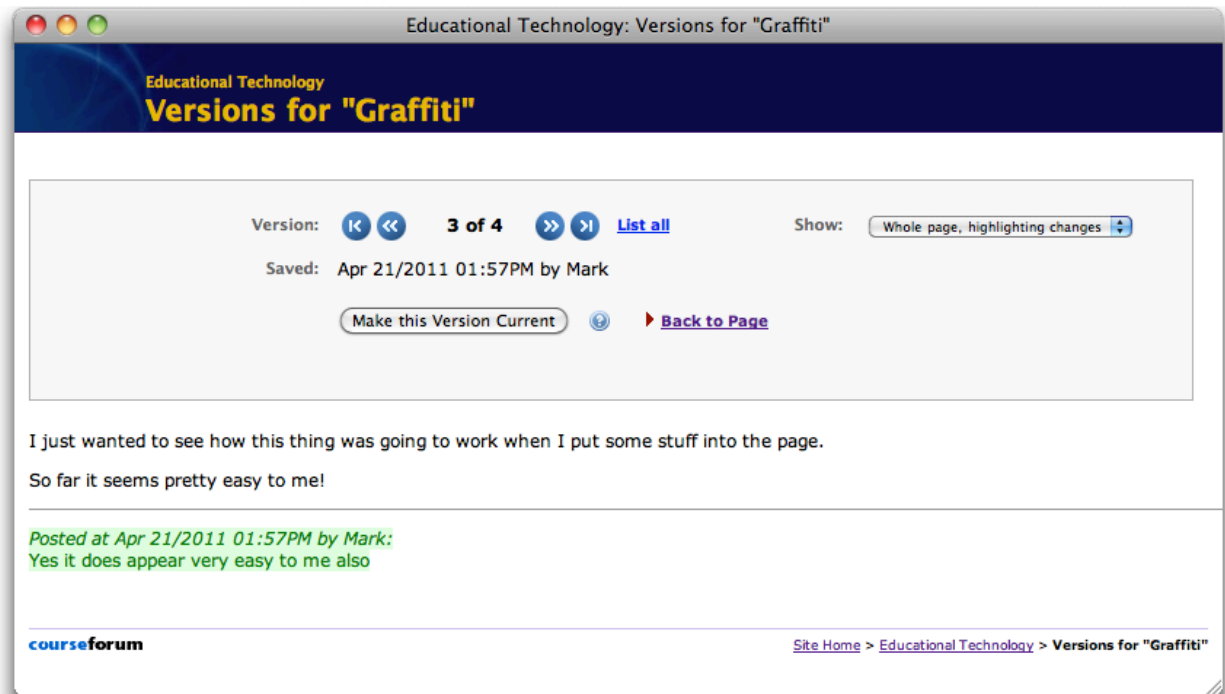
Figure 6-8. Browsing versions for a page.

At the top, the round arrow buttons ("First", "Prev", "Next" and "Last") allow you to change which version of the page you are looking at. You can also see how many versions of the page are available, and which you are currently looking at in the bottom half of the window.

Just below that is the date and time the version you're looking at was saved, as well as who saved it.

The options in the "Show:" menu allow you to change what is displayed in the bottom half of the window: the whole page with changes highlighted, just the changes, the whole page without highlighting, or the unformatted page as you'd see it in the "Edit this Page" screen. This last one can be useful if you'd like to coy some text to paste into a page's edit screen.

The "Make This Version Current" button will replace the newest version of the page with the current version being displayed, and so is used to restore an older version of the page.

The small "List all" link in the top row will take you to a page showing a list of all the versions of that page (Figure 6-9). For each, you can see when the version was saved, and by who. Clicking on the version number will show you just that particular version. Course administrators would also have the option of deleting one or more versions.
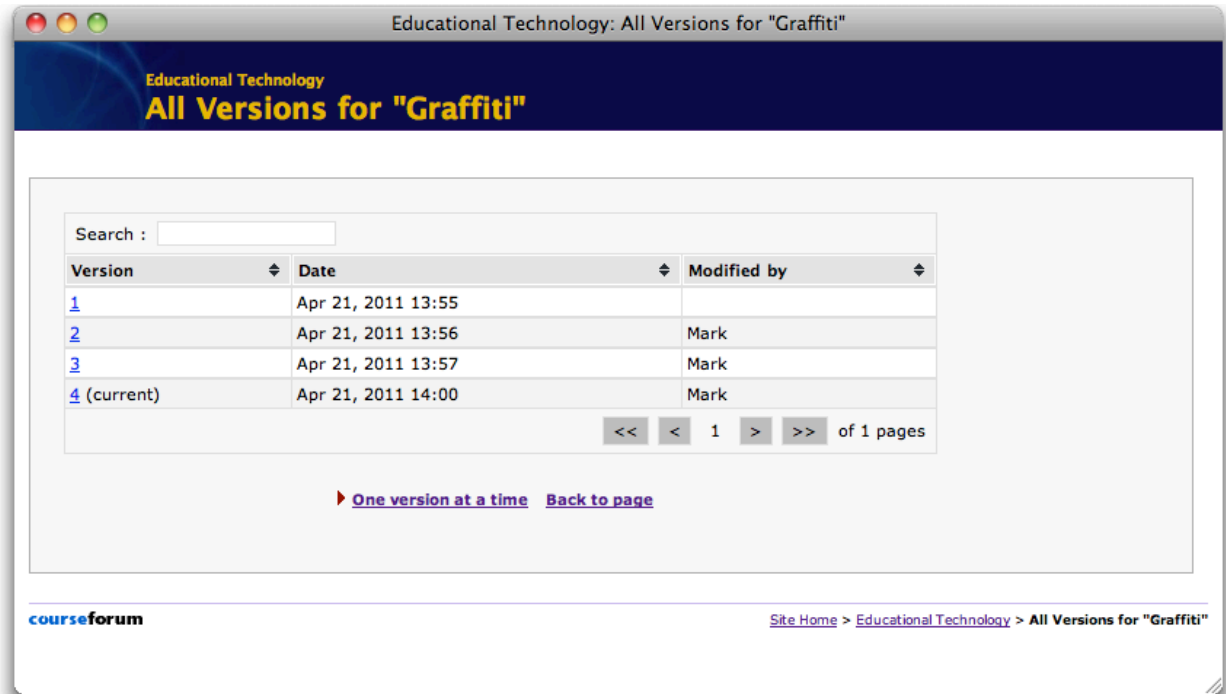
Figure 6-9. List All Versions of a Page.

When you're done browsing the older versions, "Back to Page" will take you back to the normal page.

7. Working with Files and Images

This chapter explains how you can work with files and images, which helps to bring in a wide range of other content into your CourseForum pages.

Attaching Files to Pages

Like adding attachments to email messages, CourseForum allows you to attach documents, such as Microsoft Word or PowerPoint files, directly to any page in your course's forums.

You can use this feature to post current copies of presentations, or other supplementary course material you've prepared in a page devoted to questions about the particular lecture. Students can upload current copies of reports rather than emailing multiple copies to large numbers of people.

Attaching the File

To attach a document to a page, click on the page's "Attach File" link, located near the bottom of the page, just above the "Post your comments" area. A window like that in Figure 7-1 will appear (different web browsers will display this window differently).
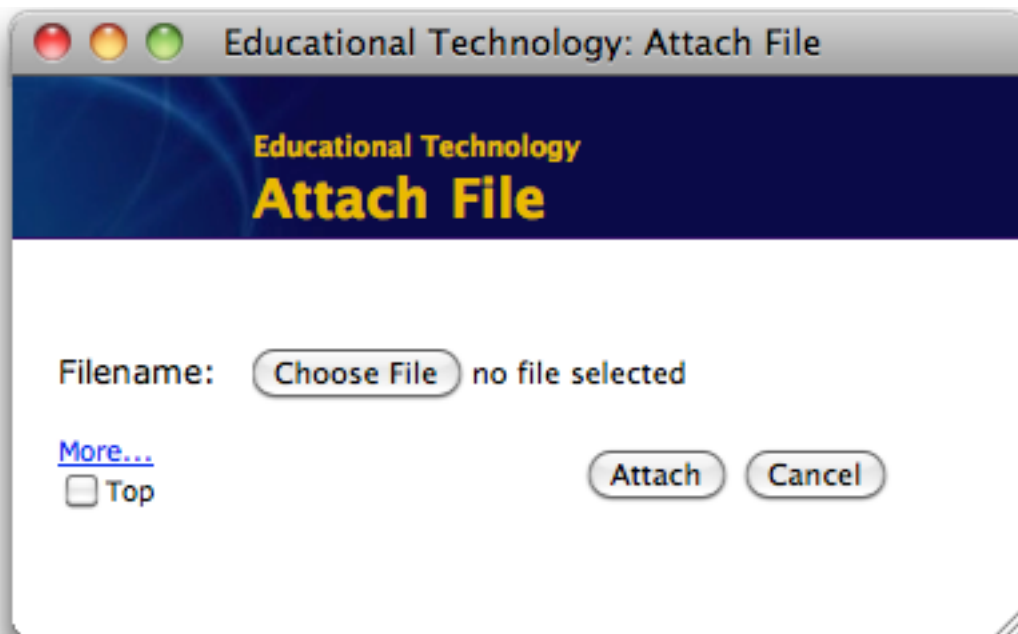
Figure 7-1. Attach File window.

Click on the "Choose File" button (this may be named something like "Browse…", depending on your web browser). This will in turn bring up a dialog box allowing you to choose a file.

Locate the file you'd like to attach on your own computer, and choose it. Back at the Attach File window, click the "Attach" button. The file will be transferred from your computer to the server running CourseForum, and the Attach File window will close.

At the bottom of your page, you will then see a small icon, showing that the file is now part of the page, as shown in Figure 7-2.
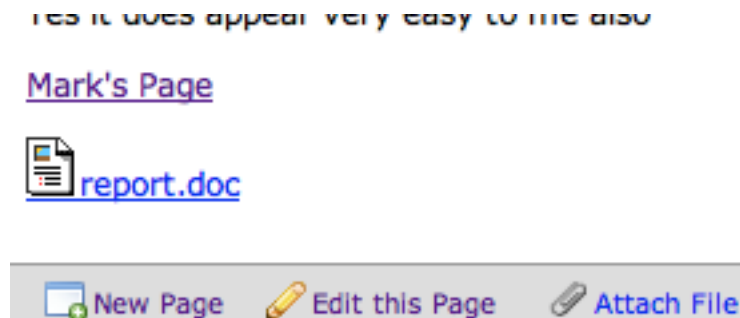
Figure 7-2. File icon in the page.

The "Attach File" dialog may also have an option, depending on the current top posting comments setting, that allows you to attach the file to the top of the page, rather than the bottom of the page.

Downloading the File

For you (or someone else) to download the file, simply click on its icon or the filename. The file will be downloaded to your computer, where it can be viewed, printed, or whatever.

Moving or Deleting the File

The file's icon is automatically placed at the end of the page, but you can actually move it anywhere on the page you'd like.

If you click the "Edit" button to view the underlying page content, you'll see that the file's location is marked by a link that looks something like the one in Figure 7-3 (the number, representing the specific file, will likely be different).

Figure 7-3. File links in richtext (left) and source markup (right) editors.

You can cut/copy and then paste that link (including the square brackets) anywhere else in the page. For example, if the file is material related to some other notes higher up on the page, move it up next to those notes.

If you'd like to delete the file entirely from the page, simply delete the link.

Updating a File

To replace a file with a newer version of it, you can attach the new file, and then edit the page to replace the old link with the new one. However, there is an easier approach.

If you right-click (or Control-click on Mac OS X) your mouse over the file's name or icon, a menu will appear, shown in Figure 7-4. Choose "Replace…" which will pop up the attach file dialog. Upload the new file from your hard drive as before; instead of it being placed at the end of the page, it will replace the existing file in the page.
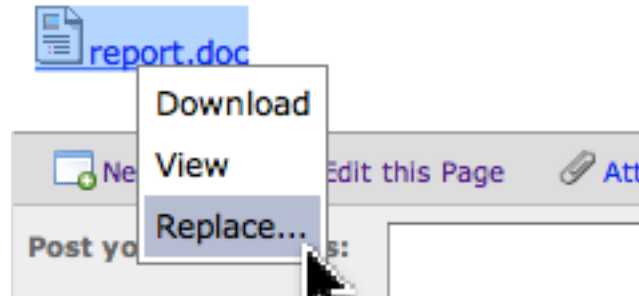
Figure 7-4. Replacing a file in a page.

Viewing a File in your Browser

Instead of downloading the file to be stored on your computer, you can use the "View" item in the menu shown in Figure 7-4. This will try to display it right in the web browser window. Not all web browsers can display all different types of files though, so some will still be downloaded even if you choose this option.

Attaching Multiple Files

You can also attach multiple files at the same time. In the attach file dialog, click the "More" link. This will expand the window, as shown in Figure 7-5. You can then choose up to ten files from your computer to attach at once.
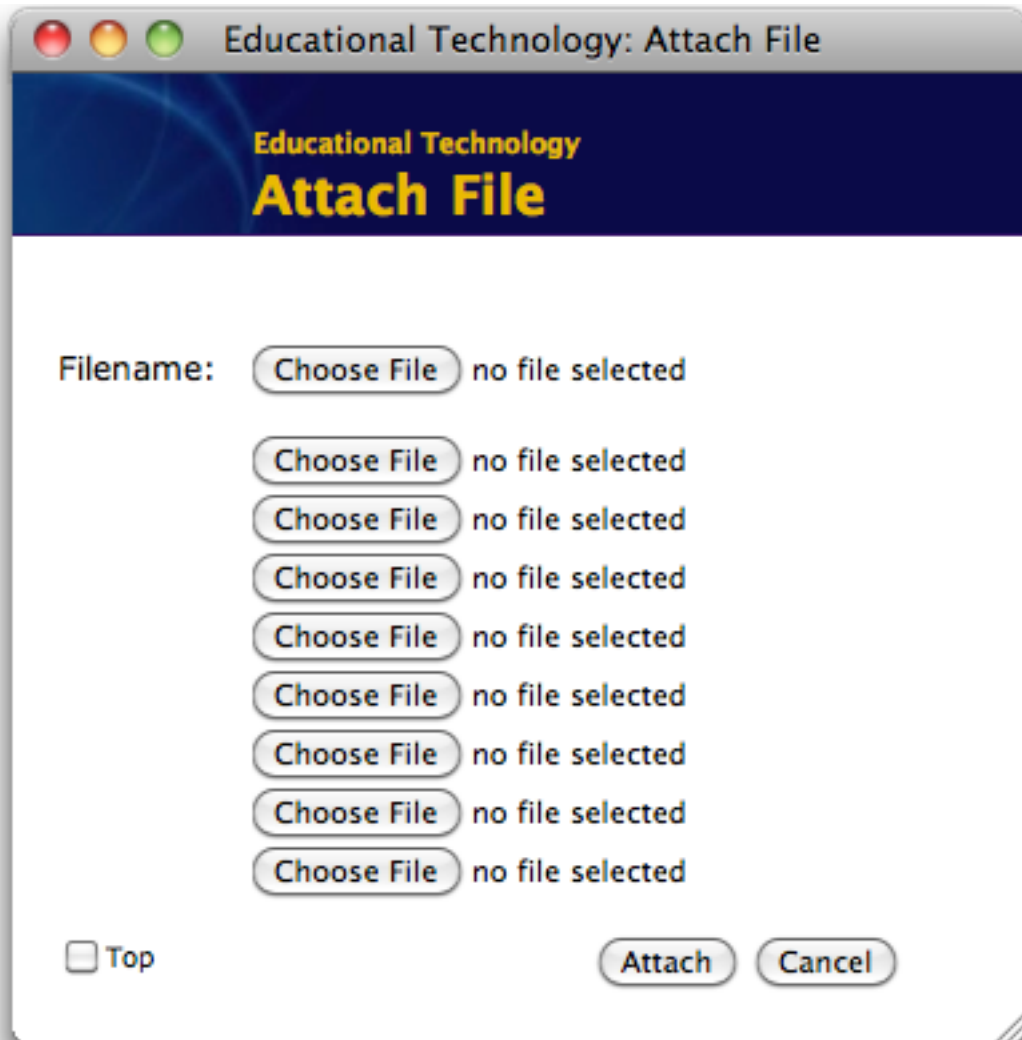
Figure 7-5. Attaching multiple files.

Displaying a Different Name

You can also change the name of the file that is displayed in the page. This works similarly to how you can change the name shown for an "http" link: simply place a space and then the name you'd like to display after the id number. For example (in the source markup editor):

```
[file:15388 My File.doc]
```

Including Attached HTML Files

If you've attached an HTML file to a page in your forum, you can insert the contents of the file as HTML directly into a forum page by using the same marker, but changing "file:" to "include:". For example:

```
[include:15388]
```

Files on your LAN

If you already have files stored on a file server on your Local Area Network, you can refer to them. This is different than attaching files, as you're just pointing to them, rather than actually placing them inside your CourseForum group. It's more like a web link, but instead it's a link to the file on your file server. For this to work, everyone needs access to the file server from wherever they are using CourseForum. To refer to a file, do something like:

```
[file://server/comp 101/myfile.doc]
```

As before, you can also display a different name for the file. However, because such network file server pathnames usually contain spaces, you'll need to surround the network pathname with quotes. For example:

```
[file:"//server/comp 101/myfile.doc" Latest Version]
```

You can also link to files on Windows shared drives like this:

```
[file:U:\foo\bar.doc]
```

However, many recent versions of browsers, for security reasons, will not allow this last form. It may be possible to adjust browser settings to work around this issue (see the support area of our web site for details), but it's generally better to use the "file://server/…" style links.

Attaching Images to Pages

Attaching images to pages works very much the same as attaching files. Click on "Add Image", and the window shown in Figure 7-6 will appear.
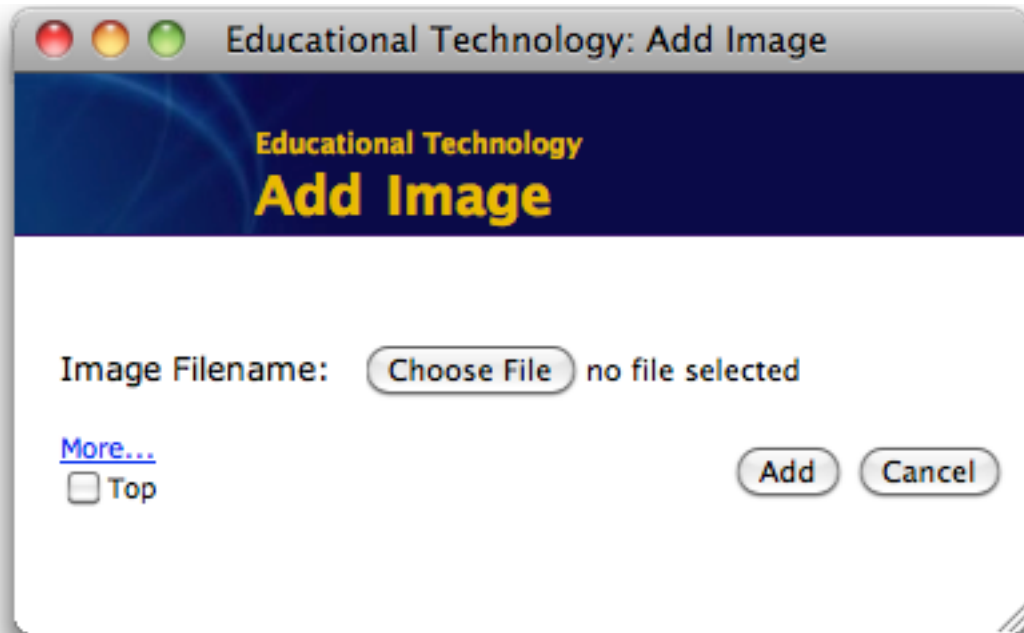
Figure 7-6. Add Image window.

Click the "Choose File" button, choose the image file (such as a GIF or JPEG) to upload, and then click "Add". The image will be uploaded and placed at the end of the page. Again, there may be an option allowing you to place the image at the top of the page instead.

If you'd like to move the image around on the page, or delete it, you'll find a link was placed in the page, looking something like the one in Figure 7-7 (again, the number will be different). Move it around to a different part of the page, or delete it entirely.

Figure 7-7. Image links in the richtext (left) or source markup (right) editors.

Resizing Images

If you find the images are too large or small to fit onto the page, you can request that they be displayed at a different size. You will need to modify the image: link to include the desired width and height of the image, in the format "[image:*idnumber@widthxheight*]". So for example, to

display the previous image at a width of 64 pixels and a height of 48 pixels, we would change the link to look like the following:

```
[image:26987@64x48]
```

Using Files and Images on Several Pages

If you'd like to use the same image, or have the same file, included on several different pages, you don't need to upload multiple different copies of the file or image to each page.

As you saw, references to images are embedded in pages as links, starting either with "file:" or with "image:". If you'd like that file or image to appear on a different page, simply copy the link, and then paste it into the content of the other page.

Using Images from Web Sites

Rather than uploading an image from your computer to the CourseForum page with the "Add Image" command, you can also just link directly to an image on another website. This may sometimes be more convenient, such as when you're trying to keep your image in sync with ones on another web site that are frequently changing.

To do this, insert a link into your page starting with "image:" and followed by the complete URL to the image on the other website. For example:

```
[image:http://www.myschool.edu/logo.gif]
```

Using Images as Links

In the same way that various links (http:, ftp:, etc.) can be shown with a different name, you can also show an image for the link. To do this, follow the link with "image:" and the id number or URL of the image to display. For example.

```
[http://www.us.com image:12345]
```

```
[http://www.us.com image:http://www.us.com/logo.gif]
```

The same thing also works for links to forum pages:

```
[page:"My Page" image:12345]
```

```
[page:"My Page" image:http://www.us.com/logo.gif]
```

Using MP3 Audio Files

You can also include MP3 audio files, in a manner similar to how files and images work. Instead of a file icon or image though, you will see a small music control appear in the forum page, as shown in Figure 7-8.
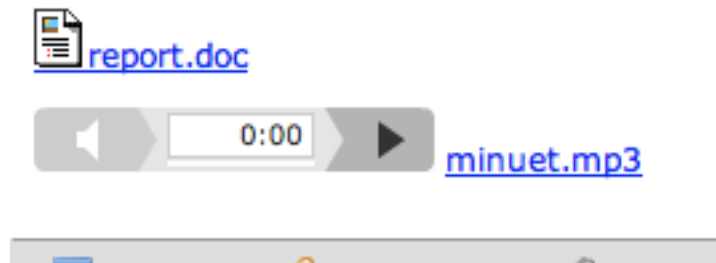
Figure 7-8. An MP3 file appearing in a page.

To upload an MP3 file from your computer to a forum page, first use the same "Attach File" command that you would use to upload any other type of file. The MP3 file will appear in your document with a document icon next to it.

Next, edit the page using the source markup editor, and locate the "[file:12345]" marker identifying the file, which will probably be right at the end of the page. Simply change the "file:" part to "mp3:" (so e.g. "[mp3:12345]") and save the page. The file will now be shown in the page with the music control instead of the generic document icon.

To link to an MP3 file located on another web server, do the same thing you would with images, but use "mp3:" instead of "image:", e.g.

```
[mp3:http://www.myschool.edu/song.mp3]
```

8. Protecting your Course

Having course materials and discussion pages that anyone can change may sound like a recipe for disaster, but this chapter explains how judicious use of certain CourseForum features, along with a bit of ordinary peer pressure, can give you all the benefits without exposing you to any of the pain.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Open Editing

In a traditional web site, either a single webmaster or a small group of people are responsible for managing all material on the site, and anyone who wants to publish something must do so via the webmaster. In CourseForum, this "gatekeeper" role is removed, and anyone can contribute to the site. Before turning to mechanisms to "protect" the site, lets first look at what is good and bad with this wide-open approach where anyone can contribute.

Building Shared Knowledge

With CourseForum, everyone in your course can contribute directly to the creation of communal, truly shared knowledge and ideas. Take the example of trying to understand a complicated topic presented in a lecture.

The instructor may start a CourseForum page, and attach a copy of the slides presented in class. Students can add questions to the page, asking about points that were confusing. Other students and the instructor can jump in to try to answer them.

Over time, a few students begin to create some new examples that help to clarify and explain the key points. As more people add to it, or raise more questions, these examples begin to evolve towards a more unified metaphor that helps explain things even more. Someone else finds some research on the web that amplifies the new explanations, and links it to the page. Others continue to tweak the examples, adding better descriptions, correcting grammar, etc.

By the end, the page contains a new expression of the ideas underlying the lecture topic. What is interesting is that it has truly been created by the group as a whole. While a few individual contributions may still be recognizable, everyone sees this as truly a product of the entire class's interaction. This is the sort of effect that can't be achieved by traditional discussion forums, where students can post individual opinions, but do not collaborate directly on a shared piece of knowledge.

At a more mundane level, it's not unusual to see students correct spelling, grammar, links or other syntactic level items of contributions made by other students. Similarly, students familiar with different content either in the forum or elsewhere will often link that content in to other pages.

Easier Contributions

With everyone able to directly contribute, more contributions can be made. The instructor doesn't need to waste time posting students' material to the class web site, as the students can do it themselves. The instructor might even save time by having other students answer questions that are posed, as they come in. Having students directly contribute means that no one person becomes a bottleneck.

Different Voices can be Heard

On a regular web site (e.g. for a company), it is often desirable for the site as a whole to appear to "speak" with one voice, or present a unified point of view. For learning purposes, this is not as useful. Direct contributions, free of the filter of a moderator, can help to enhance learning through the presentation of diverse opinions.

Potential for Abuse

On the down side, if anyone can go in and do anything, there is the clear potential for abuse. Material can be deleted (accidentally or otherwise), modified to misrepresent original content posted by someone else, or the digital equivalent of graffiti can be added, where people leave behind obnoxious messages.

The rest of this chapter will discuss several mechanisms to minimize this abuse. It is often useful to draw parallels to how such abuse (like graffiti) would be prevented in the real world. Ideally, we'd like to prevent such abuse, without giving up the benefits we've described earlier.

Version History and Page Locking

We discussed both version history and page locking in Chapter 6. Both are useful in fixing or preventing abuse.

Because old versions of pages are always kept (and only the administrator can delete them), if any information is deleted or changed (accidentally or otherwise), anyone in the group can use the version history to see what has changed, and if needed, correct it.

Page locking can be useful to prevent any changes to a particular page, unless the user knows the password used to lock the page.

Setting Course Passwords

Another way to prevent abuse is to make certain that outsiders cannot get into your course's forums, and for groups of people that might not be entirely trustworthy, knowing who exactly has gotten in and what they have been doing.

CourseForum allows you to set passwords to restrict access to the course, even requiring users to individually identify themselves.

By default, anyone can enter a course, view all the pages, and make any changes (unless any pages have been locked). This may be fine for a completely open public forum, or one hidden away behind a network firewall, but is most likely too permissive for many courses.

Shared Course Password

The Course Administrator (usually the instructor) can require that anyone entering the forum for the course first enter a password before doing so. In this case, everyone would use the same password. This is very quick to setup, and is appropriate to use when you have a fairly small, trusted group of students in your class (e.g. a graduate seminar). You can setup the password, communicate it to your students, and be relatively assured that you'll keep outsiders away.

This only works if you're confident that the single shared password will be kept secret, and that the students in the class will behave when in the forum.

It is also possible to setup the forum so that no password is required to enter the forum, but that a password must be provided in order to make any changes to a page. This allows outsiders to view the course materials, but not to change them. You can even setup the forum so that no password is needed to view materials or post comments, but only to edit pages.

Details about how to set up a shared password for the course are discussed in Chapter 11, "Course Administrator Tasks".

Individual Student Accounts

If you need more protection than a shared password will allow, such as when students in your class might not be 100% trustworthy, you'll most likely want to setup individual accounts for each student. This will require them to provide a password, unique to each student, to enter the forum or make changes.

This provides greatly increased accountability. As we'll see shortly, every change in the forum is tagged with the name of the person making the change (i.e. the account that they've signed in as). This makes it trivial to identify any individuals causing trouble. More to the point, if they know their name will be attached to anything they do, they're not likely to cause trouble in the first place.

Again, details on setting up individual accounts and passwords are provided in Chapter 11, "Course Administrator Tasks".

Private Project Areas

If you'd like to allow access – perhaps with a password – to most of the course, but still prevent people from entering certain areas, you can setup a "project" forum. This is a separate set of pages, behaving just like those in the main course forum. These project areas can be assigned a different password than your course.

For example, you might setup a project area for instructor notes or grading information, and protect it with a password that would not be given out to anyone else.

Project areas are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Resolving Abuse

If there has been some abuse (e.g. a page defaced), there are two things you might want to worry about: fixing the page to remove any inappropriate remarks or restore any deleted content, and possibly figuring out who did it.

Removing Inappropriate Remarks

The nice thing about pages being editable by everyone is that it makes it very easy for anyone to remove any offensive remarks, simply by editing the page and removing them. This doesn't necessarily need to be done by the instructor; anyone, students or instructor, who comes across such abuse can easily remove it.

The Page Version History feature previously discussed can also be very helpful when removing inappropriate remarks, restoring deleted content, and more.

Identifying Abusers

The version history is obviously critical to identifying the person who has defaced any pages, particularly when you've setup individual accounts and passwords, so you know for sure it's that particular person.

How to deal with that abuse is obviously outside the scope of the software; while you may simply remove the account, there are obviously larger issues of academic misconduct to be addressed.

As was suggested though, if people know that what they do can be tracked back to them, they are far less likely to do anything in the first place.

9. Working with Projects

Projects provide private forums, separate from the main course's forum, designed for smaller group work.

Projects and their Uses

Each course has its main course forum (what is normally thought of as the course itself in CourseForum) automatically created, containing its own set of pages. Projects allow you to create additional sets of pages associated with the course. These project forums have all the same features as the main forum for the course.

Small group projects are the obvious use for a project area. In this case, you've got a small group of students working on something that the rest of the class is not involved in. It makes sense to set aside a private area where the group can work without "disturbing" the entire class. For example, project pages won't show up in the normal "Recent Changes" list in the main course's forum, nor in searches (unless explicitly asked for). And projects can be password protected so that only project members (and the Course Administrator) can enter the project.

A private instructor-only area is another use for projects; a forum can be setup for the instructor's working notes, in-progress copies of materials for later lectures, and so on. These can then be copied into the main forum for the course at appropriate times. The forum could also store material that shouldn't be shared at all, such as test materials, grading information, etc.

Creating and Using Projects

A course can have any number of projects associated with it. These can be found via the "Projects" page in the main course's forum. This can be quickly reached by clicking the "Projects" link, located near the top of each page. The Projects page, as shown in Figure 9-1, will contain a list of any projects already created, and a button allowing you to create a new project.
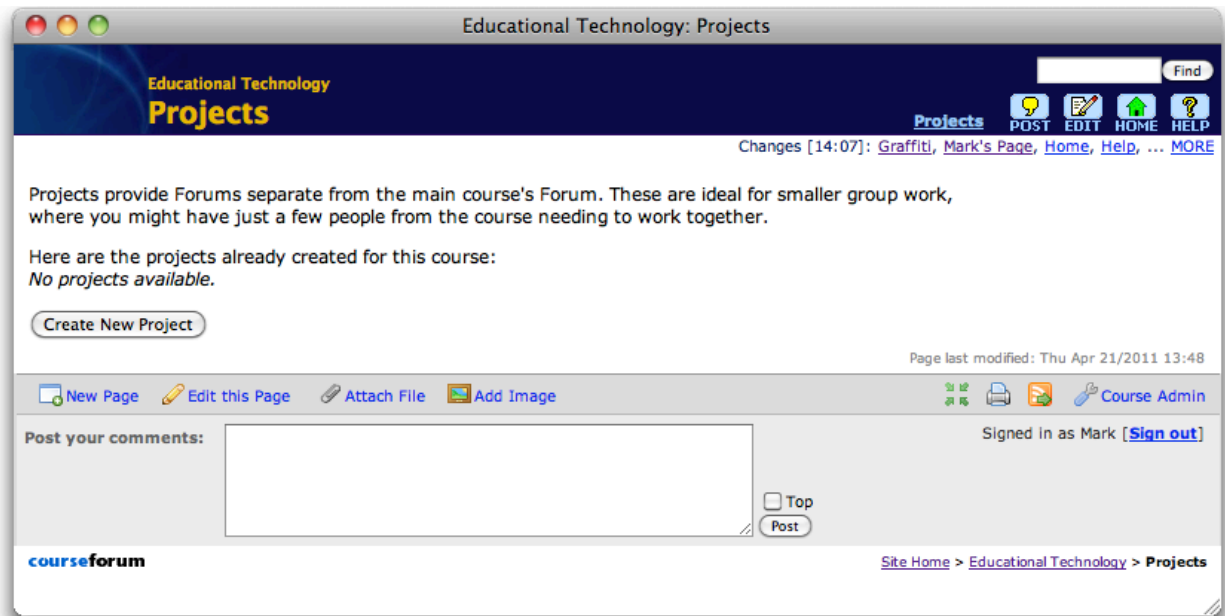
Figure 9-1. Projects page in main course forum.

Creating a New Project

To create a new project, just click the "Create New Project" button.

> This button may not be present, if the Course Administrator has decided not to allow students to create projects.

This will immediately create a new project forum, which would appear in the list on the Projects page next time you checked. You'll be immediately taken to the Home page for the new project, as shown in Figure 9-2.
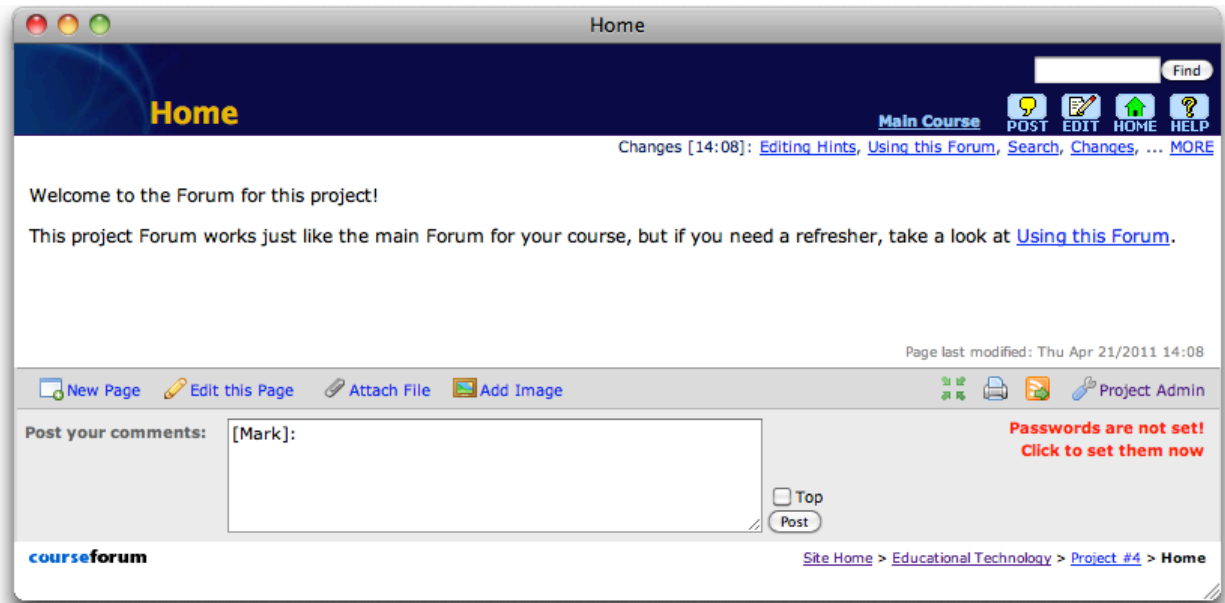
Figure 9-2. Home page for new project.

This should immediately look familiar, as it contains all the same features as the pages in the main course's forum. Note that the "Home" button will always take you to this page (the Home page for the project), while the "Main Course" link will take you to the Home page for the main course's forum.

Initial Project Setup

You'll want to do a small amount of setup before using this project. Click on the "Project Admin" link at the bottom right of the page, which will bring up the "Project Admin Settings" page, as shown in Figure 9-3.

Figure 9-3. Project Admin Settings page.

You will want to provide an administration password, which will allow you to return to this screen at a later point. You will also want to give the project a name, which appears in the "Projects" page in the main forum for the course.

> Try not to forget the administration password. If you do forget it, the Course Administrator will be able to get it back for you or change it, as they always have full access to everything in your project.

You may also want to set a password for the forum, or require that people be signed in with the same password information used by the main course forum. This will be required for people to enter the forum (or optionally, only required for people to make changes, though anyone can enter and view pages). You can then give this password to other people you'd like to participate in your forum. The same password would be used for everyone.

This page provides a subset of the options available to Course Administrators, in the corresponding "Course Admin Settings" page. Many of the details on that page, which are discussed in Chapter 11, will therefore be relevant here for project administration.

When you're done making changes to the setup, click on the "Save Changes" button, and then the "Exit Administration" link. You'll be returned to the Home page of the project forum.

Linking Between Forums

Normally, you can create a link to another page in the forum you're in, whether the main course's forum or a project, by simply enclosing its name in square brackets, e.g. "[Home]".

It is also possible to create links between pages in *different* forums. For example, you can link to a page in a project from the course, to a page in the main course forum from a project, or link pages from two different projects in completely different courses. The only restriction is that the forums need to be on the same CourseForum site (otherwise you can still link to them, but you'll need to use the full URL).

To link to a page in another forum, you need to know the "id number" or "URL prefix" associated with the course or project's forum. While in the other forum, take a look at the URL (web address) displayed in your web browser. It should look something like:

```
http://www.mysite.edu:3455/9/Home
```

The "9" in this case specifies what forum you're part of; this is the unique id number for this forum. Some forums may use an alphanumeric URL prefix instead.

To link to a page in another forum then, put the id number or URL prefix for the forum, then a hash sign ("#"), followed by the name of the page you'd like to link to. This might look something like:

```
Look at the project's [9#Home] page.
```

To link to a page in the main forum of the course, you can also just leave off the id number, as in this example:

```
Visit the course's [#Home] page.
```

If you omit the page name instead, the link will be made to the Home page of the forum, and will have the forum name displayed rather than "Home":

```
Visit [9#].
```

Including Pages from Other Forums

You can use this same approach with "include:" links to include pages from another forum into your page, e.g.

```
[include:#Contact Info]
```

You can also pull in the most recent changes from any forum on the CourseForum server, specified by its URL prefix:

```
[recentchanges:9]
```

10. Best Practices

This chapter collects a variety of hints and tips designed to encourage effective use of CourseForum within your course.

Course Information and Announcements

CourseForum is a convenient place to store information pages, things like contact information, a syllabus, assignments, etc. like you'd post on any web site. Because editing such pages is easy, it makes it convenient to keep them updated.

Place links on the Home page to these informational pages. If you have a lot of them, make a single "Course Information" page linked from the Home page, which in turn has links to all the other pages.

You might want to lock down these pages (using the "Lock this page" feature on the Edit screens), but still allow students to post their comments or questions right on them.

The "Home" page of the Forum is important because it's normally where people will enter. It's therefore a good place to put announcements, links to important information, and links to current discussion topics you'd like people to participate in.

Getting into the habit of posting announcements in CourseForum will get your students into the habit of checking there. And once they are in the system, they'll discover other opportunities to interact and participate in the online discussions.

If you do tend to email announcements to your students, post them in CourseForum, and email the URL of the page instead. That will ensure they always see the latest version (if you've made changes), and offers an opportunity to pose questions right alongside the announcement, rather than you getting the same question fifty times via replied email.

Lectures

Add a page for each lecture, along with an index page that points to all of them. Create a link to that index page right from the Home page of your course.

On the page for the specific lecture topic, add the PowerPoint file from your lecture as an attachment to the page, along with any other materials you may have used during the lecture. If you have additional resources available for people interested in digging deeper into the topic, post links to those resources.

Let students add their own notes taken during class, or add follow-up questions and comments on the lecture topic. You'll save time answering questions in the forum, and other students will

learn from the questions and answers that have already been posted. You may or may not want to lock the page so that changes cannot be made to your material, but new material such as questions and answers can be posted.

Discussions

You can use the "Post" features to add comments or have discussions on any page in the Forum. When you want to discuss a topic in some depth, start a new page just for that topic.

Add a paragraph at the top of the page introducing the topic, and inviting students to add their own comments. Encourage them to include links in their comments to other Forums or other web pages that are relevant to the discussion.

As discussion continues, you might want to pull out side topics into their own page (use Copy and Paste to move the postings over to the new page, and leave a link in the original discussion).

Put a link to the discussion in a "Hot Topics" area of the course Home page, so people can quickly find the discussion topic. As you move on to other topics, move these links to an "Older Discussions" page. You may want to mention these discussions during class time to encourage participation, or email out the URL of the discussion pages.

Group projects

Create separate forums for smaller group projects taking place in the course. Students in the group can password protect the project so nobody else can see what they're working on. The instructor can still monitor these groups and the progress they are making. Later on, change the password protection so that people outside the group can view the project results, but only group members can make changes.

In the project forum, they can store the latest drafts of reports they're preparing and post comments on these drafts. Doing this instead of emailing multiple drafts around ensures everyone always knows where the latest copy is, and reduces the number of large email attachments sent to people who may not be interested.

Keep a "to do" list so that everyone in the group knows what's left to be done on a project and who is doing it. Brainstorm new ideas. Keep track of relevant bookmarks and other research by adding notes, web links, and more.

Student Portfolios

Let students start their own pages, containing their own personal information, or notes on the course. Use these pages to share presentations, documents and research they've prepared with others in the course. Personal pages can even act like simple "weblog" systems, behaving as a

personal diary for students. The student creating the page can lock pages down to prevent changes by others.

Create an index page that will point to these portfolios, and let each student link their own work to this index. If pages are named with the user's actual name (i.e. the one used to sign in to the forum), every posting made using "Post your comments" will automatically be linked to the student's personal page.

Getting students to create their own pages is a great way to get them used to creating and editing content in CourseForum, and an ideal introduction. As they grow more proficient and confident, they'll more likely create other pages, and contribute to existing course pages.

Q&A

Start a page dedicated specifically to questions and answers. Let students post any questions they have — and get answers (and opinions!) from yourself, teaching assistants and other students.

As with discussions, think about spinning off any larger issues to their own pages, and consider moving older topics to an "Old Questions" page. And remember to link to the Q&A page from the Home page.

Seeing other peoples' questions is a great resource for students, and not having to answer student questions individually (and repetitively) can also save you considerable time. Knowing that many students will see questions and answers over time can lead to more thorough responses than you'd normally devote to a one-off question.

11. Course Administrator Tasks

This section details the various tasks that a course administrator may perform to enhance the effectiveness of their course. These include such things as setting options, dealing with course passwords, managing projects, and more.

Initial Setup

Chapter 2, "Quick Start", provided an overview of the initial setup and configuration that would normally be done when a course is first created. These include such things as setting the course name, an optional URL prefix, and so on.

Course Administration tasks are generally accomplished through the "Course Admin Settings" page (see Figure 11-1), accessible via the "Course Admin" link at the bottom right of any regular page in the forum. You will need the Course Administration password to get into this page.

The row of tabs near the top (Settings, User Accounts, etc.) allows you to move between different administration screens. When you make changes to any of these screens, make sure to use the "Save Changes" button.

A subset of these options is available to project administrators, via the "Project Admin" link in projects.
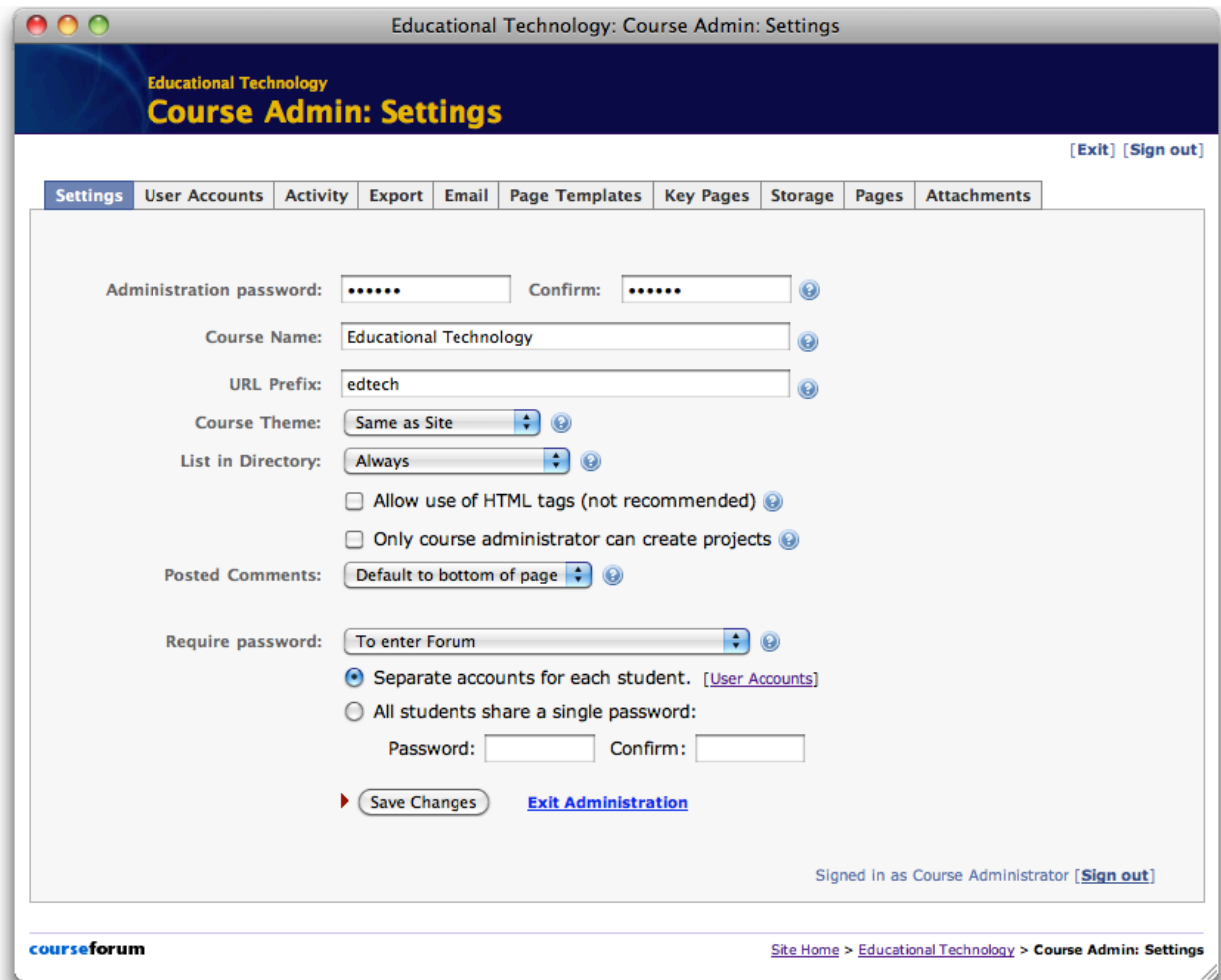
Figure 11-1. Course Admin Settings page.

Other Options

Besides the "Administration Password", "Course Name" and "URL Prefix" options described previously, several other options are available, that can be changed either initially at course creation time, or at any time later.

Course Theme. The appearance of the forum is determined by its theme. CourseForum comes with several different themes, and the site administrator can add others (such as themes matching other web sites on campus). By default, the course forum will use the same theme used for the entire site.

List in Directory. If you would prefer your group not to be shown in the main course directory page, you can change the "List in Directory" setting from "Always" to "Never". This will then require you to give out the exact URL for the course to each group student. A third possibility is "Only if user has access", which will list the group only if the user student already signed into it (if signin is needed). Note that regardless of the setting, the course will always be visible in the directory for the Site Administrator.

Allow use of HTML tags. Normally, pages contain just plain text, which may be augmented with the simple markup detailed in Chapter 5, "Markup in Depth". By checking the "Allow use of HTML tags" checkbox, you can also allow HTML formatting tags to be entered and displayed in CourseForum pages, alongside the regular markup. This can be useful if people have a special need to display very sophisticated formatting in pages.

However, excessive use of this feature can greatly increase the complexity of pages, requiring people to fully understand HTML in order to do any editing. This can really get in the way of people being able to contribute, so is not generally recommended.

Only course administrator can create projects. By default, any user in the course can create new projects. By checking this checkbox, this can be restricted so that only the administrator can create new projects.

Posted comment location. This setting chooses whether comments initially default to top or bottom posted for pages. Of course, this can be changed on a page-by-page basis, and pages remember whether the last comment on the page was top or bottom posted.

Password Protecting the Forum

Chapter 8, "Protecting your Course," introduced the notion of setting passwords to protect your course, and explored various approaches that you might consider. This section explains exactly how to set passwords after you've chosen the approach you'll be using.

When to Require Passwords

The first step is to decide when you will require passwords. This can be set using the "Require password" option. There are four choices. The default, "Never", means that a password will never be required, whether to view pages or to change them.

The second option, "To enter Forum", will require that a password be provided to initially enter the forum, or to view or change any pages in the forum. This is the option to choose when you only want people who should be there looking around or making changes.

The third option, "To edit pages (not needed to post comments)", will allow anyone to enter the forum and view pages without a password. They will also be able to post comments at the end of pages. However, to actually edit a page, a password is required.

The final option, "To post comments or edit pages", will require a password be provided to make changes, but allows anyone to enter the forum or view pages. This is useful if you'd like to let anyone see what is going on, but restrict actual contributions to people enrolled in the course.

Setting a Shared Password

Having a single shared password is the easiest approach, though not the most secure. You choose a password, and give that same password to everyone in the course. If that password is given out to others, you have no control over that, and because everyone uses the same password, you have

no idea who really is making changes. However, this is still a useful option for classes containing a small, trusted group of students.

To set a shared password, first set the "Require password" option to either "To enter Forum" or "Only to edit pages". Then select the "All students share a single password" radio button. Finally, enter the password you've chosen and confirm it right below that. You can also change this password here anytime you'd like.

Individual Student Accounts

Creating individual accounts for each student provides the best security. With this option, everyone has a separate password, so you can easily tell who has done what, delete accounts for troublesome students, and so on.

To create individual accounts, first set the "Require password" option to either "To enter Forum" or "Only to edit pages". Then make sure the "Separate accounts for each student" radio button is selected. Click on the "User Accounts" tab (or the link next to the radio button), which will bring up the "Students Accounts" screen, shown in Figure 11-2.
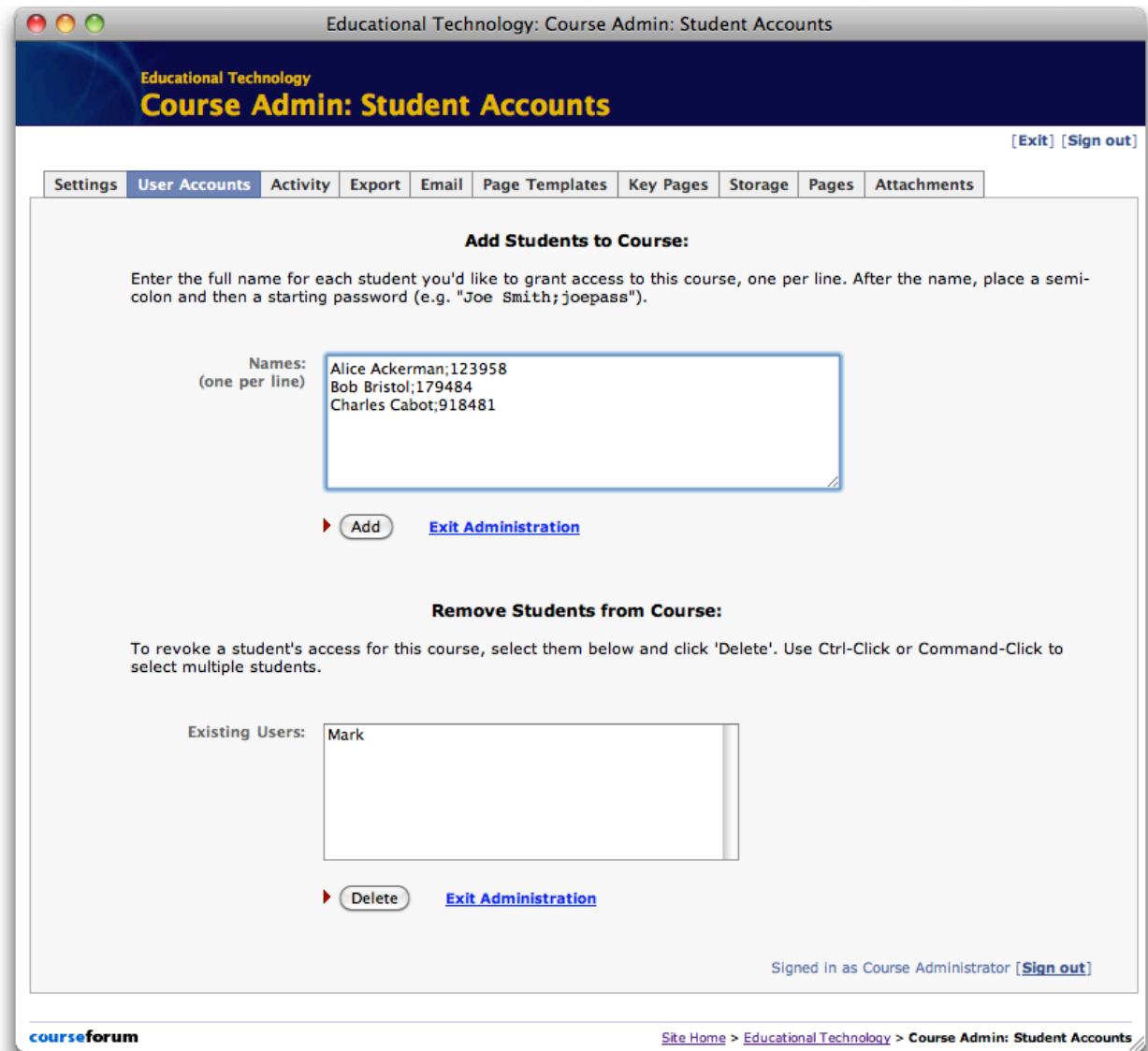
Figure 11-2. Student Accounts page.

Follow the directions at the top of the page to enter each student's name, and an optional initial password, into the top box and then press "Add".

To delete an existing user account from the course, select the student's name from the lower box, and press "Delete".

Site-Wide User Accounts

When you create individual user accounts as described above, they apply just to this course, and not to any other course. It would not be unusual for a student to have different accounts in different courses. They may have the same name (or not), and the same password (or not), but it is important to remember that these are actually completely different user accounts for each course.

If the Site Administrator has allowed the use of site-wide user accounts (see Chapter 12), you have the option of using those instead of accounts created just for this one particular course. This would let users sign in to their site-wide user account, and not need to sign in to separate accounts for each course they have access to.

To add a user to the course via their site-wide account, just use their email address in place of their name and password (you can't change their password for a site-wide user account here, since it's not used just in this course).

When signed in as Site Administrator, you have the option of creating new site-wide user accounts at the same time as adding them to the course. To do so, simply enter the email address and click "Add"; CourseForum will prompt you for their user name and password.

You can switch to another administration page from the tabs at the top, or exit the course administration area altogether. You can also return to this screen at any time to add new students, remove students, or change their passwords.

After setting up accounts, students will then need to sign in to use the forum (or just to edit pages, depending on the option you chose). They will automatically be presented with the "Forum Signin" page, shown in Figure 11-3. They can also change their passwords from this screen, using the "Change Password…" button.
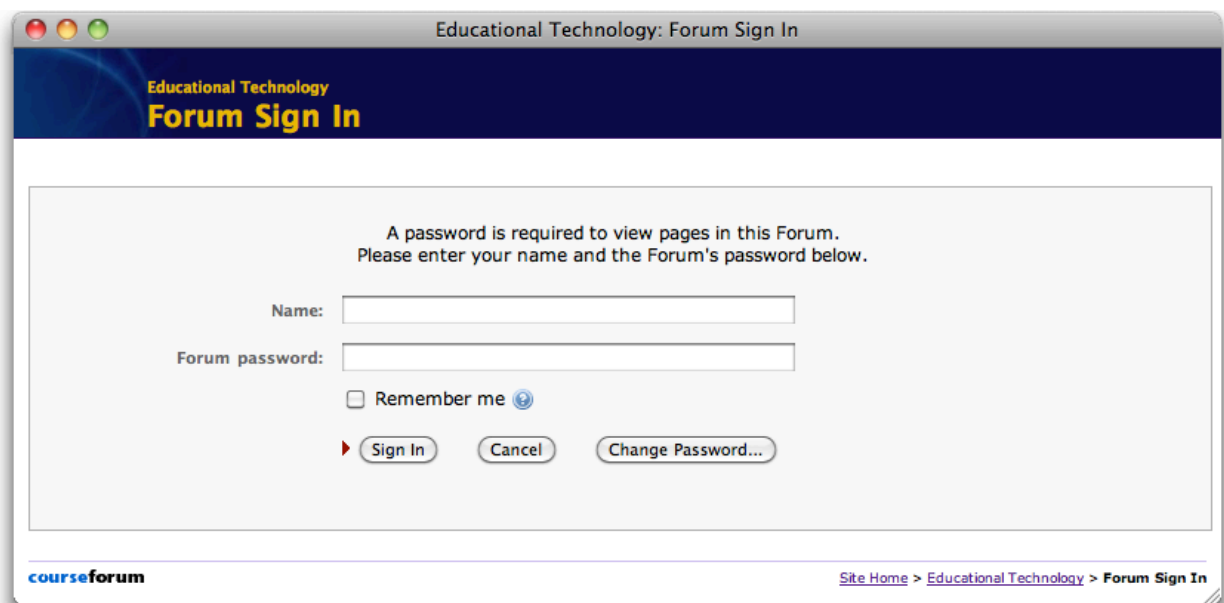
Figure 11-3. Forum Signin page.

Tracking User Activity

If you've setup individual accounts for your students, you may also be interested in seeing who has been contributing. By clicking on the "Activity" tab at the top of any administration page, you can get a report of the number of page views, edits, posts and downloads for each account

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(see Figure 11-4). It's a good way to find out who has been very active in the course, and also to identify students who have not been participating.

You can click on the headings in the table to sort it according to that column; click again to reverse the sort order. Clicking on the magnifying glass icon next to each name will let you see a more detailed record of that user's activity (Figure 11-5).

There is also an option at the top of the main activity page allowing you to specify how long you'd like activity logs kept on the server for. By default, activity logging is turned off, so if you do plan to use it, you'll want to turn it on here.

Figure 11-4. User Activity Summary page.

Figure 11-5. User Activity Details for a User.

Exporting to Static Web Pages

A forum can be exported to static web pages, which will allow it to be placed on a regular web server, burned on a CD, or put elsewhere, separate from CourseForum. These pages cannot be edited of course, but it is a way of providing a snapshot of the forum's content at a given time. This export includes all pages in the forum, as well as any included images, attached files, etc.

To export the forum, click on the "Export" tab from one of the "Course Admin" pages. The subsequent page (see Figure 11-6) will allow you to export the forum, creating a series of HTML pages and other files as needed.

The exported pages are written into the "exports" folder within the "Course Data" folder where CourseForum stores its other files. Therefore, you will need access to the server running the CourseForum software (or help from the Site Administrator) to retrieve the exported pages.

Figure 11-6. Forum Export page.

Email to Page

Another way to get content into a forum, besides editing, posting, or attaching, is to email it. To do so, you'll need to have available a POP email account that will exclusively be used by CourseForum. When any email is sent to that group, the contents of the email (text only) will automatically be added to a special 'Inbox' page in the forum. You can also have the email added to a different page by placing 'Page:name of page' in the email's subject or at the start of the email's body.

Figure 11-7 shows how you'd tell CourseForum about the email account to use for the forum. You can set up a different account for every forum if desired.
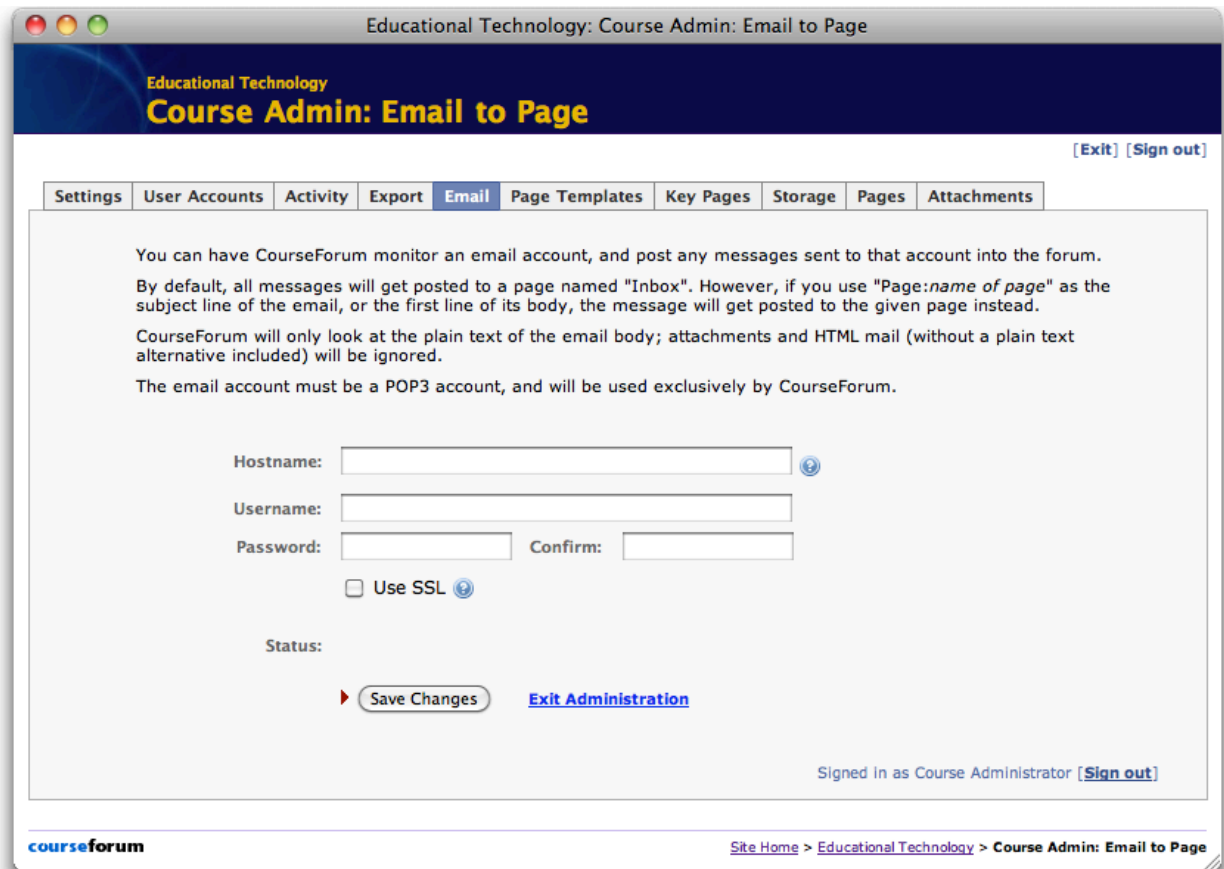
Figure 11-7. Setting up Email to Page.

Page Templates

You'll recall that when pages are first created, people have the option of either starting to edit from a blank page, or choosing from one of several page templates. The Course Administrator can customize the templates that are available, including modifying existing templates, removing existing ones, or adding new ones.

From the "Course Admin Settings" page, click the "Page Templates" tab, which brings up the page shown in Figure 11-8. This will allow you to modify the list of pages that are available as templates. As you can see from the instructions, templates are just regular pages already in the forum. Therefore, modifying the contents of the templates themselves is just a matter of going to the corresponding page in the forum, and editing it as you would any other page.

Figure 11-8. Edit New Page Templates page.

Key Pages

By default, one link ("Projects") will appear at the top of every page. If you would like to change this to add other pages, click the "Key Pages" tab, which will allow you to change the list of pages or links displayed on each page. See Figure 11-9.
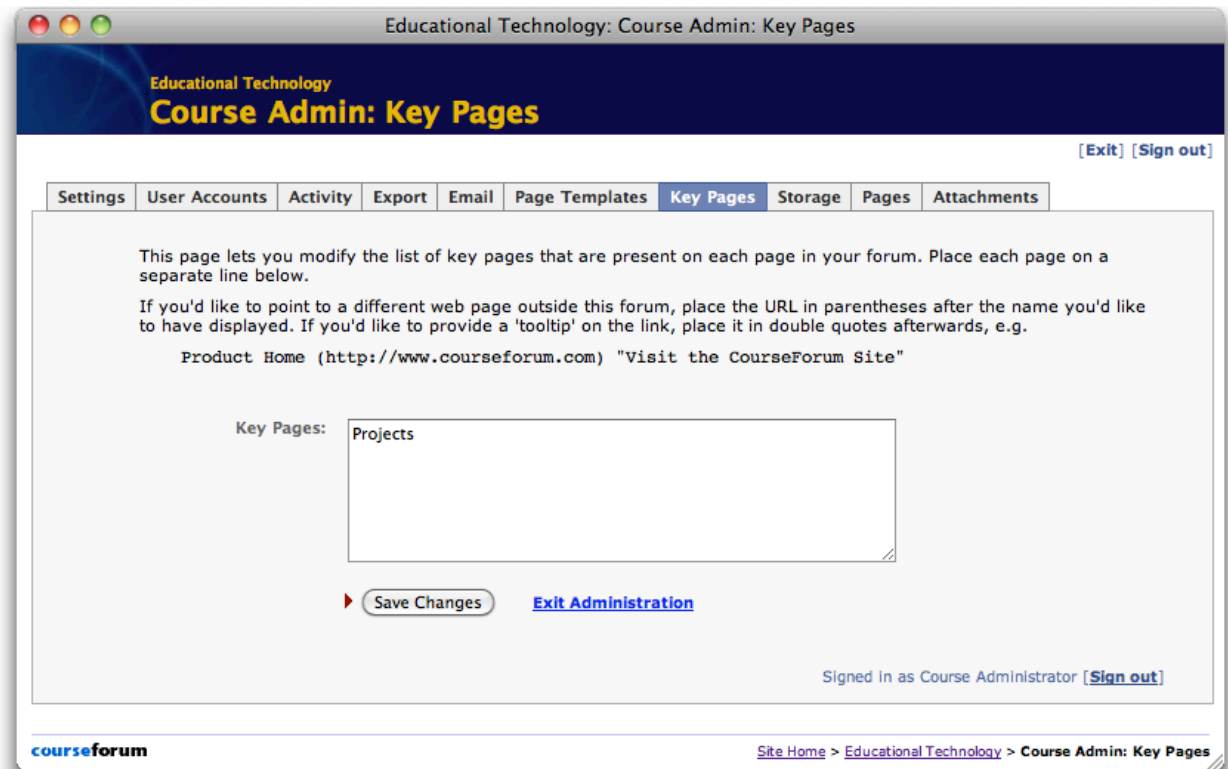
Figure 11-9. Changing the key pages.

Managing Storage

As you and your students use the course's forums over time, you may find that you accumulate quite a large amount of material that you no longer need, and is just wasting disk space on the machine you're running your server. Clicking on the "Storage" tab from any administration page will provide you with several options to remove unneeded information. These are shown in Figure 11-10.
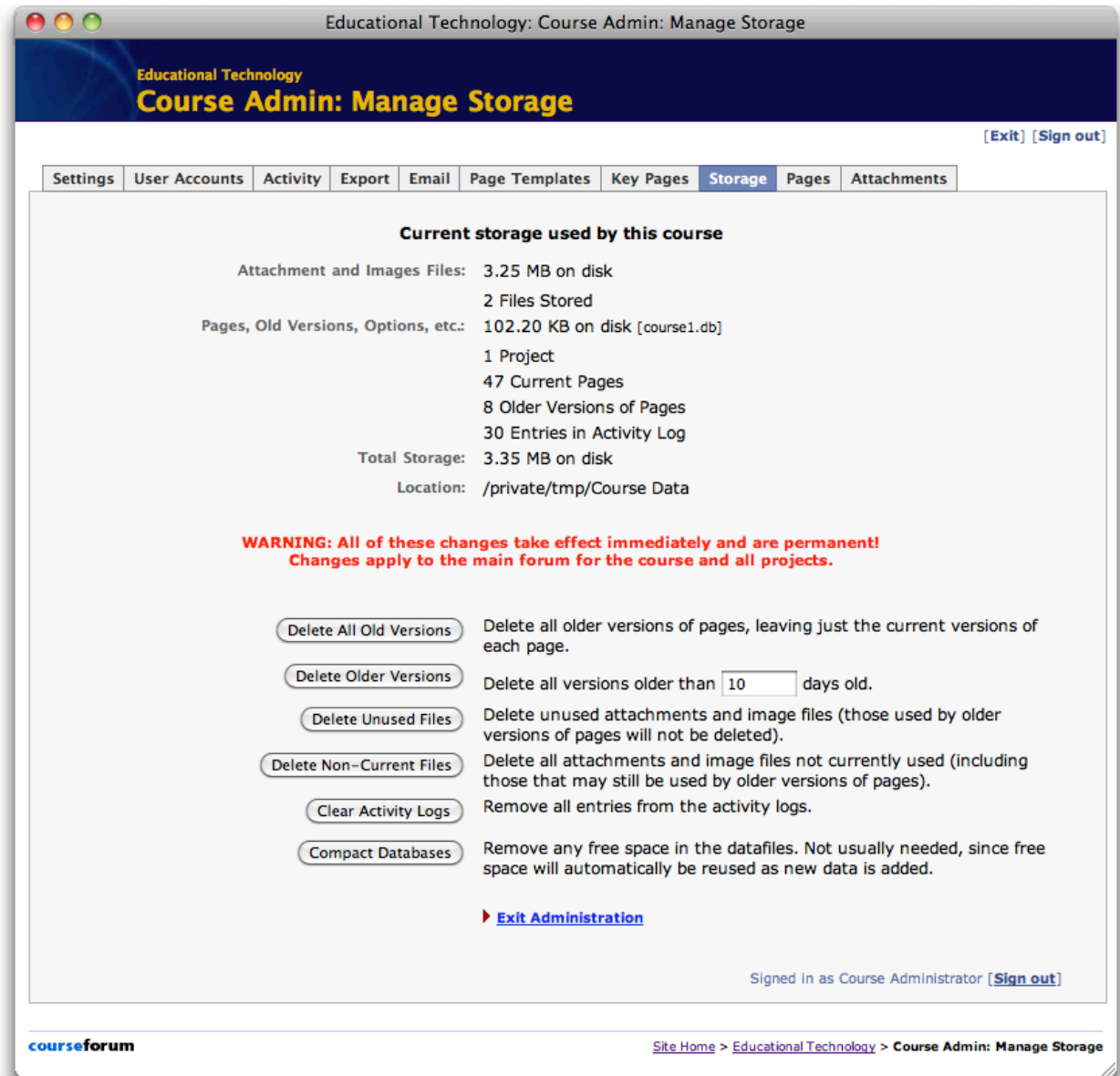
Figure 11-10. Manage Storage page.

The top of this page shows how much storage your course, including any projects, is currently using. This is separated out into images and attachment files, and then the pages and "everything else".

Along the left towards the bottom are several buttons allowing you to clean up specific parts of your course's storage. Note that most of these will permanently delete material from your course, so be careful!

Delete All Old Versions

Remember that as people make changes to pages, CourseForum remembers older versions of the page, allowing you to go back and see what was done earlier, recover accidentally deleted material, and so on. Choosing this option will immediately and permanently delete all these older versions of all pages. Only the very latest version will remain.

Delete Older Versions

This works like "Delete All Old Versions", except that you may specify that only versions older than a certain number of days should be deleted. Those that are newer will be kept.

Delete Unused Files

This option will remove any files (images or attachments) that are no longer referred to by any page in any of the course's forums. Remember that attachments and images are included on a page by including a link like [file:123] or [image:456]. Even if these links are removed from pages, the files they refer to are not immediately deleted, in case you later decide to refer to them again. Choosing this option will delete any files that are no longer referenced by any pages, including any older versions of pages that are still stored.

Delete Non-Current Files

This works like "Delete Unused Files", except that only files referenced by the current versions of pages are kept; even if they are still used by an older version of a page (but not a current version) they will be deleted. This may mean broken links if you later choose to restore old page content.

Clear Activity Logs

CourseForum keeps track of when users visit and change pages. While each recorded entry is quite small, after a while they can add up. This option lets you remove all existing entries in the activity log.

Compact Databases

Through normal use, changing pages and so on, the actual database files that hold information about your course will grow and shrink. For efficiency reasons, sometimes they will end up containing considerable "empty space". While this is normal, and the space will be reused over

time, if you are not going to be changing your course for a while and would like to minimize the space it takes on disk, this option will remove empty space from the database files.

Managing Pages

The "Pages" tab allows you to list all the pages in the course, and optionally delete them. This page is shown in Figure 11-11.

Figure 11-11. Pages in this Forum page.

Each page shows the date it was last modified, the name of the page, icons allowing it to be deleted or renamed, the size of the page (number of characters), and the number of versions stored for that page. You can change how the table is sorted by clicking on the headings at the top; click again to reverse the sorting order. Clicking on the name of a page will display that take you directly to that page.

Clicking the "trash can" (delete) icon next to a page will (after confirmation) permanently delete the page, including all older versions of the page. Be very careful when using this option, as there is no way to get the page back.

Clicking on the "rename" icon to the right of the trash will allow you to change the name of the page. Both the "Delete" and "Rename" options are also available to administrators directly on the pages themselves.

To delete several pages at once, click on the checkbox at the far right of each page you'd like to delete, so that it is selected (checked). The "Select Empty Pages" button can provide a helpful starting point for this if you have many empty pages you'd like to get rid of. Then click the "Delete Selected" button at the bottom of the page. After confirmation, those pages will be deleted.

Managing Attachments

The "Attachments" link allows you to list all the attached files and images in the course. This page is shown in Figure 11-12.
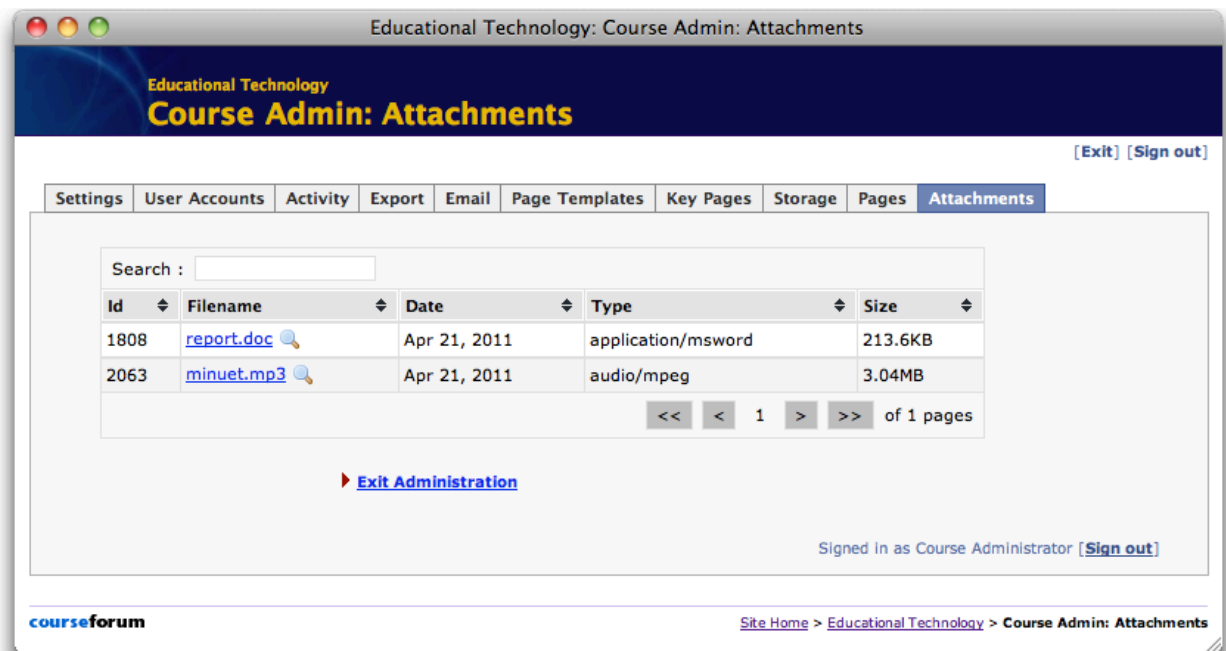
Figure 11-12. Attachments page.

For each attachment, it's id (the number used in file: or image: links), original file name, date uploaded, MIME type, and size is shown. Again, clicking on the headings of each column will change how the table is sorted.

Clicking on the magnifying glass icon beside each filename will take you to a page showing more information about that particular attachment, as shown in Figure 11-13.
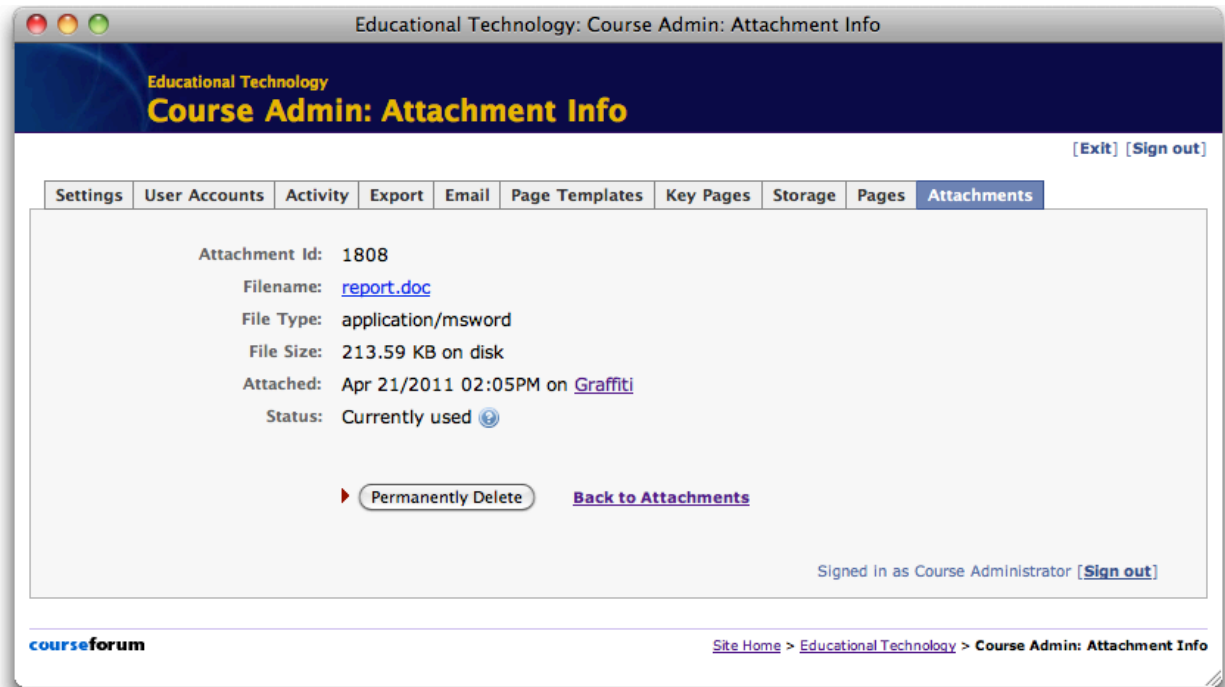
Figure 11-13. More Information on an Attachment.

Here, clicking on the filename link will let you download the file. The "Attached" line tells you not only exactly when the file was attached, but also provides a link to the page it was attached to (though it may be used on other pages of course). The "Status" line tells you if this file is currently being used, is not currently used but is used in an older version of a page, or if it is no longer used at all (because older pages or versions were deleted).

Clicking the "Permanently Delete" button will allow you to delete the attachment from the server entirely (there is no confirmation needed here). If any pages still refer to the attachment, it will be displayed as a broken file or image.

Managing Projects

As Course Administrator, you also automatically have full access to any projects that are created within your course, despite any passwords that may have been set on individual forums (in fact, because you can get into any projects, you are able to retrieve or change project passwords if students forget them).

Restricting Project Creation

You can restrict the creation of Projects by checking the "Only course administrator can create projects" checkbox on the "Course Admin Settings" page. Doing this will remove the ability for students to create projects (though you can create a project for them, set a password, and provide that to students if you wish).

Archiving, Deleting and Duplicating Projects

As the Course Administrator, you also have the ability to archive or delete individual project forums. Archiving is useful when a project is completed, but do not want to delete it; when archived, the project is no longer shown on the main list of projects, and while its contents can be viewed, changes can no longer be made. Archived projects can also be unarchived at a later date if required.

To archive or delete projects, when signed in as Course Administrator, go to the "Projects" page in the forum, which shows the list of all the projects (Figure 11-14). You will notice that each project in the list has a magnifying glass icon next to it. Clicking on that will take you to another screen, providing options to archive or delete the project, as shown in Figure 11-15.
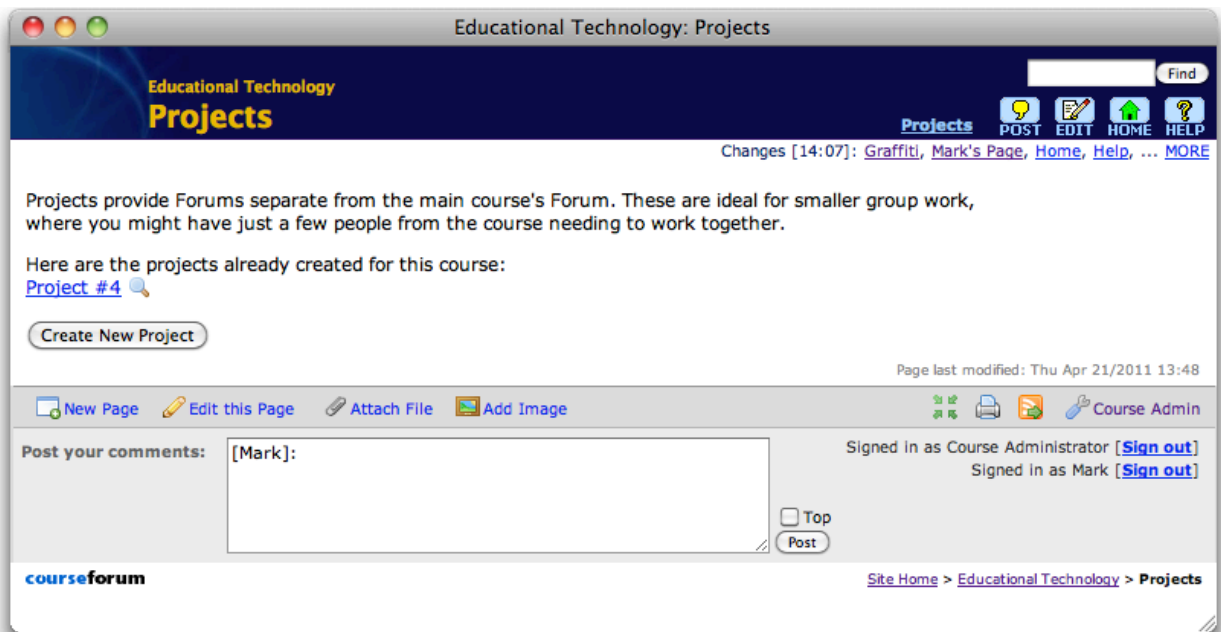
Figure 11-14. List of Projects.
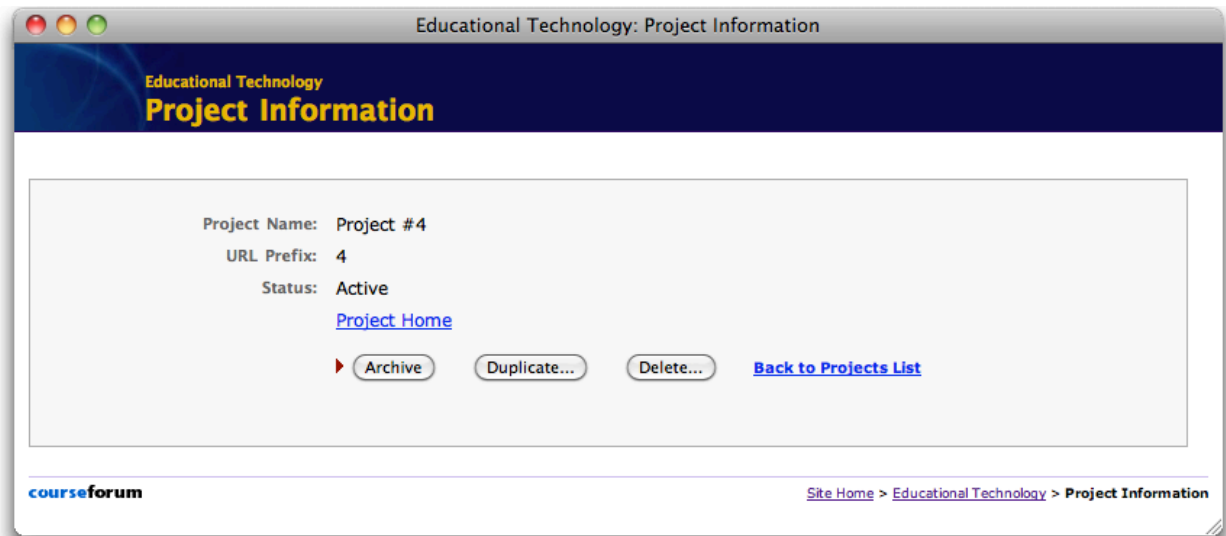
Figure 11-15. Archiving, duplicating and deleting projects.

Be very careful about deleting projects; once deleted, there is no way to get back the project or any of its contents.

Duplicating projects is useful for when you'd like to keep an existing project as-is, but start a new one initially based on the content of the existing one. To duplicate it, click on the "Duplicate…" button and then confirm your action.

12. Site Administrator Tasks

This chapter describes the few areas that the overall CourseForum Site Administrator should be aware of, including routine maintenance activities, course management and site branding.

Routine Maintenance

CourseForum was designed to require extremely little routine maintenance; for the most part, you start it, and it just works.

Chapter 2, "Quick Start", already described the activities required to get the server started and initially configured.

Besides the information in this chapter, the support area on the CourseForum web site has a wide variety of information that may be useful for various special situations you may encounter.

Server Restarts

Any time that the server machine you're running CourseForum on is restarted, you'll need to ensure that the CourseForum server application is also restarted. Its best if this is setup automatically; the details of how to do this will depend on the type of machine you're using to run CourseForum, and also how that machine is setup.

It's a good idea if you're planning to have the server shut down for some period of time to announce that. You might want to update the message that appears in the Course Directory page, as described shortly.

Backups

CourseForum stores all of its data — course pages, attachments, accounts, etc. — on the server where you're running the CourseForum application. As with any such data, it's recommended to make regular backups.

You can find information on exactly what needs to be backed up, and where it is stored, by consulting the support documentation at the CourseForum web site.

Software Upgrades

New versions of CourseForum are released quite regularly, which you can find out about from the CourseForum web site. To upgrade, first check that your license will cover the new version (see the "Main Settings" section coming up). If it does, shut down the existing CourseForum server, install the new version "over top" of the old one, and start CourseForum again. The new version will automatically pick up all your existing data.

Course Management

As you saw from the previous chapter, the individual instructor or Course Administrator is responsible for most administration within an individual course. When signed in as Site Administrator, you automatically have full access to all courses on the system, exactly as if you had the administration password for a single course. In fact, if a Course Administrator forgets their password, you can go into their course for them, and retrieve or change the course administration password.

Because you have full access to courses, you can easily assist with any problems a Course Administrator may have, or perform any tasks they would normally perform.

Archiving, Deleting and Duplicating Courses

When forums for courses are no longer needed, you can choose to archive or delete them. Deleting courses is very permanent, destroying all information associated with the course.

Archiving courses allows you to keep them around on your server, but in a way that they cannot be changed by anyone. Archived courses do not count against the number of courses specified in your CourseForum license, and do not appear on the main Course Directory page (a link to a page listing all archived courses does appear on the main directory however).

To archive or delete courses, visit the Course Directory page when signed in as Site Administrator. You will notice a magnifying glass icon next to each course, as shown in Figure 12-1.

Clicking on the magnifying glass next to a course's name brings up the Course Information page, as shown in Figure 12-2. To delete the course, click on the "Delete…" button. After confirming, the course will be permanently deleted.
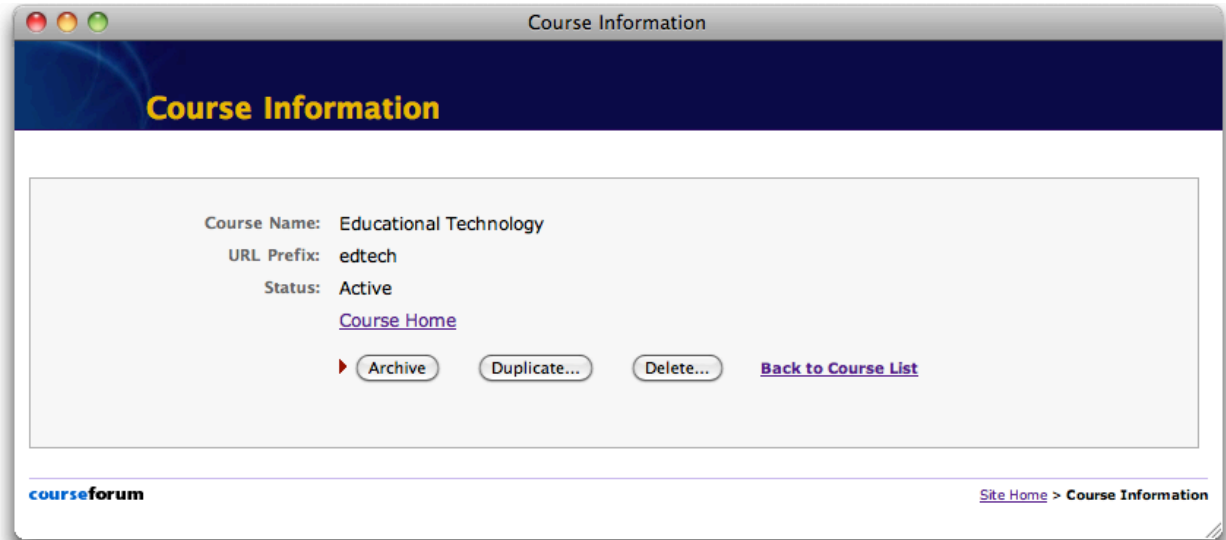
Figure 12-2. Course Information page.

To archive it, click on the "Archive" button. The course will be immediately archived.

To view the archived course, first visit the Course Directory. A new link will be present called "See archived courses". Clicking on that link will take you to a list of all archived courses. Choosing the name from that list will allow you to browse the archived course.

You can also later un-archive the course (assuming you have space left in your license), which will return it to the Course Directory, and allow changes to be made again. To do this, you would first locate the course in the list of archived courses. Again, clicking on the triangle next to its name will bring up the "Course Information" page. The "Archive" button will in this case be replaced with a button labeled "Make Active". Clicking this button will restore the course to normal.

Duplicating courses is useful for when you'd like to keep an existing course as-is, but start a new one initially based on the content of the existing one. To duplicate it, click on the "Duplicate…" button and then confirm your action.

Main Settings

Chapter 2 already touched on the main configuration, done via the "Site Administration" page (see Figure 12-3). The remainder of this chapter details all the things that can be changed through the site administration area.

This area can always be reached via the "Site Administration" link on the Course Directory page. As with the Course Administration screens, site administration also consists of a set of pages. A row of tabs at the top of each page allows you to move between them, while the "Exit Administration" link will return you to the Course Directory.
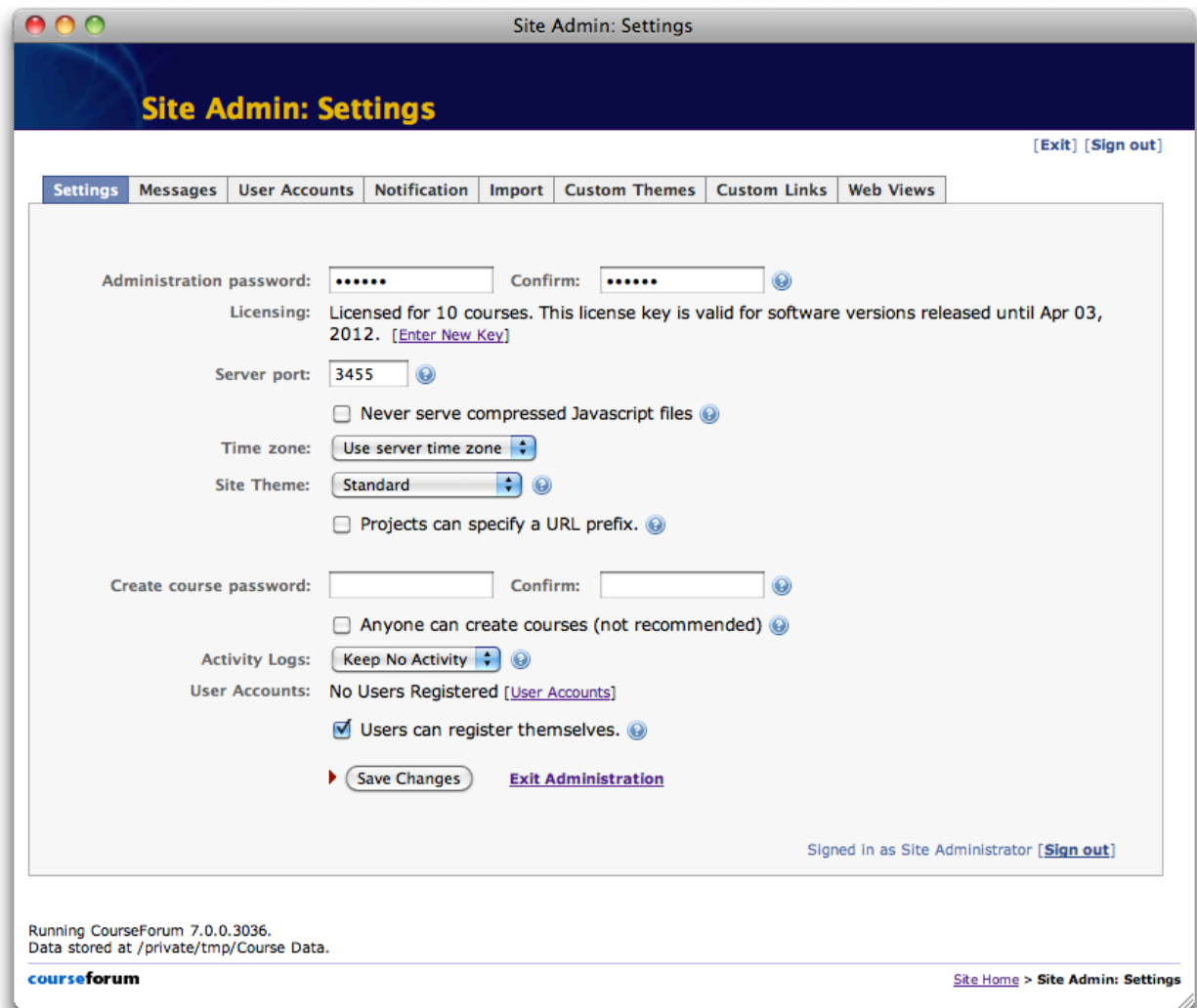
Figure 12-3. Main Site Administration Page.

Administration password. You'll need this to get into the Site Administration area, so try not to forget it. If needed, you can reset it. In the Mac and Windows versions, look in the menus associated with the small window that comes up when you start CourseForum. You'll find a

menu item saying "Reset Site Password…" which will clear the password so you can go in and set a new one. In the command line versions, stop CourseForum, run "courseforum – resetpassword" and then start it up again.

Licensing. This describes your current license, and lets you enter a new license key. Note the message describing what versions of the software this license is valid for. If you try to upgrade to a version of the software released after that date, your license will not work in the new version, and you'll be reverted back to the free version. Make sure to upgrade your license if needed before upgrading the software.

Server port. You can change this to run the server on a different port, which would then change the address users need to type into their web browsers.

SSL. The ProjectForum web site provides details on how to configure your server to run SSL, which will provide you with encrypted connections.

Compressed Javascript files. Many parts of CourseForum (e.g. the richtext editor) include large Javascript files which are automatically downloaded to the user's web browser. To save time and bandwidth, these are normally compressed, if the browser accepts that. However, some firewalls are configured to not permit downloading compressed Javascript. If this is an issue, check this box, which will always serve the larger, uncompressed Javascript files. This setting will rarely be needed.

Time zone. Select the time zone that all dates in the system will be displayed as. This defaults to the time zone of the server running CourseForum. The ability to change the time zone may not be available on all systems.

Site Theme. The theme determines the overall "look and feel" of the site. CourseForum comes with several default themes, and as you'll see shortly, you can create others. Individual courses may select their own themes to override the site-wide choice.

Project URL prefix. Normally each course can specify its own URL prefix (the part after the host on the URL that identifies the particular course), but projects are identified only by a number. Selecting this option will allow projects to specify their own URL prefix as well. Remember that each URL prefix must be unique across the entire site, for courses and projects.

Creating courses. By default, only the site administrator can create new courses. If you'd like to restrict this to a few other people, but without giving them the site administration password, you can specify a create course password. Another option, suitable for a small intranet environment, is to allow anyone to create new courses; select the "anyone can create courses" checkbox to enable that.

User Accounts. When courses are set up to require individual accounts for users to access them, these can either be defined separately for each course, or using a site-wide account, letting the user sign in once. Not every site will use site-wide user accounts. Creating, modifying and deleting these site-wide user accounts, if used, is described shortly. By default, site administrators must create new accounts, but if the "users can register themselves" box is checked, users can create their own accounts, via a register link on the course directory page.

Customizing Messages

The "Messages" tab at the top of the Administration pages will take you to the "Messages" administration page (see Figure 12-4), which allows you to customize a number of different messages that appear on the site, such as on the home page (Course Directory).

Figure 12-4. Messages Page.

Site-Wide User Accounts

If you've decided to use site-wide user accounts, which provide the option of having a user sign in once and potentially access several courses, you can manage them via the "User Accounts" tab, which will bring up the page in Figure 12-5. (Remember that choosing whether or not users can register for their own site-wide user account is done on the main settings page).
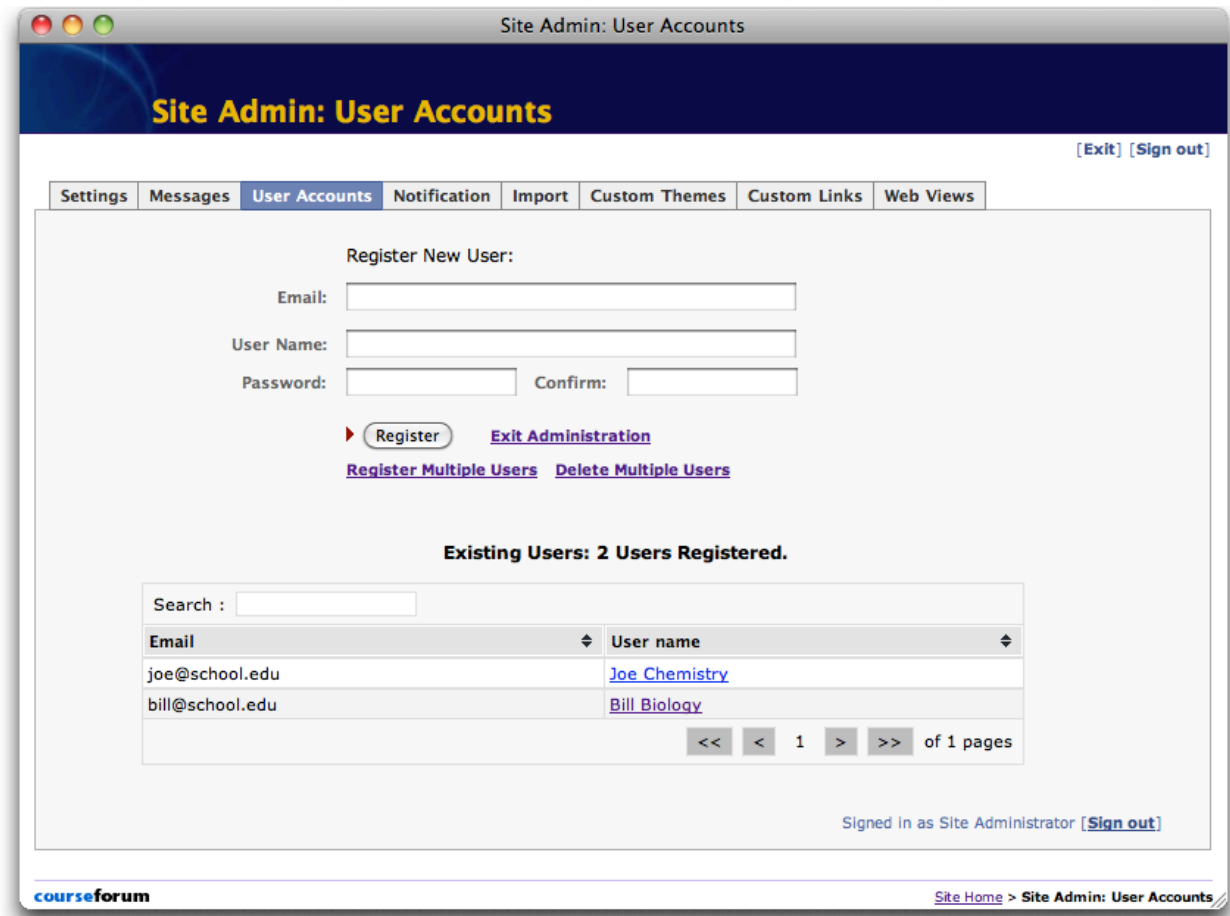
Figure 12-5. Site-wide user accounts.

To register a new user, at the top of the page, fill in their email address (which they'll use to sign in), their user name, and their password, and click "Register".

Currently registered users are listed below the new user area. If there are more than 10, they will be split across multiple pages (with next/previous to move between them) and there will be an option to locate a user by searching.

To modify an existing user, click on their name in the users list, which will display their User Information page (see Figure 12-6).
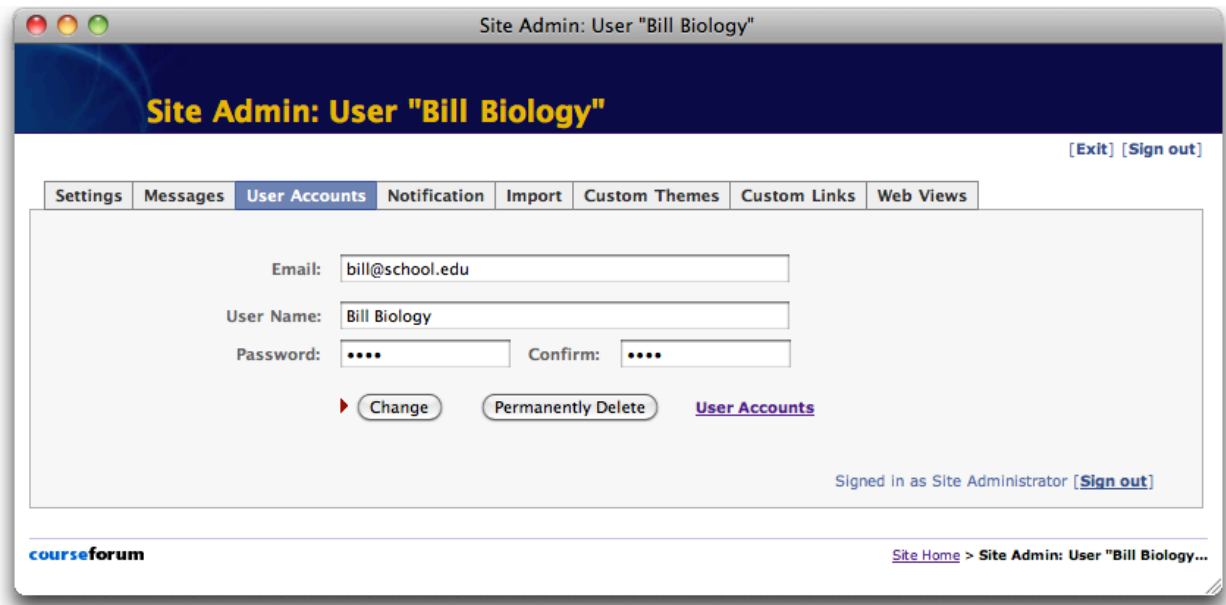
Figure 12-6. User information page.

From there, you can change their email, user name or password, or delete them altogether.

If you have many users to register all at once, you can do so by following the "Register Multiple Users" link on the main User Accounts page, which will bring up the page shown in Figure 12-7. Follow the instructions at the top to add multiple users.

Figure 12-7. Register Multiple Users page.

Similarly, to delete a large number of users, follow the "Delete Multiple Users" link to the page shown in Figure 12-8. Again, follow the instructions. If you're deleting all or most of the users, the "Load All Users" button will load the entire user list into the form, which you can then modify to keep certain users.
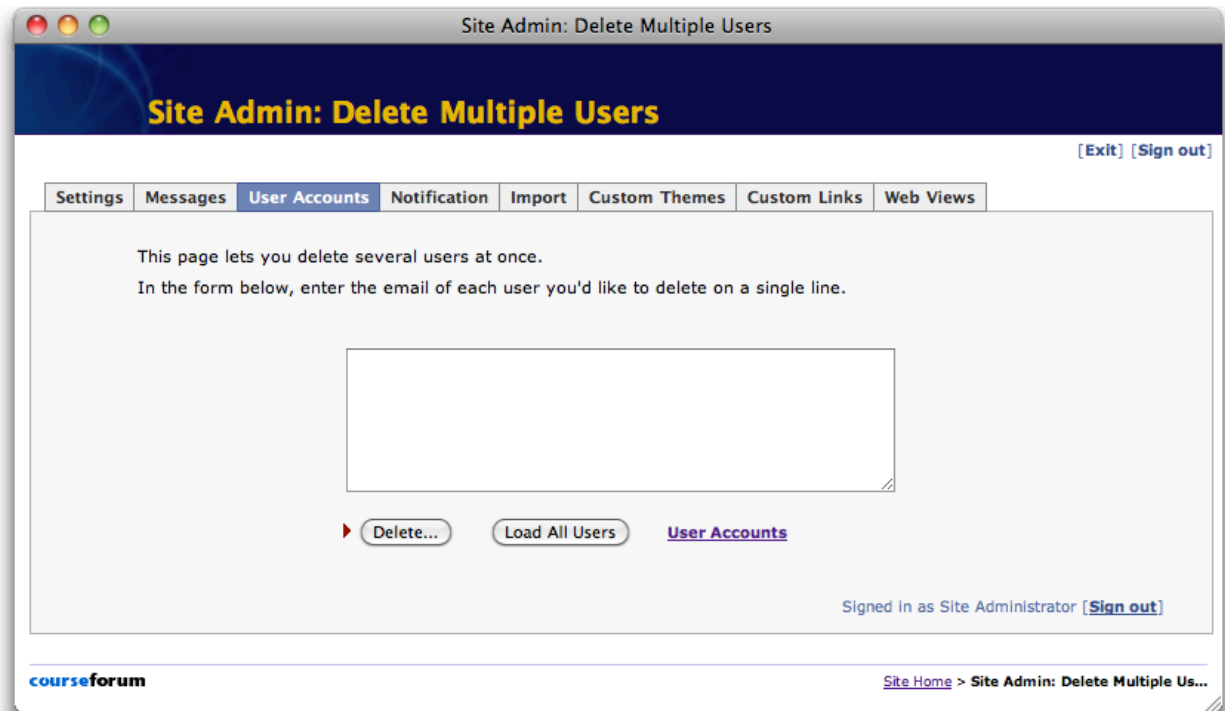
Figure 12-8. Delete Multiple Users page.

Notification

The "Notification" tab at the top of the Administration pages will take you to the "RSS/Email Notification" administration page (see Figure 12-9), which allows you to customize how CourseForum handles RSS feeds, and also to enable email notification.
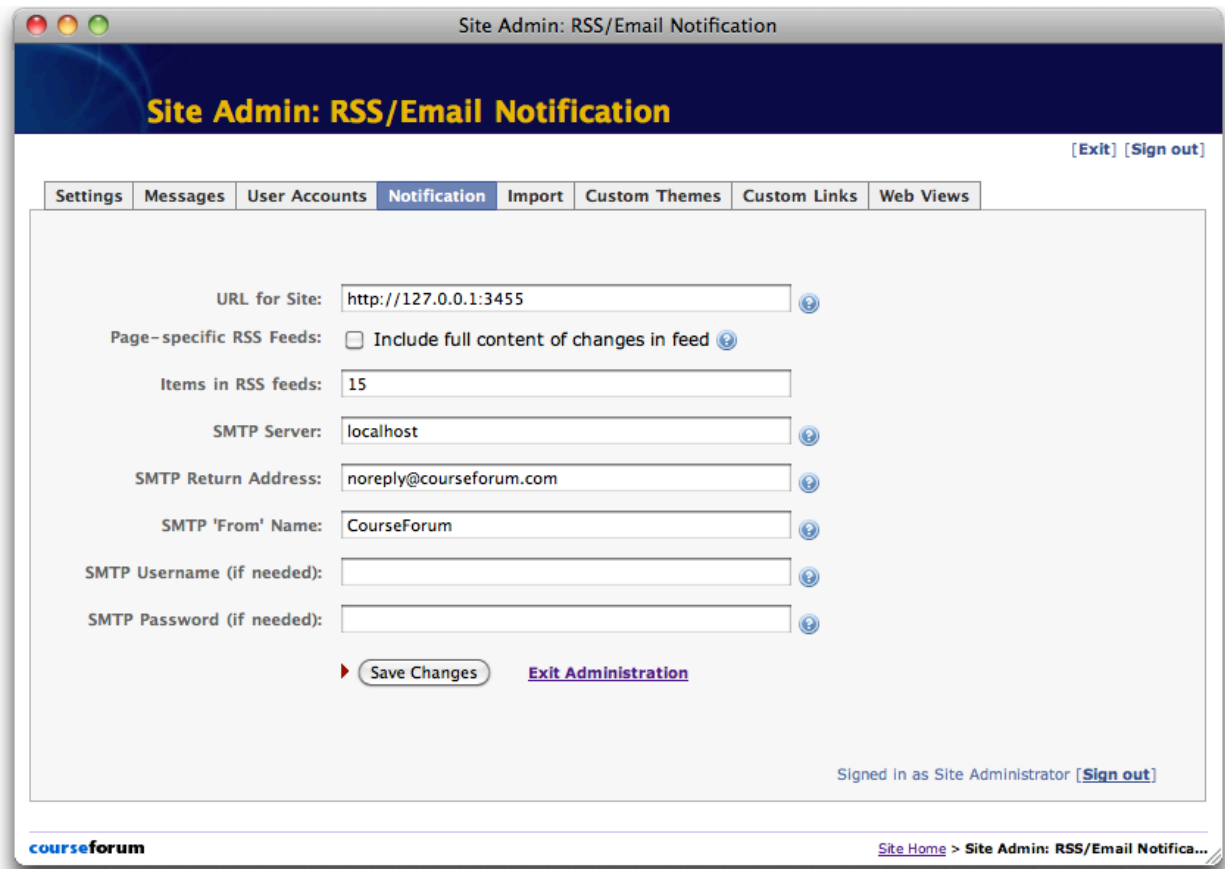
Figure 12-9. RSS/Email Notification Page.

Make sure that the "URL for Site" field shows the official web address your site is running at; this is used both for email notifications and RSS. You can also change the number of items that appear in RSS feeds, and allow the page-specific feeds to include the full content of changes (though because RSS feeds are not password protected, you should be conscious of the privacy implications of doing this).

To allow users to receive notification of changes via email, you will need to provide both the address of an SMTP server on your network that will be used to send out the notifications, as well as a return email address and name (which will appear as the 'From' address that these emails are sent with). If the SMTP server requires a username and password, you can provide them here.

Importing a Course

If you happen to be running Course on two different servers, you may find that you want to move one or more course from one server to another (duplicating everything from one server can be done by simply copying its entire "Course Data" directory and placing it on the new machine).

The "Import" tab on any of the Site Administration pages will take you to the "Import Course" page, shown in Figure 12-10. The instructions on that page describe what files from the original server need to be moved onto the current server, where they are to be placed, etc. After importing, the course (including all its projects) will be added alongside any existing courses on the current server.
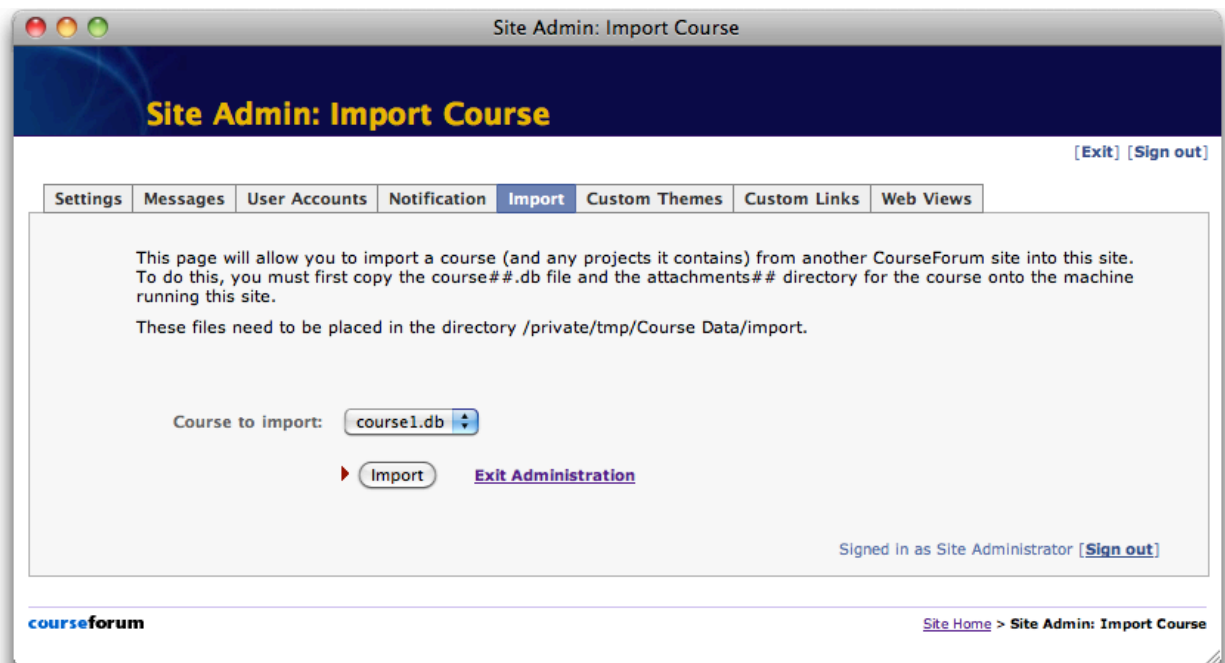
Figure 12-10. Import Course page.

Custom Themes

CourseForum comes with a number of different themes, which control the appearance of the entire site. These themes can be selected from any of the Site, Course or Project Administration screens.

If you wish, you can also create new themes, or modify existing ones. By doing so, the site can be *branded* so that it will visually fit in more with other web sites that you may have. You can change things like colors, fonts, images, add customized page headers and footers, add logos, and so on.

While some simple changes can be quickly and easily done, more complex modification of themesdifying themes requires some knowledge of web technologies such as Cascading Style Sheets (CSS). For this reason, you may wish to involve a web designer while developing your themes.

Clicking the "Custom Themes" tab from a Site Administration page will display the "Custom Themes" page, shown in Figure 12-11. This page shows the list of all known themes, both the built-in themes, and any custom themes that have already been created. Clicking on the name of a theme will allow you to view or modify that theme.
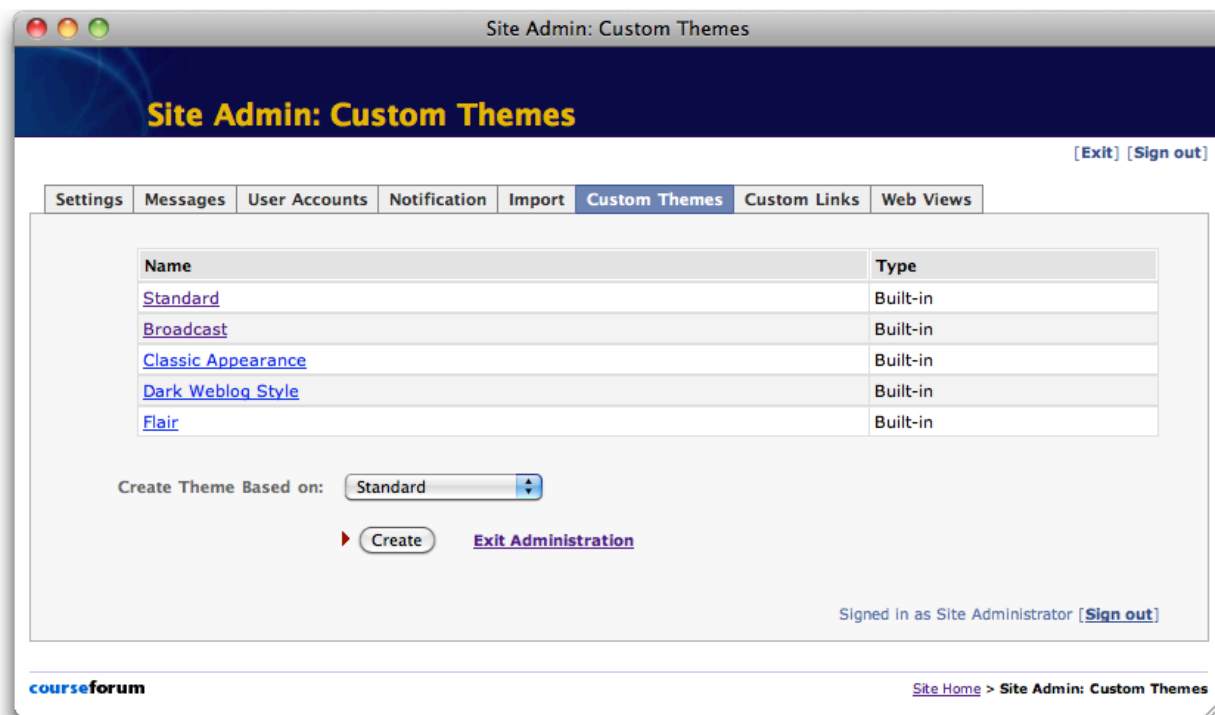
Figure 12-11. Custom Themes page.

You can also create a new theme. To do so, first choose an existing theme to serve as a basis for the new theme (you can completely change it, but it helps to have a starting point), and then click Create.

Whether creating a new theme or modifying an existing theme, you will use the Theme Editor, shown in Figure 12-12.

Using the theme editor you can modify existing parts of the theme, such as colors, logos, the styles it uses, add or delete graphics, and much more.

Additional details on using the theme editor, and more detailed explanations of the stylesheets that CourseForum uses, can be found on the support area of the CourseForum web site.
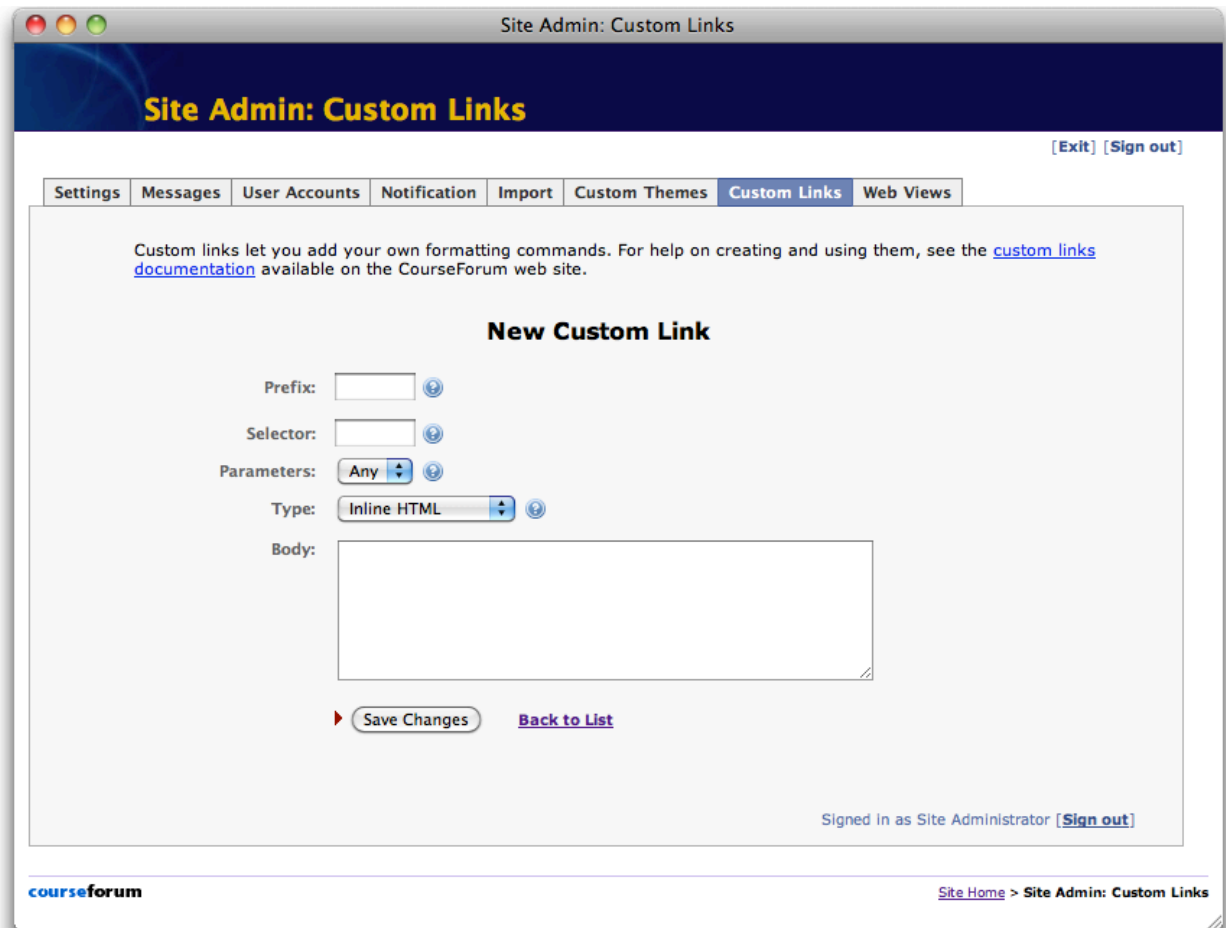
Figure 12-12. Theme Editor.

Custom Links

While CourseForum contains built-in code to handle links such as [file:], [rss:] and many others, it is also possible to add entirely new link types. These can be used for a variety of purposes, from creating new formatting commands to integrating content from other sites and services.

Constructing new custom links, done via the "Custom Links" screen (Figure 12-13), is a very advanced topic; consult the support area of the CourseForum web site for more information.

Figure 12-13. Custom links.

Web Views

While CourseForum is meant primarily as a tool for people to collaborate with each other, some people find that it can be a convenient way for a group of people to manage a simple external website.

In this situation, while the site maintainers will need all of CourseForum's editing and administration tools, regular visitors to the site have no need of them. That's where "web views" come in. They allow you to create an alternate "web view" for a course or project. It contains exactly the same content as the original course or project forum, but without all the editing controls. And as content changes in the original forum, the web view updates accordingly.

Web views can be created via the "web views" screen, shown in Figure 12-14. You'll need to specify the forum to base the web view on, what URL the web view should be accessible under, and a theme used to display the web view. After the web view is created, you'll just need to point your external web visitors to the new URL.

Figure 12-14. Web Views.