Using MERLOT in the Classroom

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ATHLETIC TRAINING educators, like most higher education faculty, are continually trying to modify the content of their courses to reach students with different learning styles and to improve their teaching methods. Many educators combine content from different resources and create their own online “learning objects” specific for their course or unit of learning. These learning objects could take the form of interactive Web pages, PowerPoint® files, and Web-based simulations. It can become very time consuming, however, to create these learning objects while performing the many unique duties of an athletic training educator. What if there were an online repository for these learning objects? There is, and that repository, or shared knowledge community, is called MERLOT (www.merlot.org).

The Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching (MERLOT) is an online resource linked to thousands of learning objects (Figure 1). MERLOT is a consortium of 23 university systems and institutions of higher education. It is a “continually growing catalog of online learning materials, peer reviews, learning assignments, and user comments, organized by discipline into specific discipline communities and created to help faculty enhance their instruction that anyone can use for free.” Learning objects that are submitted to MERLOT are peer reviewed by an editorial board of the discipline-specific subject area. The primary purpose of these reviews is to allow faculty to decide whether the online teaching–learning materials they are examining will work in their courses.

MERLOT has thousands of learning objects to choose from. Some examples that might be useful to athletic training faculty include the following:

- The Auscultation Assistant: a Web page that provides heart sounds, heart murmurs, and breath sounds in order to help students improve their diagnostic skills.
- Assessing Blood Pressure: a Flash document that includes audio of blood-pressure sounds, interactive simulations, and self-assessment tools.
- NATA CEC Virtual Library: several different lectures sponsored by the Continuing Education Committee from various National Athletic Trainers’ Association symposiums. All lectures have audio and PowerPoint slides synced together.
• Knee Injury Scenario for Athletic Trainers: a complete interactive multimedia exercise including images, sounds, and interactivity. The project uses Shockwave™ technology for delivery via the Internet.

• Learning Styles and Multiple Intelligence: a Web page providing an explanation of what learning styles and multiple intelligence are all about, an interactive assessment of learning style/MI, and practical tips to make learning styles work for each individual.

• Authentic Assessment Toolbox: a tutorial for learning all about authentic assessment. It is presented with hypertext and features creating authentic tasks, rubrics, and standards for measuring and improving student learning.

As you review the list of available learning objects, you will be able to go to a detail view of the material in MERLOT. This view features more information about the learning object, including the title and review ratings (if available), where the learning object is located, its MERLOT subject category or categories, and author information. The boxes in Figure 3 point out some of these specific components of a detail view. It is important to remember that MERLOT does not actually store the learning material itself, only a description. The actual learning object is located somewhere else on the Internet. To view the learning object, click on the link next to Location. Most learning objects are simply Web pages with interactive content; others are advanced...