

Memo from Glen Kuck

I would like to chime in on the discussion of the possible transition from Blackboard to Canvas.

Let me preface my following comments by saying that I firmly believe that above all systems, our faculty should be the ones to decide what LMS we should use. It is their virtual classroom and they need to decide which LMS helps them connect best with our online learners. Having said that, this decision is not a trivial one and currently there are several unknowns with Canvas that we need to research and get to the bottom of before we can develop a tactical transition plan.

For example, over the past several years, we have invested heavily in hosting, help desk, customizations such as auto-populating of shells, training tools, integrations with our Student Information System, etc. All of these investments have come about because our faculty felt they were necessary and important. So does Canvas offer all of this? Do they offer the same Service Level Agreements (SLAs)? How do they handle retention of courses and back-ups? If not, can faculty live without these things and, if they can't, what can we do to augment Canvas' offerings? Canvas does not offer as much storage capacity. Is half of what we currently offer enough? If not, can we buy more and at what price? What will the resulting total cost of ownership be?

In other words, in the interest of total transparency and to ensure complete understanding by all faculty, we need to do a side-by-side comparison of all features and also assess the total cost of ownership should the state stop funding Canvas. We can then make this comparison available to both senates and conduct a couple of workshops to walk everyone through the differences. Only then can the faculty truly make an informed decision. Even now, there are currently only two colleges in the state on Canvas. We are watching very closely to see what the other colleges, who were part of the pilot, are going to do. If those colleges don't move across, it will be very difficult for the state to justify the continued funding of Canvas.

Having said that, based on what I've seen and the workshops I have participated in, I'm pretty confident that Canvas will be able to offer the same features that Blackboard offers, we can save our District upwards of \$400,000 (for so long as the state is paying for it), and will enable our colleges to participate more in the statewide OEI. I just want to make sure we do this with our eyes wide open. A transition such as this will not be trivial and reversing it will be extremely difficult because of the time and costs involved. We also need to be cognizant of the fact that we have many, many faculty that are passionate about Blackboard. We need to be sure to share this information with them so they understand the rationale and don't feel alienated.

Finally, I need to be upfront in saying that we will not support two LMS's. We do not have the resources necessary to support two, so both colleges will have to make a collective decision and move forward on this together.

I have asked Tre to start putting together the side-by-side comparison and we have already had one "technical" meeting with Canvas to start assessing it's impact on the back end. We should have the side-by-side comparison completed and ready for discuss at the next DECC meeting in September. I would encourage all members of the DECC to share with those they represent and interact with that these discussions are underway and more information will be forthcoming. However, until the presentations to the faculty are completed and the decisions, based on those presentations, are made by the academic senates, no decision has been made.