

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Liv Gjestvang  
**FROM:** LMS Evaluation Committee  
**DATE:** June 10, 2015  
**RE:** **LMS Evaluation Recommendations**

### Committee Charge:

In light of several recent developments, on April 20th, 2015 selected faculty, staff, and students from across several university units were invited by Michael Hoffher and Liv Gjestvang to participate in this short term evaluation committee to provide an initial assessment of the current landscape for Learning Management Systems (LMS) in higher education with the needs of Ohio State faculty and student communities in mind. Specifically, [the charge](#) was to evaluate three best-in-class learning management systems including our current vendor (D2L) and to provide a recommendation consisting of:

1. An assessment indicating whether each LMS is suitable for the OSU environment. This should include a comparison of the products based on key features used by instructors and students.
2. A recommendation that OSU continue with D2L for the foreseeable future, or explore in detail, the feasibility of moving to a specific, alternative LMS.

### Committee Process:

From the thirty-two (32) faculty, staff and students invited, twenty-five (25) committee members actively participated by either submitting scorecard and ranking surveys and/or attending at least one vendor demonstrations and/or worked in at least one vendor provided sandbox (self-identified participation was acceptable). [Committee members](#) who participated were from Arts and Sciences Tech, Dance, Educational Studies, English, Material Science, Math, Microbiology, Molecular Genetics, Office of Academic Affairs, Physiology and Cell Biology, Psychology, Public Health, Social Work, Statistics, Teaching and Learning, UCAT, University Libraries, and Veterinary Clinical Services.

ODEE provided the committee with three market-leading vendors to assess that were determined to meet at least the minimal requirements to be feasible for an institution of this size and complexity: Blackboard, D2L, and Canvas. The full committee was given an opportunity in the first meeting and in subsequent discussions to determine other vendors to be included and none were suggested. ODEE staff organized vendor demonstrations, test sites and communication with vendors, including submitting questionnaires on the committee's behalf, technical resources to answer questions or resolve issues with test sites, and compilation of the survey data submitted by the committee.

The committee assessed the functionality of key features in each product and identified the most important features.

As outlined in the charge, the committee did not evaluate factors such as accessibility, security, ability to integrate with other systems, infrastructure needs, scalability and performance, transition, or cost. This committee's recommendation only extends as far as whether or not further exploration of an alternative LMS is appropriate, at which time these factors will be considered carefully.

In all assessments the committee not only evaluated current functionality, but also looked at vendors' road maps for the future and potential innovations.

#### Recommendation:

Based upon the report of committee members' survey responses and subsequent discussion in which there was rapid consensus, the recommendation from the committee is to explore in detail the feasibility of moving to Canvas as an alternative vendor for Ohio State's Learning Management System. We note that this assessment of the suitability of each LMS is based principally on faculty and staff perspectives, given the minimal participation of students on the committee. Going forward the committee recommends careful attention to an evaluation process that is long enough to do a comprehensive review and broad enough to be inclusive and representative of all users.

This recommendation to explore Canvas more deeply is based on initial assessments done using vendor presentations, tutorial webinars, and use-tests in sandboxes provided by the three vendors, during which committee members rated a wide range of features. While each of the three vendors met minimum standards for feasibility, significant differences were noted.

In the surveys and subsequent committee deliberations, Canvas stood out as superior in every feature, except for recording and calculating grades; and was rated by committee members far above both Blackboard and D2L on ease of use and clarity of interface throughout, inspiring prospects for teaching and learning, functionality on mobile devices, collaboration and communication features, and overall integration.

During our deliberations, committee members noted hopes and wishes for the future LMS that will be gathered in a separate survey by ODEE sent out June 9, 2015. They also noted that given the growing interest in online courses and programs, our LMS must support Ohio State's online initiatives as effectively as classroom-based or hybrid courses. Members also identified a need to take advantage of distributed support staff and conduct assessment about how the LSM functions "above" the course level.

Other questions and concerns to be evaluated in the next phase of review:

- What trade-offs are we making between ease of use on the one hand and range of functionality or adaptability to edge-cases on the other, and can those be more carefully identified (i.e., grade book)?

- Can Canvas scale to peak usage times and complexities of this institution?
- By relying on cloud-based infrastructure are we reducing local control and flexibility?
- What will be the balance between security/support concerns and flexible integration with third party services made possible by the cloud-based environment on Canvas?
- How does the university plan to ensure ethical and transparent policies for use of student and faculty data within the range of current Ohio State policy and practice?
- Will the product we are being shown actually be what we get to adopt? Specifically there were questions about features in D2L that may already have similar functionality to those desired in Canvas but have not been adopted due to support, legal, or security limitations.

Further, the committee articulated several specific concerns regarding LMS features and functions:

- There are minimal conditional release options with Canvas and adaptive learning capabilities are currently not as robust as either of the other two vendors.
- Gradebook calculation options and flexibility are limited with Canvas and in particular the lack of formula based options was a major concern for several committee members.
- Quiz import and display options in Canvas were limited and need to be more flexible and customizable.
- Management and appropriate role definition for large multi-section or cluster courses is a major need for our large courses and program assessment, regardless of which vendor we select.
- Student View: The inability in the current instance of D2L to see “actual” student view as an instructor
- Accessibility was not assessed but remains a major interest and concern

Significant changes to the LMS are difficult and unavoidable, whether they come in the form of a transition to a new vendor or an update to the current D2L system. We recommend that the next phase of assessment include a plan to maximize the benefits that we can derive from those changes. These include, but are not limited to, improved competencies and assessment tools, student analytics, engaging in cross-departmental and multi-institutional partnerships, broad-based LMS adoption for instructional and learning efficiencies, and expanded pedagogical exchange and innovation. The vendor’s roadmap should be matched with a broad range of potential uses that have been identified at Ohio State. Any legal or security issues, shortage of support resources, or IT infrastructure limitations should then be addressed in advance, so that we are able to quickly and fully take advantage of desirable technology.