

DMACC's LMS Review Summary

In the Fall of 2020, DMACC asked three Learning Management System (LMS) vendors to present their products to faculty, administration, and the Online Learning team to allow us to evaluate them and determine if a change is necessary to help improve our students' and faculty's experience in teaching and learning. There are many reasons to make a change in your LMS: new technologies/workflows, features, ease of use, integrations and/or new tools, and a refresh on your systems, just to name a few. We invited Blackboard (Bb) to show their newest product (still in development) called Ultra Courses, and invited Canvas and Desire2Learn (D2L) Brightspace. We hosted two faculty demonstrations for each LMS, as well as one meeting for Online and other administrators. After the demos, we asked faculty to take a survey and had Online Learning fill out rubrics for each product to inform our decision moving forward.

At the start of the review, we invited all full-time faculty to join the sessions so they could provide input on if a change is necessary. To be fair to all vendors, we requested that faculty attend all three demonstrations if they wanted to receive the survey. We had 43 faculty attend all three sessions. Individually, we had 74 attend Bb, 62 attend Canvas, and 60 attend D2L. The Online Learning and administrative sessions had anywhere from 10 to 17 attendees. In the end, the surveys and feedback showed the faculty group preferred Canvas to both Blackboard and D2L. The Online Learning staff was split between Blackboard and Canvas, mainly due to the timing of the pandemic and knowing how it may be a difficult transition without much face-to-face interaction. We cannot overlook the fact that we did not have a large number of faculty attend all sessions. Those who did attend were mostly high-end users with a good understanding of the platforms. Therefore, the hundreds of novice and non-technical instructors we support were not represented in the survey feedback.

Through this evaluation, we learned more about DMACC's current LMS users and their needs, as well as how many schools are using each system statewide, and their strengths and weaknesses. We also took into account the number of users we have at DMACC – this spring semester includes 2,300 instructors and 12,800 students in the Learn platform itself, along with 34,500 unique enrollments. We also have 270 organizations in our Bb Community license with a variety of enrollments depending on what time of year it is. All faculty are enrolled in various Communities, including our high school adjuncts to facilitate our NACEP requirement. Furthermore, all orientation students use a Community at some point to access required orientation materials, which ultimately allows them to enroll in classes. We also have two programs using Communities since the pandemic started, which made it possible for them to continue serving: TRIO-SSS and YouthBuild. Adding to this, DMACC Online Tutoring (DOT) and some other programs use a standalone license of Collaborate for student-faculty collaboration and hosting virtual meetings.

Another consideration is both the cost and time we have invested in training faculty for Blackboard. Currently, we have over 1,930 faculty that we have paid (\$300 per person) to complete the Blackboard training, which is required before they can teach using the system. We also have spent countless hours delivering trainings on tools and features of Blackboard,

Collaborate, Kaltura, and other licenses, as well as best practices in design and teaching methods in hopes of helping faculty improve their classes. In addition to this, the COVID-19 pandemic, forced us to move over 2,750 sections from Face-to-Face to Real-time Virtual using Bb and Collaborate in the Fall of 2020 and Spring of 2021.

Finally, we considered the time and expense it would take to move the courses from one system to a new one. On one hand, this would allow us to potentially add more design oversight and structure as we configure a new system to meet our various needs. This also could turn into a long and difficult process as we would have to rely on faculty to re-develop their courses in the new platform. There are companies that we can pay to do these conversions, but this is a costly endeavor, so the migration process would not be easy.

Challenges to an LMS Change

The following are some challenges to adopting a new LMS given the current state of the College and operations.

The Online Learning department, in conjunction with other departments, would need time to configure several systems and tools.

- The LMS visual design, structure, roles, permissions, integrations, assessment, etc.
- User authentication (login) and myDMACC Portal
- Banner integration – ILP won't working in our business model
- Publisher integrations / LTI tools we have added for special products
- Confirm accessibility tools are robust and in place
 - Provide additional training on ensuring all learning materials are accessible (this is still a large issue in Bb)
 - Potentially still license Blackboard's Ally product

Online Learning would need time to familiarize ourselves with a new LMS so we can teach others.

- Develop a comprehensive training plan
- Rebuild the required LMS training course
 - We have instructors working in and completing the training year-round and would need a plan for switching those new users to Canvas
- Rebuild the Online Instructional Resources course
- Rebuild LMS Basics for Students training course
- Revise the Online Course Development Checklist
- Rebuild Signature and Virtual Framework courses
- Require faculty training (even though they may have just completed it in Bb)
- Potentially pay faculty for the training on a new system
- Possibly halt Online Course Development grant applications for a time period

We need to consider other users of the system and how a change will affect them.

- DMACC Assessment reconfiguration and training
- IT Help Desk Training and knowledge base
- Orientation department – Communities
- Other Community areas (e.g., Teaching and Learning, academic departments, NACEP)
- Special programs (TRIO and YouthBuild – Communities)
- DOT/AAC and STRIVE virtual Collaborate rooms
- Continuing Ed’s increasing online options
- TSA Certificate program course migrations, communication with stakeholders, and revision of processes, materials, etc.

Each LMS has its own unique toolset which will not allow for a seamless migration. All courses will need to be adjusted.

- Bb has blogs, wikis, journals – Canvas does not
- Canvas doesn’t support the folder structure we’ve used for the past 11 years with Bb
- All Signature courses would need to be rebuilt in the new LMS (not just exported and imported, but rebuilt with substantial changes)
 - Top 25 Signature courses
 - Department Signature courses (e.g., entire Mortuary Science program; Criminal Justice, Computer Science, and Math programs all have a lot of Signature courses)
 - Department shell courses that aren’t Signature
- Need migration plan for all other courses
- We have over 500 faculty development “shells” to encourage faculty to try new things and experiment with different content and tools – this material may need to be recreated or moved

The timing of a LMS move is even more difficult right now due to other changes:

- Banner update/change has a substantial effect and won’t be complete until at least November 2021
- The ongoing pandemic affects timing
 - Currently, we have 2-3 times our “normal” users active in the system, already straining our available resources
 - Collaborate, a Bb product, was chosen by Deans and Provosts as the platform for online virtual classes
 - Trying to plan for a change this large while working remotely is much more difficult

We must thoroughly consider the toll the pandemic and other events of the past year have taken on our students, faculty, and staff. We have many non-technical people using the LMS to deliver courses. By changing the platform completely, we would be disrupting faculty who have

found a way to keep teaching in this difficult time. We have tried to help alleviate their transition to Bb by offering support, training, best practices, and expectations for faculty teaching virtually. We also built a virtual course template for faculty to copy into their courses, which provides many useful ideas, resources, and tools for this teaching method, for both faculty and students.

Additional updates outside the LMS are needed.

- Revise materials on our Online Learning website
- Ensure the entire DMACC website is updated with any references to the LMS
- Revise the automatic online welcome letter to students that's sent out at the start of term
- Departments (e.g., IT, Marketing, student services like recruitment, advising, etc.) will need to check their support materials/communications
 - Support will need to be provided to these departments as they are learning what they need to know from a change in LMS

Advantages to Adopting a New LMS

Despite the existing challenges, especially given the timing, a change in platform could be appropriate and positive. Here is a list of potential positive outcomes that adopting a new LMS can provide.

- It presents an opportunity to refresh some courses, reinforce best practices, and retrain some users
- Managing Signature course changes would be easier with "Blueprint" courses in Canvas (i.e., can push them out to associated courses), and faculty who manage department courses that aren't Signature courses would also appreciate it
- There's a lot of benefit in using the same LMS as surrounding high schools and universities (e.g., the ease of transitioning students from Canvas in the high school to DMACC's Canvas to Iowa State's Canvas)
- Canvas has been pushing and leading the LMS market for over a decade, and they program based upon good design and user experience, whereas Blackboard seems to program from a software engineer standpoint (we often hear complaints from users about this)
- We would have more control over LMS updates – some could be delayed so they don't happen in the middle of a semester
- Canvas puts a lot of their training materials online in Canvas Commons, so we might be able to leverage those for training faculty
- Canvas has some desirable features in courses (e.g., easily hide grades/feedback until you're finished grading, student "What If" for grades, test accommodations carry from test to test, robust analytics, students can mark up their submitted documents, video comments/feedback, etc., search discussions by entry/author, speech-to-text feedback, merged sections can have different due dates, link validator, etc.)

- We could reduce redundancy of licensing synchronous meeting tools (from 3 – Teams, Collaborate, Zoom – to 2); we may also be able to eliminate Kaltura since Canvas has some built-in recording software (ADA compliance is still unclear with this built-in recorder, and it doesn't seem to allow for inline quizzing like Kaltura)
- Data/courses are never purged in Canvas, which would make retrieving archives easier if needed for reports or other purposes

Recommendations

With our current course, organization, and user load, any change in platform will be a large transition. Some of the feedback from faculty asked for a lot of time to migrate. It's the Online Learning department's recommendation that we stay with Blackboard and sign an extension, so we have more time. No additional costs will be incurred from what we have in place. It's our belief that a change may indeed be something we want to take on in the future, but we need to have the ability to support faculty and work directly with users to make this transition possible. We also need time to work with Information Technology and Systems Integration to set up the infrastructure and prepare. The Banner migration will hinder our ability to do that this year.

Please consider a 2 to 3-year contract extension with Blackboard. During this extension, we will attempt to pilot the use of Ultra Courses and test its functionality and if the pandemic clears in a year or so, we can attempt to start progressing on updating our Banner integrations related to the LMS and prepare for a change in the future. If we want to change, Canvas would be the chosen platform when we're ready.