LMS Working Group  
August 13, 2013  

**Attendees:** Andy Jones, David Levin, Mary Stewart, Fernando Soccoro, Dan Comins, Bob Blake, Constance Fuller, Cara Harwood, Beau Patrette, Beverley Wilcox, Thomas Ansler, Greg Kuperburg, Alex Alferi, Steve Faith, Chris Pagliarulo, Brent Martin  

The steering committee (Andy Jones, Dan Comins, Steve Faith, and Mary Stewart) has been looking into LMS options this summer. For more details about our findings and links to resources, please review the LMS Working Group Google Doc: [https://docs.google.com/a/ucdavis.edu/document/d/1VcpR_dmTS23-f3FghKbY7fVloH7r-Qqj0X4wmglVZXw/edit?usp=drive_web](https://docs.google.com/a/ucdavis.edu/document/d/1VcpR_dmTS23-f3FghKbY7fVloH7r-Qqj0X4wmglVZXw/edit?usp=drive_web)  

Andy Jones introduces the Transition project  
- We have been considering Blackboard, Sakai, Desire2Learn, Moodle, and Canvas.  
- UC Online has been using that system for our online and hybrid efforts. Berkeley had been planning to move toward Sakai CLE but is now going with Canvas.  
- Blackboard is widely used across the country, but it seems that people are leaving Blackboard, often because of cost.  
  - Greg Kuperburg notes that institutions are generally moving toward D2L or Moodle (rather than Sakai) when they leave Bb.  
- Desire2Learn and Canvas seem to be the more ambitious, integrated, and attractive LMSs that are being used at other institutions; they seem to be doing the best job of anticipating the kind of flexibility we need in an online learning system.  

Constance Fuller has worked extensively with the group who hosts Sakai for us.  
- Over the last 6 months, a new corporation acquired the rSmart portion of the company that supports Sakai. They have been working with us and making improvements that give us more iterative development (frequent patches instead of one annual release).  
- Their focus is customer-driven; they are working to incorporate more flexibility. Voice integration may come in the future, for example.  
- It may be that there are available tools within SmartSite that faculty aren’t using.  

**Why was hosting of SmartSite outsourced to rSmart?**  
- When you have a full team of administrators, programmers, coders, etc., there’s a big overhead cost. Consolidating those services in one vendor who is working for multiple universities and is in a secure location is a safe and cost-efficient decision.  
- Why doesn’t UCOP provide the hosting? Because there is not a single LMS for all UC campuses, and because LMSs are becoming more like commodity resources that need to be housed elsewhere.
Dan notes that it would be great to have a system-wide LMS, especially when we think about cross-campus enrollment. But as the UCs are independent and tied to their own LMSs, and this seems unlikely.

Are there any open-source options for us?
- Stanford is developing one; Google is supposedly doing the same. But most open-source options are going to require us to provide our own hosting, and we can’t be in the business of fully hosting and supporting our LMS.
- Sakai is open source and there is a vendor that does the hosting, and this is problematic because there is a disconnect between the creators and the hosts. Another problem with Sakai is that it’s very fractured. Each institution contributes different tools and it makes for a program that lacks unity.

What does one make with the open-source and hosted combination in Canvas?
- There’s a hosted version of Canvas that gets sold to universities and an open-source version. Much of what is developed on the open source side is analyzed by the hosted side, who then decide whether or not to integrate those changes into the hosted version of Canvas.
- Local developers can develop for the LMS and then ask Canvas programmers to incorporate the developments into their own version of the LMS, and those developments can also be made available to the entire Canvas Community. For us, this means we could keep our own version of Gradebook.
- The two versions are pretty similar (only 6-8 weeks apart with upgrades); they push changes easily because they are cloud-based.
- Greg was unable to find a direct mailing list to Canvas developers. Dan says something like that exists, but you have to be a developer to subscribe. We should find a way to get access to this.

The Steering Group has been working with the below criteria for comparing Blackboard, Moodle, Canvas, and Desire2Learn (see chart in Google Doc).

- Third Party Tool Support (LTI)
- Mobile
- Customization
- Accessibility
- Assessment
- Analytics
- Content authoring, posting, and sharing
- Support
- Collaboration
- Ease of Transition
- UC Enthusiasm
- Hosting
- Underlying technology
- Cost
- Available tools (including grading tools)
- Add and investigate first: BASICS
The group expressed interest in seeing a more detailed version of the chart in the Google Doc that has the nuanced response to why we believe the different LMSs do or do not satisfy our need for a given criteria or element. It was later decided that this additional information does exist in the Google Doc and via the resource links at the bottom. The next steps for the Steering Group is to develop a more detailed analysis of Canvas and D2L.

- Over this summer, we’ve been engaged in preliminary investigations. We will investigate Canvas and D2L in more depth and return with a report; the next step for this group is to determine whether we wish to pilot one or both.
- In fall, we’ll be having more meetings like this, inviting vendors, and be inviting qualitative comments from the UC Davis community.
- In winter and spring, we will pilot our selected LMS(s).
- By the time we have our June CCFIT Meeting, we will make a recommendation regarding which LMS UC Davis should transition to.

Is there a way in the preliminary stage of investigation to articulate how satisfied customers are with the basics of each LMS? This would be like a pre-evaluation of what other people think of the basics, meaning looking at things like gradebook before we think about things like mobile.

- This will be part of the Steering Group’s more in-depth analysis of Canvas and D2L.

Accessibility

- No LMS is completely accessible, but D2L and Canvas have both demonstrated that they are putting a lot of effort behind making their LMSs accessible. D2L has an entire department (they’ve hired people with visual disabilities to test their system).
- We have directives from UCOP to make our systems accessible, so this issue is very important to our final decision.

Could we just pilot one in the winter? Why do two?

- This committee can make that decision, but we’ll need to have a strong argument for why. And we’d still want to go through the pilot phase to make sure our recommended LMS functions well in real-life conditions.
- While we all want this transition to happen as quickly as possible, we need to remember that the move from MyUCDavis to SmartSite took two years longer than we planned, partly because of faculty resistance.
- Testing one may be the most logical choice, but politically a minimum of two is smart. (Berkeley only piloted one, and they are running into political issues.)
- We want to leave this to be discussed, pending on our future findings.

We seem to be seeing people moving away from Sakai, Bb, and Moodle, which leaves D2L and Canvas as the major players in the LMS world.

Project Sites
Lots of staff members and faculty committees use project sites. Will this be available at Canvas and D2L? The D2L vendor said they have something like that, and Canvas has group sites that can work that way. We can also get at this by integrating third-party tools.

We also need to think about available collaborative tools, like box.net and Google Drive, that may serve those needs better than an LMS project site.

We have to be careful to think through the critical tools that each department needs; if we don’t think about the unique needs of music instruction, for example, then we might not even consider what the LMS needs to have. The point is that we need to make sure that the feedback we solicit throughout this process is broad.

Narrowing Down the List of Candidates
- How much more information do we need to disqualify some of the players? How substantiated should that information be? Are there enough blockers to cross out Blackboard and Moodle now?
  o There was some concern that the information we have right now is rather binary (the chart is just yes/no), and the general feeling is that we need more information around both the “yeses” and the “nos.” But it was also pointed out that there is quite a bit more information if you read through that Google Doc and the links at the bottom, and most felt that we did not need to redo the work already done by the Steering Committee.
- Why we’re hesitant about Moodle:
  o Brent, our UC Davis extension representative feels, that Moodle would be a bad choice for the campus as a whole. Extension has different concerns, and the support structure for Moodle is not great.
  o He also pointed out that our investigation should consider corporate health (or developer community health). Canvas looks great, but it’s only two years old.
- Have we looked at Pearson Classroom or even newer systems who are trying to enter the field? What would it mean if we waited a year to see the even newer candidates? Can we afford to wait?
  o In our preliminary studies we looked at 10 or 12 and narrowed it down to four. But that was six months ago. There could be newer options.
  o But the general feeling is that we need to move forward. We can’t wait any longer.
- The Steering Committee feels like it should be Canvas and D2L. At no point did we find ourselves getting excited about Blackboard and Moodle.

Canvas Versus D2L
- Canvas is built on Ruby on Rails (coding language); the others are built on older languages. Greg says RoR is well-designed but not a reason to prefer it over other systems.
- D2L is well-tested for scaling; lots of large institutions are using it without too many problems. And we’ve heard that D2L does better with analytics.

Andy proposes that, from preliminary investigations, we disqualify Blackboard and Moodle. The next step will be to collect more data on Canvas and D2L. We’ll ask, what do we want out of an LMS? And then work with these two companies to see whether their road map will match what we want. As a committee, we may also want to develop a survey to send to stakeholders and ask what features are important; this will give us something home-grown that we can site as reasons for why we went in the direction we went.

By unanimous vote, we disqualify Blackboard and Moodle. By unanimous vote, we will further investigate Canvas and D2L, understanding that we may disqualify D2L in the future.

It is possible that we do all of this work and we do pilots and we’re not happy with the LMS options. In that event, we might consider recommending continuing with the status quo and more evaluation.

The steering committee will do more research. When we have enough to warrant another meeting, we will send another Doodle Poll, and invite more faculty and students to attend. In the mean time, we invite and encourage you to look into D2L and Canvas on your own.