Fall 2015 - Instructor and Student Canvas Pilot Evaluation

University of Minnesota

Office of Information Technology and
Center for Educational Innovation

1. Data Collection

Data was collected toward the end of the semester from 7 instructors via focus group and all 25 Instructors through an online survey. Additionally, we collected data from 8 students through an end of semester focus group and 385 students through an online survey.

	# of Participants	Response Rate
Instructor Survey Responses	25	100%
Instructor Focus Group Participants	7	
Student Survey Responses	385	43%
Student Focus Group Participants	9	

2. LMS Preference
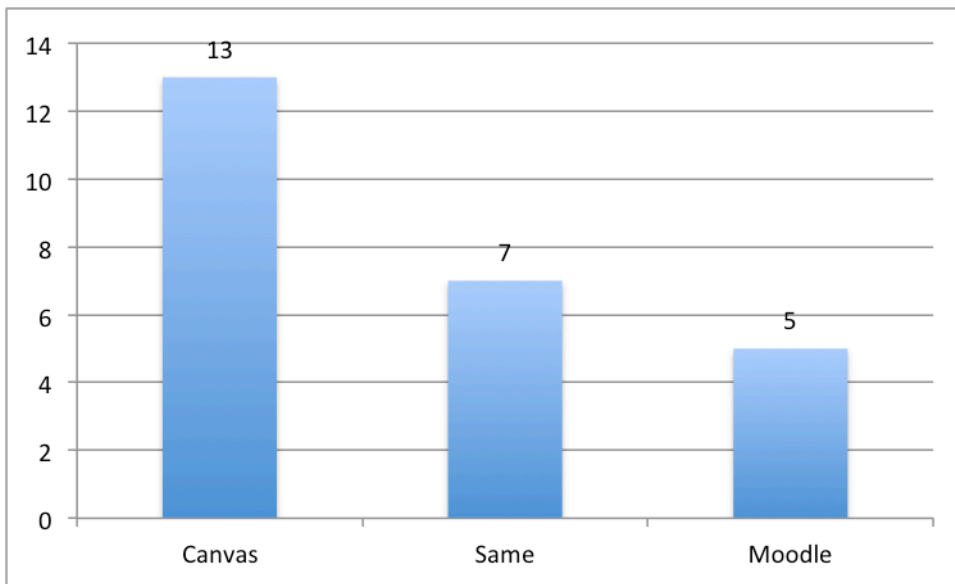
In general, **students** expressed a slight preference for Canvas over Moodle when asked which LMS helps them better succeed in their classes.

Student Preference
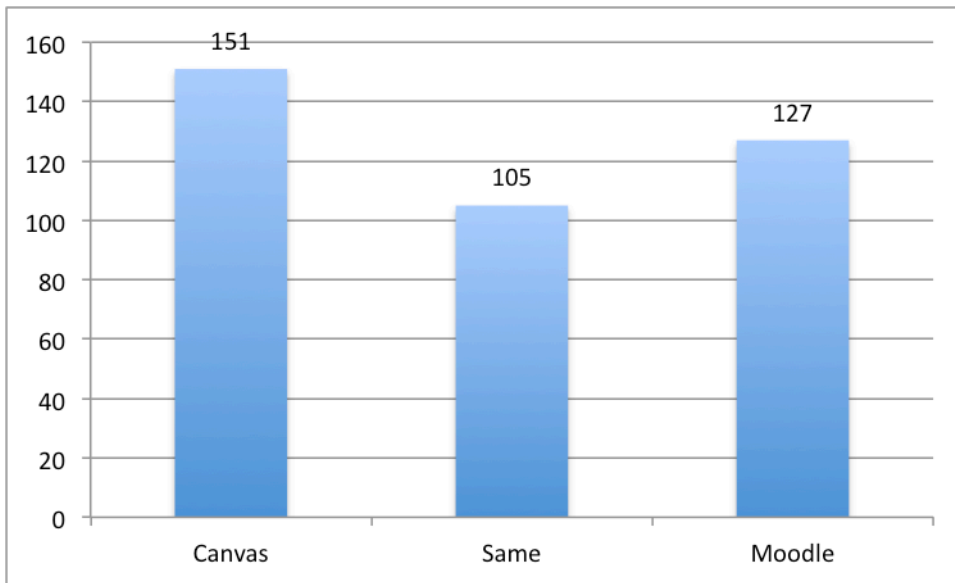
Overall, **instructors** indicated Canvas was better for teaching than Moodle.
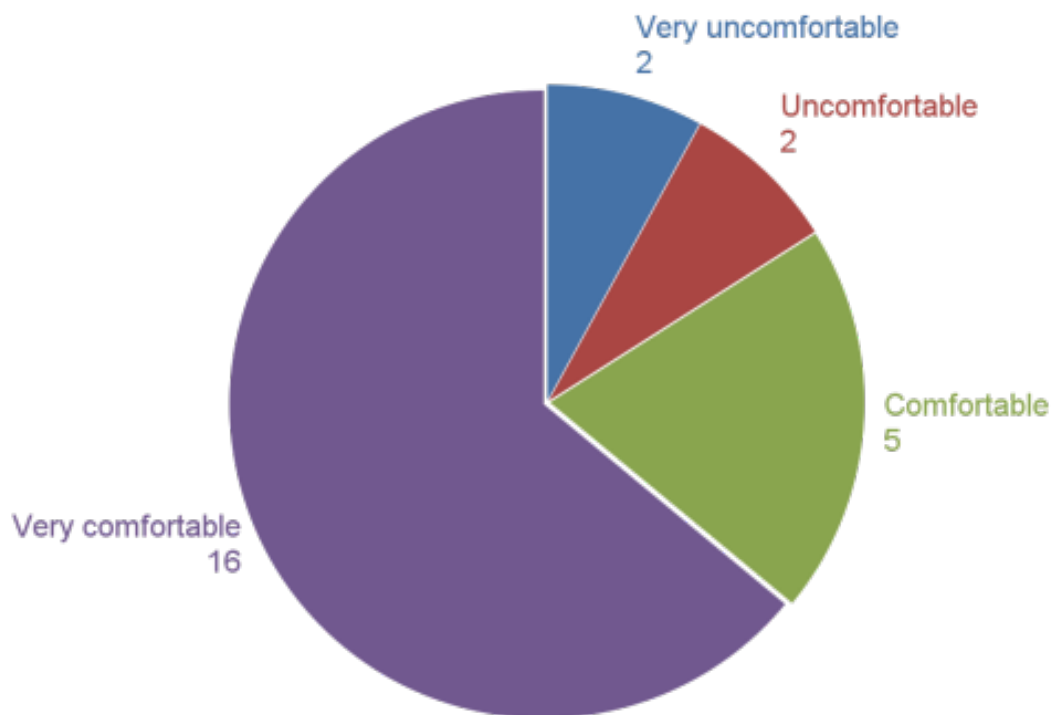
Instructor Preference

3. Instructor View

The course was delivered in multiple formats.

Face-to-face	12
Blend of face-to-face and online	6
Online	7

Over three quarters of the instructors participating in the pilot described themselves as comfortable or very comfortable with using technology in the classroom.

4. Instructor satisfaction with Canvas

Instructors were asked to rate their level of satisfaction on the following Canvas features

	n	Mean
Grading assignments and tracking grades	25	3.35
Uploading, Organizing, and Sharing Course Materials	25	3.44
Creating and managing group assignments	25	3.29
Creating and using rubrics to grade assignments	25	3.47
Organizing course content into a series of lessons or modules	25	3.35
Communicating with students	25	3.62
Creating and administering online tests, quizzes, and/or surveys	25	3.50
Setting the course up	25	3.43
Using third party tools: Turnitin, kaltura, iClickers, etc.	25	3.00

1= strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree

What do you like most about Canvas

- *I also like the feature of "hiding" the assignment while I was grading. It was easy and very intuitive. I also liked some of the features of the forum tool which made it easy to go back and forth between seeing posts before posting and not being able to see posts before posting.*

- *Grading tools are great. Much faster than Moodle.*

- *I like the structure -- the prominence of the syllabus and the mechanism for turning in and downloading assignments.*

- *LOVE the calendar feature. I think students used this A LOT (especially since no student I know ?! reads a syllabus anymore.*

Which, if any, features/tools in Canvas allowed you to design and/or teach your course in a new way?

- *I like the speedgrader grading feature for discussions. I have always liked being able to easily see all of a student's discussion posts in a glance, as well as how their posts fit into the discussion with their group or the class. Missed having this kind of option with Moodle.*

- *I had not previously had students submit work via the learning management system. This way I can offer students feedback on their work within Canvas and we can have an exchange about it. I also had not previously used a learning management system to track assignments and grade. This allows better real time communication with students about their progress.*

What do you like least about Canvas

- *There are some serious deficiencies in the quizzing and gradebook function. For example, any graded assignment has to be called a "quiz" which is not the message I want to give to students.*

- *I think the student tracking left much to be desired compared to Moodle. For example, Moodle lets me track every student action, while Canvas only shows the last time they accessed a resource. Although I liked the quiz system more than Moodle's, I was also not able to randomize quiz questions in the same way as Moodle.*

- *The greatest feedback from myself and students has been related to the "unread" notification in the discussion forum. When you open the forum, there are just small blue dots on the left side of the post if its new and the dot disappears quickly. So, I have to watch for the blue dot and re-click it right away to keep track of which posts are new. Then, I can review all new posts and determine how to respond as usual. I then have to unclick the blue dot because they are no longer new to me. It is quite cumbersome. We have extensive discussions in my class and students are also having a hard time tracking new posts as well.*

- *Discussion forums do not allow for an in-context grading design. I must go to the grader application instead of staying in the discussion and continuing to read within the flow of the discussion. No private reply within the discussions. Yes a*

comment in grading is possible, but that's not always the best way to handle some feedback. As a result I have to depend upon email. Essay questions in exams must be graded within the exam for each person instead of grading everyone's reply to a single question. This takes away from some of the objectivity that I really would prefer.
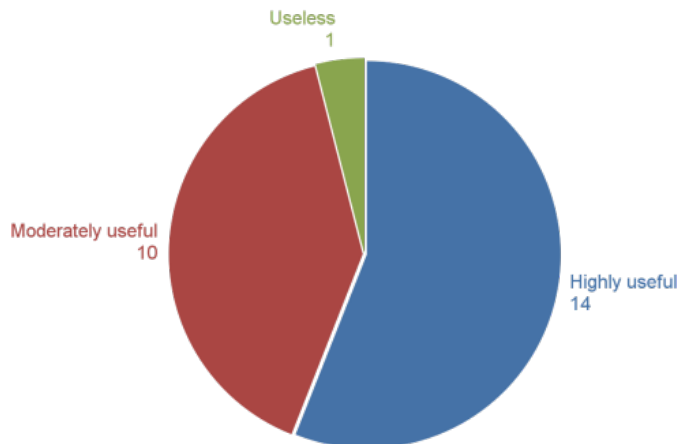
5. Instructor perception of Canvas's difficulty

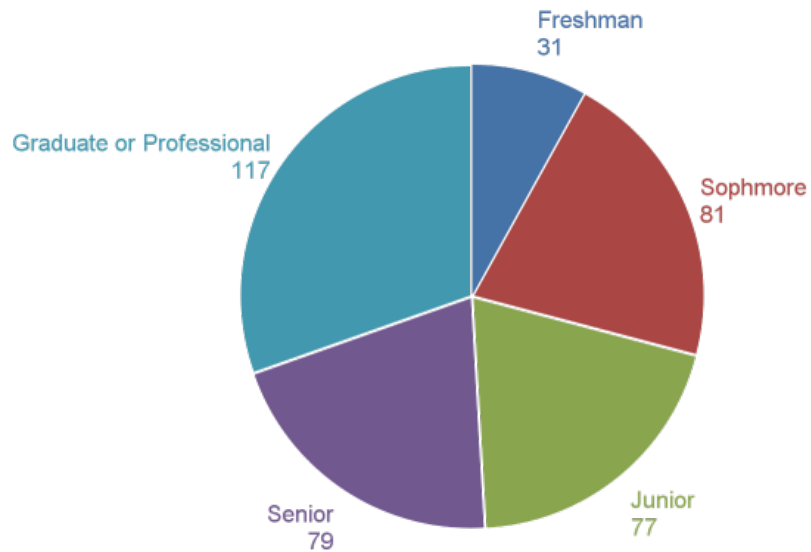The majority of instructors found Canvas easy to use.
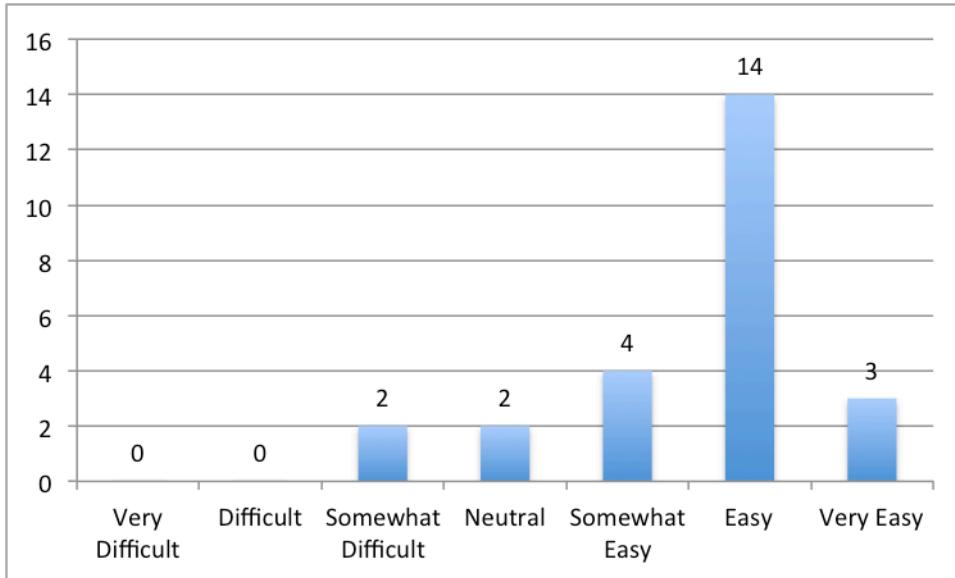
Usefulness for Instructors

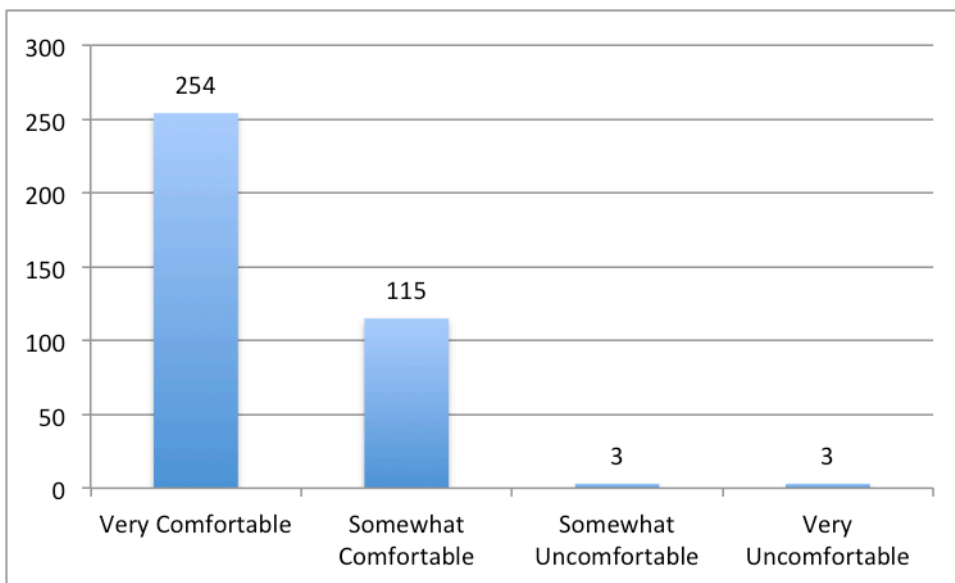By far, instructors found Canvas moderately or highly useful.

7. Student View

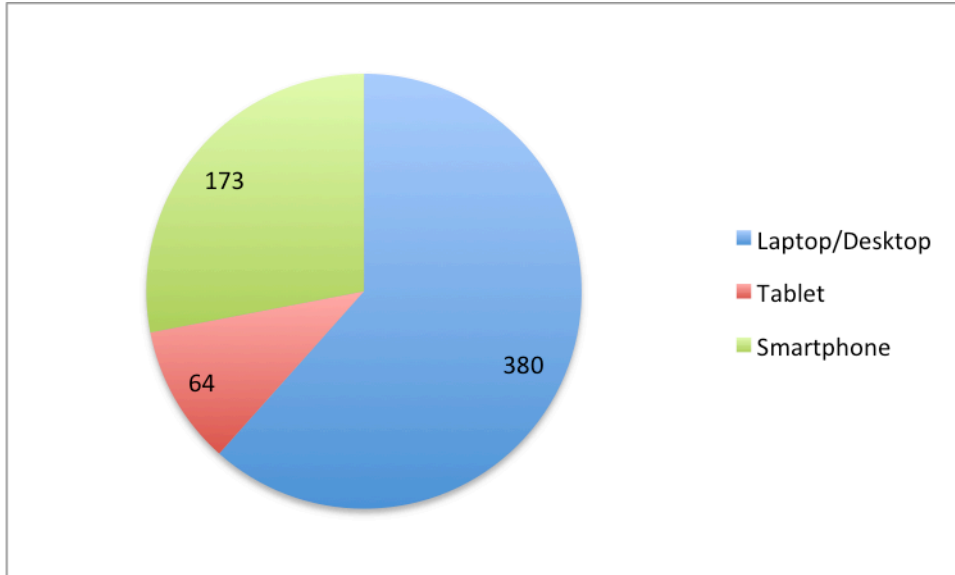Over half the students responding to the survey were either Seniors or Graduate/Professionals.

Even more than the instructors, students described themselves as comfortable or highly comfortable with technology.
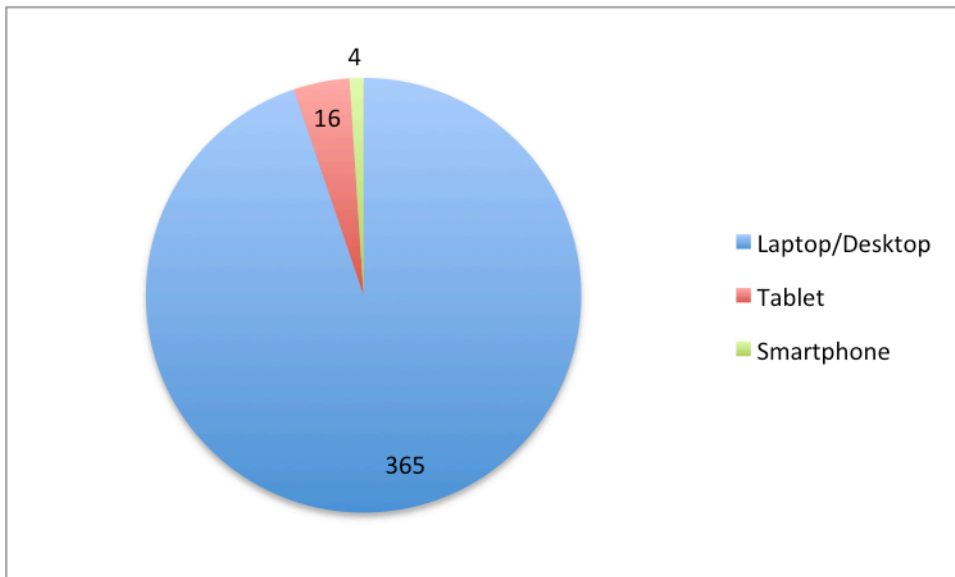
8. Student device use

Students used a range of devices to access Canvas:

They most frequently used their laptop or desktop computer to interact with Canvas.

9. Student satisfaction with specific Canvas features

Students were asked to rate their level of satisfaction on the following Canvas features

	n	Mean
Tracking assignments and grades on assignments	385	3.08
Finding course materials	385	3.03
Communicating with other students in the course	385	2.93
Communicating with the course instructor	384	2.98
Taking quizzes	385	3.19
Using discussion boards	384	3.06
Participating in group work	385	2.97

10. Student satisfaction with the mobile app

Approximately one third of the responding students (127) used the mobile app and 75% of those who used it were satisfied with it.
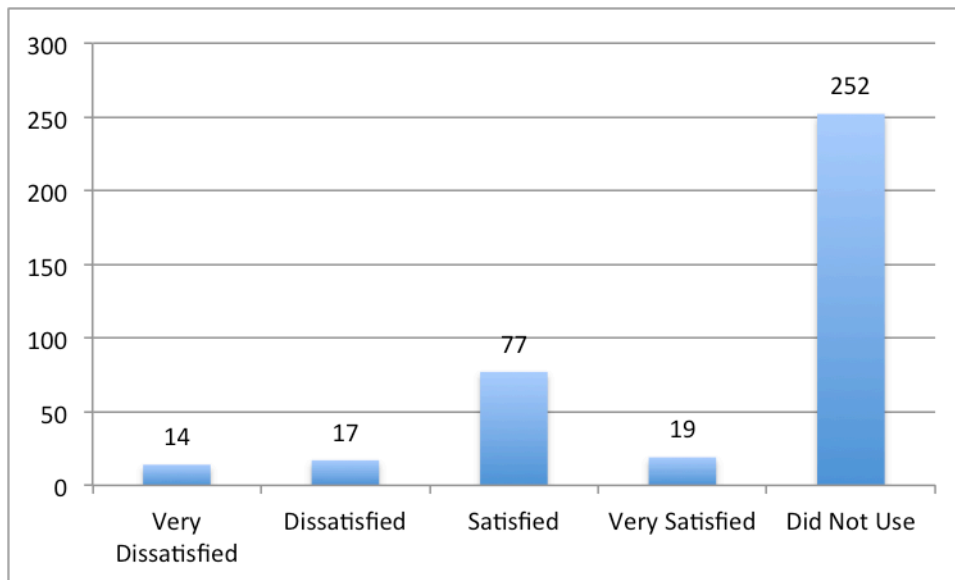
- *Tablet interface is great - can easily download course materials (especially lecture notes) directly;*

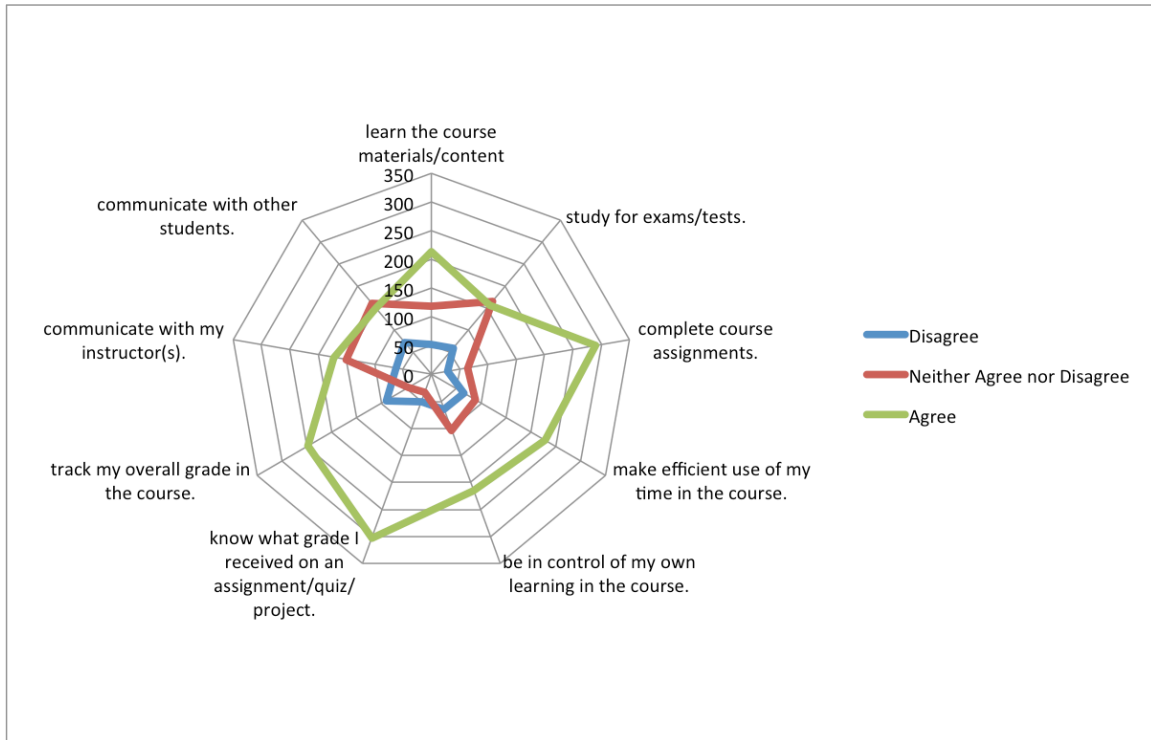- *The app for canvas is great.*

11. Technical Difficulties

Students experienced very few technical difficulties. Fewer than 20% of the students experienced 3 or more issues with Canvas during the Fall semester.
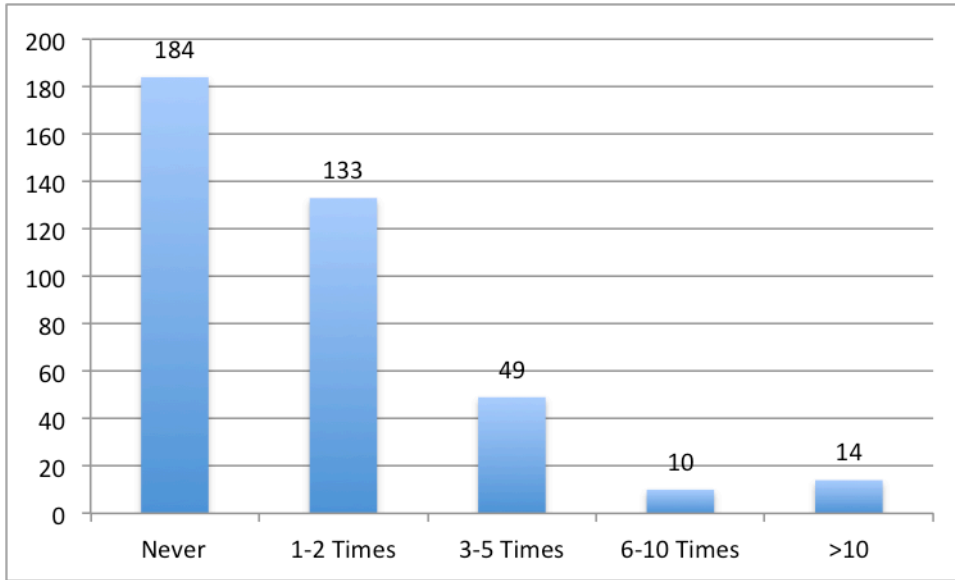
12. Usefulness of Canvas

Students generally found Canvas helpful to perform course tasks.

Please indicate whether you *Strongly Disagree*=1, *Disagree*=2, *Neither Agree nor Diasgree*=3, *Agree*=4, or *Strongly Agree*=5.

"Canvas helps me to…"

	n	Mean
learn the course materials/content.	383	3.48
study for exams/tests.	383	3.31
complete course assignments.	383	3.92
make efficient use of my time in the course.	383	3.56
be in control of my own learning in the course.	384	3.53
know what grade I received on an assignment/quiz/project.	384	3.96
track my overall grade in the course.	383	3.66
communicate with my instructor(s).	384	3.34
communicate with other students.	383	3.23

Positive student comments about Canvas (versus Moodle)

- *Especially love the calender with all my dues.*

- *I especially liked the calendar part of Canvas and the fact that, when I complete an assignment, it crosses it off of my calendar.*

- *I like Canvas more because we have the option to change our "what-if" grade on an assignment to see what our overall grade in the class would be.*

- *Canvas has an easier layout. It is less scrolling down the page and everything is more condensed.*

- *Canvas is a lot more interactive. It was easier to feel more engaged and stay on track.*

- *I find it is easier to navigate between weeks within a class using Canvas.*

- *I think Canvas is visually easier to use.*

- *Canvas is much cleaner looking and easier to navigate week by week.*

- *I like canvas because it is formatted much better. Things aren't in giant lists like they end up being in moodle.*

- *I thought there was more of an inherent structure/organization to canvas that made it easier to find where things were. It seems like Moodle relies more heavily on the organization of the professor.*

- *I like how canvas allows you to view documents without downloading them while also giving you the option to download them.*

- *I would like to say that we used canvas at my previous institution, and I am a big fan; particularly of its capacity to facilitate group work.*

Neutral student comments (Canvas versus Moodle)

- *I don't prefer one over the other when they are working well.*

- *I have had not so good experiences with Moodle, but also really good ones. I think it depends on how the instructor sets it up.*

- *I think my teachers did not really know how to use it but maybe if it functioned as it should have it would have been ok.*

Negative student comments (Canvas versus Moodle)

- *It's like Moodle is Power Point and Canvas is Prezi. Canvas is like Prezi because it takes you all over the site and makes it incredibly frustrating trying to navigate the sight in a way that generally should make sense and you can't figure out how to do it again next time. Moodle is like Power Point because it flows intuitively, A leads to B leads to C and you can navigate easily next time to get to the same place.*

- *Canvas grading wise seemed to have more issues.*

- *I prefer Moodle's layout, in Canvas I found myself going in circles sometimes trying to view my grade for assignments, comments on assignment, or the assignment itself. I do prefer the communication capabilities on Canvas a lot better though.*

- *Moodle seems more streamlined. The forums are easier to follow, unlike Canvas where only one or two forums show up on a page*

- *Canvas appears to have good features to help class learning but it seems to not be very linear - everything is everywhere and it takes as much effort to track down the essentials to complete an assignment as to doing the assignment itself.*

Canvas Focus Group: Instructor
Canvas Pilot Evaluation

Date: December 2, 2015
Time: 10:00-11:00
Location: Walter 131

Purpose: Understand instructor satisfaction, and perceived learning potential of the Canvas LMS.

Themes

Canvas was seen by most instructors as more **intuitive** to learn than Moodle, and they reported fewer queries from students about how to perform particular actions in Canvas than previously in Moodle. One instructor who taught a course with "community members who were part of the digital divide" noted fewer technology barriers and fewer questions from this segment of her student population, "It was really smooth for these community-based students who otherwise struggled with Moodle."

Instructors appreciated the **visual cues** displayed in the quizzes (green = correct/ red = incorrect), and the calendar that displayed the macro view of the course.

Instructors liked how in both the discussion boards and in assignments, the ability to respond to students was **integrated** into the tool, requiring fewer steps and distractions for the instructor. This more efficient workflow led to more willingness to engage students.

The **interface** was described as clean, uncluttered, and modern.

Pedagogical implications of Canvas

Canvas encourages a modular structure that Moodle doesn't, and this leads to a modular redesign of a course. Because an instructor works in modules and submodules, Canvas is seen as more flexible than Moodle.

> *Moodle can be forced to do some of the same things but not in "a clean way."*

Grading in Canvas is more efficient than Moodle because the workflow 1) takes fewer steps, and 2) remains within the system.

> *"I used to have to download files from Moodle, enter my own comments in Acrobat or Word, and then upload them to the site. It was really clunky." "I find I can give much more substantive feedback."*

> *"I used a rubric for the first time because it's so much easier to do in Canvas."*

The **Calendar tool encouraged instructors to view their courses from a new vantage** by viewing the entire course at once and thereby paying attention to the flow of the course.

Instructors appreciated the **efficiency of the Discussion Boards** that presented all of a student's discussion in one area:

> *"The more likely I am to have the discussion because otherwise I'm dreading the grading, quite honestly."*

> *"It's all right there, and it's so much easier to grade. Much better."*

Challenges with Canvas

Instructors reported major problems with third party plug-ins (TurnItIn, FlipGrid, VoiceThread).

Instructors disappointed by the promise of a mobile app. The app was seen as sufficient for viewing material but not for making course changes or communicating with students. One instructor, however, liked being able to take attendance on the app.

File management can be cumbersome, though drag and drop functionality seen as an advantage.

Notifications were vague and too generic.

Support

Instructors relied on their IT consultants and very much appreciated their help. They also thought the online documentation and web help to be sufficient given the level of assistance to which they had access.

Canvas Focus Group: <u>Student</u>
Canvas Pilot Evaluation

Date: December 9, 2015
Time: 1:00-2:00
Location: Walter 131

Purpose: Understand student satisfaction, and perceived learning potential of the Canvas LMS.

<u>Themes</u>

Students liked the "crisp and clean" look of Canvas because it was uncluttered and visually similar to an app. They felt the **interface was efficiently organized** and that, in turn, they were able to **find what they needed easily and quickly**.

The **gradebook was singled out** as a prime feature, in particular because an estimated grade could be generated and descriptive data (min/max/mean/sd, etc.) could be determined for each assignment.

Canvas was seen as a "**collaborative learning space**" because of ease of use of the discussion space, and the integration with Google Docs.

<u>Pedagogical implications of Canvas</u>

The Canvas notification system and discussion area was viewed as helpful and intuitive. In Moodle, "*it's easy to miss posts*" or to choose not to look at them because the layout made it cumbersome to locate new postings.

Similarly, students felt Canvas was easy to use and they could easily locate material.

> *"It helps doing homework if it's going easier."* If it's not going well, *"I just want to get this done."* When you see your assignments there, *"you immediately feel at ease because you know that's all you have to worry about."*

Students appreciated reminders within Canvas that allowed them to know what was coming due. This allowed them to plan their work. Students mentioned the importance of locating materials/assignments.

When you see your assignments, "*you immediately feel at ease because you know that's all you have to worry about.*" This was contrasted with a perception that in Moodle a student couldn't easily and reliably find all that they needed to get done in a single location.

Regarding the gradebook, being able to 1) estimate their current grade and determine what they might need in order to earn a particular mark, and 2) gauge how they were doing in comparison to the rest of the class by assignment was seen by students as being:

"*Helpful to me to see if I needed to try harder.*"

Students mentioned that the speed of any LMS was important to them. (They liked the speed of Canvas and guessed that it was a function of having fewer courses on the server during a pilot.) They expressed frustration with the slowness of any LMS (Moodle as the contrast). When the LMS is not relatively quick, students say instructors won't use it in class to show materials or upload notes or materials in the moment. For their part, students won't use a slow LMS to download materials for the class. They suggested that when the technological is layered onto a challenging assignment, they can grow more easily frustrated and not want to continue with the assignment:

With a slow LMS, students will upload incomplete or imperfect work: "*I want to throw my computer against the wall…. If things are not going the way we want it to, we'll just try to upload something just to get it uploaded, maybe not try our best because you just want to get it submitted when its getting really frustrating.*"

Students liked the integration with Google Docs because you don't get lost, as you might with a link to a normal Google Doc. Again, you can efficiently find what you need.

Additional Student Recommendations

Students …

- believe most instructors need **more training** in any LMS.

- liked a **hyperlinked syllabus** so that materials were easily located from one page.

- wished for an **integrated gradebook**—across courses—and an **integrated calendar** so they can easily peruse all their due dates and grade status.

- believe **courses should look generally similar** so they can navigate each of them in the same manner to efficiently find what they need.

- wanted their **LMS landing page to be simple** and put their current courses at the top of the page since that is what is most important to them; extraneous material should be nested into help or supplemental pages.

Challenges with Canvas

There were some "glitches" surrounding quizzing in a large, multi-section course.

Not all instructors seemed to know how to operate Canvas efficiently.

Canvas contrasted to Moodle

Students in the focus group unanimously preferred Canvas to Moodle. They described the difference between the two in these ways:

"Canvas looks more professional, less DIY [than Moodle]."

"It looks like I could create Moodle…but I would not be able to make Canvas."

"Moodle is like that 1999 blog and Canvas is that "this day and age" interface."