

# LMS Advisory Committee Recommendation

## INTRODUCTION

At Ohio State, we are not just about providing education, we are about advancing education. In fact, the first of the university's core goals is "to provide an unsurpassed, student-centered learning experience led by engaged, world-class faculty and enhanced by a globally diverse student body." From our land-grant mission to our 2020 Vision, we are collectively charged with defining excellence in higher education in the 21st century. Going forward, excellence in education will be marked by ever growing levels of collaboration, transformation, engagement and access.

A learning management system (LMS) can be viewed simplistically as a tool to deliver content and support course management. It can also be much more. The right LMS is an opportunity to motivate, energize and even inspire students. It can stimulate the imagination of faculty, and encourage more creative instructional design. It can provide deep analytics, and reveal insights into how well our students, and we, are progressing. It can create new connections and build communities of learning. But these additional benefits will only be realized if we adopt a platform that goes beyond what is merely functional and familiar.

## WORK TO DATE

The LMS Advisory Committee was convened in January 2016 following the first pilot of Canvas in autumn 2015. Activities of the committee have included reviewing pilot results; providing faculty and staff perspectives and recommendations on communication strategies; and determining messaging and support needed in advance of and during adoption of Canvas or a major upgrade of the D2L platform. In addition, the Advisory Committee reviewed the recommendations made by the previous LMS Evaluation Committee in June 2015 and was charged with delivering a recommendation document. This document is that deliverable. Throughout each stage of this process, Canvas has emerged as the most innovative and intuitive learning platform.

The Advisory Committee discussions have included consideration of student, faculty and staff perspectives; however, the committee is composed of only faculty and staff and additional discussions including groups of students would likely be beneficial as the process continues.

## CANVAS CONSIDERATIONS

An overarching theme of the evaluation and pilot has been that Canvas' focus on ease of use has resulted in tools that are quick and efficient for faculty and students and offer a superior user experience compared to other LMS solutions. This theme was supported by feedback from the autumn pilot (a self-selected group of faculty and students in their classes) in which Canvas was preferred among 93 percent of faculty

participants, 70 percent of first-year student participants and a majority of student participants overall.

In addition to the reported improvements in user experience that Canvas offers, and the overarching ease of use and integration in the interface, there are specific advantages that have emerged including:

- **Mobile Support:** Canvas was initially designed with mobile support as a primary objective. Its mature support of Android, iPhone, iPad and mobile web has the potential to allow students and faculty to engage much more successfully in their courses on their preferred devices. During the autumn 2015 pilot, 50 percent of student participants were already using the LMS on their phones or tablets.
- **Cloud Hosting:** Canvas was developed as a cloud-based platform, so issues other vendors may face in transitioning to the cloud will not hamper Canvas. Cloud hosting also improves the speed and access to course resources for Ohio State users when travelling or located away from the Columbus campus. Canvas has a contractual service-level agreement that promises 99.9 percent availability.
- **Canvas Community:** Canvas users are on a common platform, which allows Ohio State faculty and support staff to collaborate with peers and experts at other institutions to solve problems and share ideas in an open online community. Through Canvas “Commons” faculty can share course materials, by permission, with others in their department, the university or anyone who is using Canvas across all institutions that use it. This sharing can serve as a course enhancement or even replace the need for a textbook.
- **Improved Tools:** With tools like “SpeedGrader” faculty can easily provide rich feedback, including audio and video comments and annotations of student work. SpeedGrader also integrates with Canvas’ rubrics and outcomes tools which can potentially improve assessment and enable outcomes tracking and progression. Additionally, coordinated calendars, grade features, a “to do” list and a flexible home page promise to make it easier for students and faculty to keep up with multiple courses.
- **Unizin:** Canvas has been widely adopted among Ohio State's partners in the Unizin consortium. Ohio State may benefit from the combination of Canvas and Unizin by having access to tools such as Unizin Engage, an eTextbook platform that enables collaboration, provides analytics and offers significant financial savings for students compared to traditional textbooks. Unizin is also able to leverage the scale of the consortium for better contract terms.

While Canvas has many strategic benefits, there are some limiting functional details that need to be addressed. These issues have been extensively discussed by the committee and are understood by the Office of Distance Education and eLearning (ODEE) support staff. ODEE is encouraged to be proactive in identifying faculty affected by these limitations and ensure appropriate support. The primary concerns include:

- The grading tool does not provide the same level of functionality that is available in the current LMS platform. Workarounds exist but there will be a need for added support of specific use cases.
- The quiz functionality is inadequate for some faculty due to its lack of support for some quiz and test design features available in the current LMS. Canvas is aware of this issue and is developing a new quiz engine. The initial release of the new quiz engine is expected during summer 2016 and will be followed by a series of updates which will add additional functionality. Faculty who rely on complex quiz configurations should consider waiting for a Canvas quiz engine update before adopting. At this time, there is no firm date for availability of the new quiz functionality.

Finally, despite careful pilot testing, the committee notes that some issues simply cannot be predicted before wide scale adoption. As thousands of courses adopt Canvas, “edge cases” — users who have highly sophisticated and specialized uses and needs in the LMS — may have to re-conceptualize how they use the LMS. It will be critical to ensure that course and program assessment practices that rely on tools within the LMS continue even if individual tools change. As supporting these users is complex and resource intensive, the committee recommends that ODEE plan for adequate staffing all users in the LMS transition. These special-use cases will require availability of highly competent support staff who can help faculty achieve success within the bounds of the new system. In addition, the lessons learned in this process will enable others to adopt innovative practices once they have been worked out. The university should immediately devote more resources to finding solutions to the known limitations and preparing to overcome the unknown limitations.

## **CHANGE MANAGEMENT**

The pending change in Carmen, either with a platform change to Canvas or a major upgrade of D2L, provides an opportunity to improve overall adoption and usability of the LMS by faculty and instructional staff. Strong messaging and support strategies will be essential to ease the workload increases and manage potential frustrations. The committee views this adoption as an opportunity to stimulate faculty interest in enhancing their use of the LMS. In planning and providing resources for the transition, it is crucial that best practices in pedagogical use of the LMS serve as the driving force for all adoption processes. This will require mindful applications of proven strategies for cultural change in an institution as large as Ohio State.

For an adoption of Canvas, a phased timeline, while important for faculty transition time, may make the student experience more challenging if they have classes in more than one LMS. Faculty and staff will have some degree of control over their transition, but students may find themselves in varying combinations of D2L and Canvas courses within and across semesters during a transition. In addition to issues around change, there may also be a need to address concerns voiced by students regarding their course success and anxiety about how the move to a new LMS will impact their assignments and course grades.

The Advisory Committee identified the following priorities from a teaching and learning perspective for easing the challenges of an adoption:

## SUPPORT

- **“High touch” Support:** We recommend direct, high-level conversations with departments and customized support for academic units to ease adoption and provide guidance about how best to utilize the LMS and exploit pedagogical opportunities. Many departments have no “in-house” support for the LMS and adoption will add to faculty and staff work load. Targeted support should aim to minimize workload, ease frustrations and enable better adoption of the new platform.
- **UCAT and ODEE Collaborative Workshops:** Workshops should not only explain the tools but also include examples of use cases. They should be offered frequently, in short and longer formats, and should be easily accessible for all campuses, including Ohio State ATI.
- **Clear Way In:** During a transition period in which courses may be in D2L or Canvas, a “smart” landing page at [carmen.osu.edu](http://carmen.osu.edu) could provide a simpler way for students to enter their courses, regardless of which LMS their instructor is using. It would also provide a way for instructors to manage key tasks related to Canvas, including the creation of course shells and the secure delivery of final grades from Canvas to the Faculty Center.
- **Target First-Year Courses First:** Courses that primarily serve first-year students should be early adopters to reduce the need for new students to learn two LMS platforms. The faculty and instructional staff should also be encouraged to be mindful of what students are experiencing in the process, and include design elements (e.g., directions to resources) that will minimize student frustration.
- **Employment Timelines:** There needs to be a way to reach and support everyone and anyone who will be expected to serve as an instructor in the LMS. Given that employment timelines differ among regular faculty, faculty on special appointment, GTAs, and instructional staff hired on short-term contracts, reaching out to all audiences can be especially difficult. For example most nine-month faculty will not be on site/on duty during the first summer of transition. Additionally, many associated faculty (clinical practitioners, adjuncts, visiting faculty and lecturers) will only have access to university systems (including Carmen) during the term of employment. We expect that Carmen Affiliates will be an important resource to bridge the gap but additional back up planning is likely required.
- **Dedicated Help:** The committee notes that a dedicated 8-HELP team is necessary so that all questions are directed to trained support staff. This will reduce frustration associated with receiving help from someone who does not have a sophisticated knowledge of the LMS. However, relying completely on 8-HELP may not be adequate because many instructors will need more individual engagement. The creation of a large temporary pool of trained central support

staff that could fan out to address specific needs efficiently is recommended. Departments should be encouraged to evaluate their staffing and support for faculty. The burden of a transition in such close proximity to semester conversion should not be underestimated.

## COMMUNICATIONS

- **Still “Carmen”/New Carmen:** A key component of all messaging should be that we are still using ‘Carmen’ — it is the platform “behind the scenes” that is changing. Messaging strategies should emphasize the key benefits of the change identified during the evaluation process (e.g., mobile capabilities). Messaging should also be transparent with regard to the challenges while providing solutions and resources for managing the challenges (e.g., older devices are not supported, how/where to access help).
- **Emphasize Benefits, Acknowledge the Hardship:** Messaging strategies should emphasize the key benefits of the change identified during the evaluation process (e.g., interface, collaboration, mobile capabilities). Messaging should also be transparent with regard to the challenges while providing solutions and resources for managing the challenges (e.g., older devices are not supported, how/where to access help, access to a growing transition knowledge base).
- **Expansive Communication:** Multiple venues for messaging have been identified and should be used: social media; orientation sessions; advisors; student organizations; advertising on CABS, in the Lantern and through academic units; Carmen Login page; Shibboleth login page; webpage banners; and onCampus Today. In addition, students and faculty access information and resources in many different ways. Consulting with students to identify how to best reach their peers (including those on the regional campuses) will be beneficial.

## RECOMMENDATION

Based on the results of our evaluation, the LMS Advisory Committee has concluded that Canvas, simply stated, is the best choice to move the Ohio State forward in ensuring excellence in teaching and learning; affordability, stability and reliability; and collaboration among peer institutions for now and the next several years.

The committee believes that transitioning to Canvas offers a strategic opportunity to improve LMS adoption and effectiveness across campus, increase student and instructor engagement, and provide a modern cloud-hosted platform with 99.9 percent reliability. The challenges that are raised by the Canvas transition can be mitigated with sufficient resources committed to support personnel and processes. Sophisticated communication and marketing strategies, as well as robust resources for a transition, will be essential to gain timely adoption and buy-in by faculty, staff and students. The Advisory Committee recommends considering engaging marketing/media expertise to craft a media campaign. Finally, resources should be available at all Ohio State branch campuses and locations to ensure system-wide successful adoption.