**16/AS/19/UEPC**
**LMS Evaluation and 2019 Contract Extension**

**RESOLVED:** that CSU Stanislaus sign a (minimum) two-year contract extension to maintain Blackboard as the university's primary learning management system (LMS); and be it further

**RESOLVED**: that no later than December 2019 the Academic Senate shall receive a policy recommendation for the evaluation and selection of learning management systems which shall be followed whenever a change in LMS is under consideration. The faculty governance committee addressing academic technology and learning will be charged with developing the draft policy; and be it further

**RESOLVED:** that selection of a Learning Management System is an academic decision, and shall occur through normal processes of shared governance.

**RATIONALE:** The campus contract with Blackboard (Bb) expires on June 30, 2019, and a decision must be made to either extend the Bb contract or select a new LMS. In the 2017-18 academic year, a process was begun to evaluate whether the campus should maintain Bb or consider an alternative LMS. Canvas was selected as a possible replacement for Bb, and a pilot was conducted in Fall 2018. Based on a variety of data, the Technology and Learning Subcommittee (TLS) recommended to the University Educational Policies Committee (UEPC) that the campus *consider* a switch to Canvas. Upon receipt of this recommendation, UEPC began such a consideration and determined that sufficient information had not yet been collected and reviewed. In coordination with the Provost and the Office of Information Technology (OIT), UEPC has been working to obtain the needed information. Detailed information about the LMS evaluation process and related reports and documents are posted at
http://www.csustan.edu/oit/lms-blackboard-canvas-evaluation-project

As of March 28, 2019, the UEPC has not yet received enough information from TLS, the Provost, OIT, and the campus community to make an informed recommendation as to the viability of transitioning to Canvas at the expiration of the current Bb contract. At minimum, the following still needs to be addressed before a switch in LMS could be fully considered:

1. **A definitive argument needs to be made to support the teaching and learning benefits of an LMS change.** TLS recommended that a switch be "considered," but didn't provide definitive information about the benefits and challenges of maintaining Bb or adopting Canvas. A review of survey responses gave some useful information, but there were gaps in the data. UEPC and the Provost are still receiving and reviewing feedback from instructors and programs/departments regarding their views on the pros and cons of the LMSs, what their needs are for course/program transition, and the overall sense of whether the benefits to adopting Canvas are worth the costs (financial and other)

involved in an LMS transition. Some of the faculty in fully online programs are working with OIT to test out some course transitions, with some of this occurring during the week of April 8.

2. **There is no finalized timeline for implementation.** We know that after an AS vote, the Provost will make a decision which will be recommended to the President. Upon Presidential approval, an expedited contract will be developed/signed, and once signed Canvas should be available within a day. However once a vote occurs in AS, we don't know exactly how long it will take for the administrative decision-making to occur, nor how long the "expedited" contract process takes. It is therefore unclear how soon faculty will obtain access to course shells to begin preparing courses on Canvas. Through consultations/forums it has become clear that the initial plan to end Bb use at the end of Spring 2020 is too early, but a firm ending date for Bb has not yet been established.

3. **The process for supporting faculty in the transition of courses to Canvas is still evolving with no indication as to when this will be finalized.** The initial recommendation included Canvas providing support for the transition of up to 1,000 courses, with the two OIT Learning Services staff members (Glenn Pillsbury and Bob Koehler) providing all other faculty development and pedagogical support for the transition. Questions have arisen regarding impacts on fully online and hybrid programs and courses, and the ability for faculty to do the work of transitioning all courses to the new LMS by the estimated Canvas-only date of June 2020. As is noted on the LMS evaluation website,

> As much as possible, existing course material will be backed up and copied into the new system. However, this process is not usually satisfactory from a technical standpoint and the time needed subsequently to "fix" any imported materials is usually as long as starting fresh. Starting fresh also lets instructors rethink and improve their course design in light of the opportunities provided by a new LMS. Importantly, student data (grades, submissions, and other student content) will need to be backed up separately by instructors, if desired. This aspect of Blackboard courses cannot be copied or imported into Canvas. (FAQ #3)

Based on feedback received and concerns raised after the TLS recommendation was made, the following has been indicated by the Provost as ways to better support the transition:

   a. The university will invest in the highest level of transition support that can be purchased from Canvas as meets faculty needs (i.e. more than 1,000 courses, access to the Canvas 24/7 help desk, on-site "white glove" course conversion services).
   b. Contracts will be negotiated in a manner that affords sufficient ability for online and hybrid programs to fully transition to Canvas.

    c.  Faculty who transition courses during non-work time will be compensated for their work .

These all appear to be smart ideas for supporting the transition, and the willingness to make these available should be appreciated/valued, but these supports are still "in development." We still don't know for certain which faculty supports will be available for the technical and pedagogical transitions to Canvas, what timeline we're working with, nor any of the criteria related to which faculty/courses will be eligible for compensation, what the level(s) of compensation may be and whether this is a flat rate or tied to salary, what "deliverables" will be required under what timeline to receive compensation, who will be responsible for administering the compensation program and supporting and monitoring progress, and how "non-work time" is defined. It is also unclear if it is preferable and/or more cost-effective to utilize Canvas services for transition support, or to hire (temporary or permanent) university employees to do this work.

4.  **There is no proposed budget for the transition.** At the time UEPC received the recommendation from TLS, some information was available regarding the cost for a new Canvas contract that included transition support for 1,000 courses. No clear information was provided regarding the cost of maintaining the Bb contract (expected to be similar to Canvas), nor the cost of signing a one-year contract extension with Bb during the transition to Canvas (expected to be approximately 100,000 as initially reported). On March 26, 2019 CIO Espinosa met with Provost Greer to share information he has obtained regarding Bb costs, and he intends to soon make available a side-by-side comparison of Bb and Canvas costs for various options. This information has not yet been shared with UEPC. Added to these LMS costs will be the costs of faculty compensation (as noted in #2), and any other local expenses related to the transition. Once a budget is established, information must be provided related to whose budgets will cover these costs (Academic Affairs, OIT, other?). Given the importance of an LMS to teaching and learning, the funding of a transition should be a high budget priority if a change in LMS occurs, and budget transparency requires an understanding of how this prioritization influences the available funding for other university interests/priorities.

5.  **There is no visible plan for faculty development.** It is acknowledged that Canvas has strong tutorials and a design that appears "intuitive" to many, and that efforts will be made to purchase transitional support from Canvas, but this is not sufficient to support faculty development. If faculty are expected to start making courses available on Canvas beginning in Fall 2019, some faculty development activities should start to be available on faculty work days in Spring 2019 in addition to any that faculty may volunteer to

attend while off-contract in summer. No information has been shared to date regarding the scope and timing of faculty development activities.

6. **There is no information provided regarding a "communications" strategy** to ensure that all members of the campus community are aware of the transition, and that all websites and documents will be updated to reflect whatever LMS(s) will be in use for particular purposes. Specifically, there is no information about how students will know on which LMS course materials will be posted (this was a concern even with Bb and Moodle options, made worse with the addition of Canvas), or when tutorials will be made available to them. Discussions about this are underway, but with implementation expected to occur within 8 weeks of the writing of this resolution, a lack of a plan (and consultations about this plan) is concerning.

Given the budgetary implications of such a transition, after review and approval by UEPC, FBAC needs to review the recommendation prior to a vote by Academic Senate. Based on the published calendar, in order for Academic Senate to have a first and second reading of the recommendation, it must be on the April 16 senate agenda (20 days from the writing of this resolution). UEPC and SEC agree that there is not yet sufficient information available for governance committees to be prepared to recommend to the AS that a switch in LMS be made at this time.

Therefore, our only option is to make a recommendation regarding the length of contract extension with Blackboard. As of March 26, 2019, it is the understanding of SEC that Bb will make available to the campus either a two-year or four-year extension of our current contract. Recognizing the faculty interest in Canvas, our current understanding of what will be available via Blackboard (our current Bb Learn system, and the new Bb Ultra), and our belief that a thorough evaluation plan can be developed and implemented within such a time frame, a two-year contract extension is recommended. If the only options are one- and three-year extensions, a three-year contract is needed because one year will not provide sufficient time to develop and approve an LMS evaluation policy and implement it.

Our university's consideration of a switch in LMS was tied to the ending of a contract and not because faculty requested a switch in support of teaching and learning. While there are acknowledged limitations to Bb, it remains an LMS that our faculty has successfully utilized to support teaching and learning, it is a system for which faculty development processes and support services are in place, it meets accessibility guidelines, and it is a system that is familiar to a majority of our students. The recommendation to extend the Bb contract should not be read as an affirmation that Bb is a preferred LMS to Canvas, but that not enough details are available to evaluate the viability of an LMS transition to Canvas at this time even if we could conclusively indicate a preference for Canvas. While there are reasons why many view Canvas

as a superior LMS to Bb, the CSU has affirmed that Blackboard is an approved LMS. Given the understanding that Bb is sufficient to meet our needs at this time (even if not ideal), and absent information from the Chancellor's Office that a Bb contract cannot be extended, it would be irresponsible for governance to approve such an important transition without the details of the transition identified and the budget implications understood.

With regard to the second resolved clause, it is important to note that there were many limitations to the LMS evaluation process that put us into a position where we didn't have enough information when a decision needed to be made. There was not a clear process for evaluating the LMS options, and there are concerns with the design and implementation of the pilot program and surveys, and about how perspectives of low/mid/high users of the LMSs were weighted in the evaluation process. Questions continue to arise related to when recommendations related to items 1-6 should have been made, and who was responsible for information gathering/planning related to these issues. Concerns have also been raised about the degree to which student perspectives were included in the evaluation process. Responsibility for these process failures lies in many areas – faculty governance, administrative leadership, and the general faculty.

The development of an LMS evaluation policy can better ensure that future evaluation processes will be more comprehensive and clear, and that any proposals for a switch in LMS will address all elements required for thoughtful faculty review and approval. A resolution to elevate the Technology and Learning Subcommittee to the Academic Technology and Learning Committee is under consideration, and the drafting of an LMS policy would logically fall within the purview of the governance committee addressing technology and student learning. This proposed committee's membership includes faculty, students, the Director of Academic Technology, the Chief Information Officer, and a Learning Services staff member, and would be well-positioned to align this LMS evaluation and selection plan within a larger academic technology plan. Having the draft policy received by Academic Senate in December 2019 is expected to provide sufficient time to implement the policy in advance of the expiration of a contract extension with Bb.

With regard to the final resolved clause, given the importance of an LMS to teaching and learning, any decision to maintain or change an LMS must occur thru established shared governance structures. Faculty must provide leadership in this process, and be actively engaged in it.


**Approved by the Academic Senate on 05/07/19**
**Approved by President Junn on 05/24/19**