

Recommendations of the Digital Innovation Advisory Group (DIAG) on the timing of adoption of the Canvas Learning Management System at the University of Michigan

The Digital Ecosystem Subcommittee (Subcommittee) of the Digital Innovations Advisory Group (DIAG) was charged with providing recommendations on the timing of adoption of the Canvas learning management system (LMS) at the University of Michigan (UM). In a previous report, the Subcommittee had concluded that there were no major impediments to switching from CTools (the current LMS) to Canvas at UM. This report instead is focused on the pace of the transition from CTools to Canvas.

To make recommendations on the timing of the adoption of Canvas at UM, the Subcommittee reviewed the assessment of the Canvas Winter semester pilot conducted by the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT); additionally, the Subcommittee also reviewed the experiences of other universities that have recently adopted Canvas, and solicited advice from the UM Information and Technology Services' (ITS) leadership.

The CRLT's evaluation of the Canvas Winter pilot is attached to this document. In summary, ITS conducted a second Canvas pilot during the Winter semester of 2015, in which 117 UM courses adopted Canvas as their LMS. The pilot involved 123 faculty and approximately 7,000 students. Consistent with the results from the Fall semester pilot, Canvas was positively judged by students and faculty. Succinctly:

- 74% of the instructors indicated that they prefer Canvas over CTools; 18% were neutral and only 8% preferred CTools to Canvas.
- 80% of the students in the pilot who participated in a focus group indicated that they prefer Canvas over CTools; the remaining 20% were neutral.

- 79.3% of the instructors were satisfied with the technical support they received during the pilot; 13.4% were neutral and only 7.3% were not satisfied.
- Over half of instructors surveyed made changes in how they teach once their course was transitioned into Canvas, oftentimes taking advantage of several new features that are available in Canvas that were previously unavailable in CTools.

Additionally, students in the pilot expressed dissatisfaction about having to use CTools and Canvas simultaneously; also, faculty were concerned about future support for “project sites” (sites that are not course related) when CTools is retired. Currently, project sites make up approximately 50% of total CTools use.

Given the findings of the Winter semester pilot, the Subcommittee concluded that a fast-as-possible transition to Canvas would be beneficial to the campus community, as it would expedite the availability of a richer teaching platform to students and instructors, and would shorten the period during which Canvas and CTools would co-exist in the student environment. Additionally, after reviewing the adoption plan followed by Indiana University, Northwestern University and UM-Dearborn, the Subcommittee determined that a target final deadline for the complete switchover to Canvas would facilitate the planning and execution of the transition.

In sum, our recommendations for the timing of adoption are based on ensuring a fast transition to the new LMS without inflicting unacceptable hardships to faculty, staff and students.

After consulting with ITS leadership to ensure the feasibility of the proposed plan, the Subcommittee recommends the following schedule:

1. Canvas and CTools will co-exist during the 2015-2016 academic year. Faculty will be able to choose either LMS to host their courses during the entire year.

2. No new **Course Sites** shall be created in CTools, starting with **Fall term 2016 courses**.

New Course Sites must be created in Canvas from Fall 2016 on.

3. **Previously created Course Sites** will be accessible via CTools until **August 31, 2017**.

Information stored on old CTools Course Sites can be permanently archived and made available to faculty, upon request.

4. No new **Project Sites** shall be created in CTools after **August 31, 2017**, and all CTools

Project Sites access will be turned off at that time. Information stored on old CTools

Project Sites can be archived and made available to the site owner, upon request. ITS will identify and recommend alternative avenues for Project Sites creation no later than

September 1, 2016, a full year before the capability to develop these sites on CTools is turned off.

Specialty applications built on top of the CTools applications, including Teaching Evaluations, Textbooks, GradTools, and Placement Exams will need to be addressed separately from Course and Project sites. ITS leadership anticipates that planning for these applications will be addressed during Fall 2015 and Winter 2016, with relevant milestones being announced by Summer 2016.

REPORT ON WINTER 2015 CANVAS PILOT EVALUATION

MEMORANDUM

TO: Sean DeMonner, John Johnston, and Jennifer Swaney
Information and Technology Services

FROM: Meg Bakewell and Ronit Greenberg, CRLT

RE: REPORT on Winter 2015 Canvas Pilot Evaluation

DATE: May 15, 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes an evaluation of the learning and teaching experience of U-M students and instructors using the Canvas learning management system (LMS) in Winter 2015. The goals of this evaluation were to identify any issues with Canvas that would need to be addressed before proceeding with campus-wide implementation, to identify exemplars that could be used to model best practices for the rest of campus, to determine an appropriate pace of adoption and what support is necessary to facilitate this transition, and to ascertain how to best communicate with instructors and students about the transition and relevant support and training resources. To meet these goals, we studied the implementation of Canvas in 117 U-M courses during Winter Term 2015. Courses enrolled from 1 to 2,161 students. CRLT hosted a series of Canvas Faculty Learning Community (FLC) lunches, surveyed instructors and students for nominations of successful and/or innovative teaching within Canvas, interviewed nine instructors about their successful teaching with Canvas, conducted several focus groups with students and with Canvas unit contacts, surveyed instructors about their Canvas experience at the end of the term, and hosted a Migration Tool Rapid Evaluation session with ITS to solicit feedback from unit contacts and select faculty about the migration tool and process.

Overall, most instructors (74.4%) agreed that they would prefer to continue using Canvas instead of CTools. Many instructors (47.5%) who preferred Canvas over CTools cited one or more beneficial features of Canvas as a reason for their preference. The most commonly cited beneficial features are Speedgrader, modules, files, discussions, and homepage. General improvement over CTools was cited by 34.4% as the reason for preferring Canvas, and 28.9% indicated user-friendliness as their reason. Among instructors who were neutral about Canvas (18.3%), many (46.7%) indicated that they found it equivalent to CTools. A few cited difficulties learning to use Canvas, difficulty moving material from CTools, or technical problems encountered in Canvas (13.3% each). 20.0% reported that they felt they had “no choice” about using Canvas. Among instructors who disagreed or strongly disagreed (6.1%) that they would prefer to use Canvas in their other courses, reasons cited include difficulty learning to use Canvas, inability to override student notification preferences, insufficient quiz capability, and difficulty setting up section specific content. Two users of assistive technologies for the blind reported some reduced functionality because Canvas did not always work well with the assistive technology.

Most instructors surveyed who had taught their Canvas course before changed the way they taught it in Canvas (72.9%). The most frequently reported changes were reorganization of content using pages or

modules, using online grading and/or paperless assignments, incorporating online activities, and using rubrics. Those who did not make any changes reported that they did not see any beneficial opportunities for change, that they wanted to familiarize themselves with Canvas before trying something new, or that they did not have time. Many instructors (70.2%) plan to make changes in future terms using Canvas, such as reorganizing materials, incorporating online grading and/or rubrics, adding group work, or using more audio/visual materials. The nine instructors we interviewed all leveraged Canvas features to change their teaching, such as using modules, using analytics, using the Canvas homepage to present key resources to students, using the group assignments feature to provide feedback and grades to students on group projects or performances, and using peer feedback. All interviewed instructors planned future changes such as improved use of rubrics, gameful approaches, and additional uses of group work, analytics, and online quizzes. 36.6% of instructors found analytics in Canvas helpful for tasks like checking student quiz performance, checking assignment submissions, or checking student time on site. A minority (7.3%) used analytics but did not find them helpful because of problems using analytics or inapplicability for their class.

Unit contacts noted several opportunities to promote teaching innovation with Canvas. In some units, Canvas is generating excitement among faculty that could lead to teaching innovation. In nearly all units, Canvas is seen as creating contexts in which faculty and IT staff will discuss teaching challenges, increasing opportunities for collaboration and problem solving. Unit contacts also see opportunities for increased collaboration among staff within and between units and they reported the high value of attending Canvas events to learn from colleagues across the university.

Unit contacts identified resources that would better support them and the faculty in their units. These include training materials that are specific to the U-M context, videos and events where faculty champions promote Canvas, and live-streamed workshops to reduce timing and travel barriers for faculty. In addition, unit contacts should be consistently recognized by help line staff as part of the teaching team. They also seek opportunities to hear from faculty who have already experienced and solved issues in Canvas so that staff can make connections with faculty who later face those issues.

Students in both focus groups were eager to be able to use the new learning tools that Canvas provides and expressed the hope that over time all faculty would use the system robustly. They suggested that in order to take full advantage of Canvas features, it would be important for faculty to have sufficient support and training so that they feel comfortable using the LMS for more than just a resource repository. Students also suggested creation of tip sheets, orientation resources, or a “Billy Magic”-style video about Canvas to help students learn about key features such as the ability to set notification preferences, the existence of the Canvas app, and the bar graphs of grades.

Most instructors (63.4%) experienced technical difficulties with Canvas two times or less. Commonly reported difficulties were slowness (10.3%) and failure to save grades or comments (10.3%). Most instructors (79.3%) were satisfied with the support they received because of quick response times and satisfactory resolution of issues. The most helpful support resources, rated helpful by 100% of instructors who used them, were emails to ITS staff, the Canvas@Michigan site, and calls to 4-HELP. The Instructure 24x7 help line was used by only 13.4% of instructors. Of these, 27.3% found it not at all

helpful. Instructors who were not satisfied with the support they received explained that issues were not resolved or were normal features of Canvas, not bugs. Many instructors used self-help resources like online search (46.3%) or did not need any support (13.4%).

Unit contacts estimate that full adoption of Canvas could be expected for individual units as soon as Winter 2016 and as late as Fall 2020. This wide range of timelines reflects competing projects in some units, such as building construction and curriculum revision. Some unit staff would prefer to have a clear deadline for adoption to help incentivize the Canvas transition in their units. However, the suggestion that CTools will be available “at least through Winter 2016” panicked some faculty because that timeline is seen as very short. On the other hand, some units plan to complete the transition to Canvas by Winter 2016.

Recommendations for how best to communicate with the campus community about the Canvas transition were offered by instructors, students, and unit contacts. Most students and many instructors remain unaware of the reasons for transitioning to Canvas. All groups suggested that it is important to communicate that the Canvas transition is campus-wide, that there is a good rationale behind the change, and that the transition was well-thought out with true input from faculty, students, and staff. They further advised that communications frame the Canvas transition as an opportunity to rethink or refresh a course, to meet an existing need or challenge in a course that CTools could not address, or to do what instructors are already doing in a different and perhaps better way. Both instructors and staff recommended the development of pedagogical frameworks for taking advantage of all that Canvas can do, along with conceptual models, examples, or templates. Well-produced instructor and student testimonial videos with innovative course examples and templates were also suggested. One critical concern raised by all groups was what will happen with project sites. All recommended the need for clarity about the process involving project sites, as many instructors and students become very concerned about their project sites when they hear that CTools is going away. Students and instructors are also concerned about the fate of archived CTools content.

Unit contacts and faculty who attended a migration tool demonstration suggested that the migration tool was not user-friendly enough for most faculty to use, preferring that staff initiate the migration process for faculty. They suggested creating a decision tree to help instructors through the complex migration process and voiced concerns that clean-up of migrated content would require significant effort. They also encouraged clear communication about the timeline for migration and the deadline for adoption, with good coordination between campus-wide and unit-specific information.

Overall, this evaluation suggests that U-M can facilitate the adoption of Canvas and promote teaching innovation with the new LMS by:

- establishing and communicating a clear timeline for campus-wide adoption of Canvas,
- addressing concerns caused by the retirement of CTools such as what to do with project sites,
- ensuring that unit contacts and ITS have sufficient resources to meet demand for migration assistance and handle competing projects,
- continuing to provide a range of high-quality support services for Canvas users,
- expanding the range of training options to include more online or asynchronous options,