THE CHALLENGE

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte prides itself on being a large public university with the small college feel that comes from a connected campus. The university had used Moodle as its third-party-hosted learning management system (LMS) since 2009, but had begun to experience technical problems with uptime, response time, and a system failure that impacted teachers and students. Because Moodle would upgrade in large batches, downtime was common throughout campus. “With slow response times and page loads in Moodle, it became untenable every time there was an update. We once spent an entire summer having to put out fires,” said Jeff Meier, who is technical systems lead for the university’s LMS and related academic technologies.

Faculty, administrators, students, and IT staff realized it was time to find a more reliable, cloud-based system that could accommodate the university’s diverse, changing needs and support its instructional mission of facilitating face-to-face, hybrid, and online courses with an enterprise-level academic technology.

THE DECISION

The university observed, tested, and evaluated four LMS companies. After asking other large universities about their experiences with these companies, UNC Charlotte decided to pilot Canvas. With the help of the Canvas support team, UNC Charlotte’s Center for Teaching and Learning staff went through a complete technical buildout. “We were off to the races pretty quickly. The SIS integration was finished in three days, and Instructure’s tech team got the pilot going in two weeks—including Christmas break!” Meier said. Instructors began using Canvas in 100 courses for 3,000 students, and staff sought continual feedback from both instructors and students through satisfaction surveys.

KEY FINDINGS

The Canvas SpeedGrader saves UNC Charlotte instructors an average of five hours per week, per course.

Canvas provides enhanced reliability, improved online and distance education, and seamless integrations.

Documentation within the Canvas Community was key to a smooth transition.

The majority of faculty and students preferred Canvas in satisfaction surveys.

Navigation in Canvas is more efficient and pedagogical.

www.canvaslms.com • 1.866.571.0857
THE RESULTS

Meier says students have found new success by having the flexibility to do their assignments “on the fly” and submit them through their mobile devices. Instructors are seeing the value of Canvas as they set up their more attractive, robust courses in less time, using intuitive features that make their jobs easier.

While UNC Charlotte previously had to dedicate and sometimes redirect staff resources to managing, supporting, and maintaining its former LMS, often in a reactive mode, Meier says that Canvas doesn’t require the same kind of “care and feeding.” Meier says that, more importantly, the change has allowed members of his staff to redirect some of their workload to additional priority initiatives: “Canvas helped them broaden their horizons and get away from the keyboard.”

Choosing the cloud-based reliability of Canvas has already helped UNC Charlotte achieve institutional goals, and Meier says initiating change through Canvas can offer additional benefits: “I would advise other colleges to think long term about how they want to drive their missions and realize that Canvas is not one-size-fits-all; the flexibility of this LMS has allowed us to drill down to the real challenges.”

Adoption at UNC Charlotte continues at a rapid pace, and campus-wide implementation will finish in mid-2017. As Meier says, “The floodgates have opened.”