CANVAS
BY INSTRUCTURE

University of Wisconsin System

Cultivating Consistency with Canvas LMS in a Digital Learning Environment

Wisconsin **114,000** **1st Adopted Canvas LMS: March 2018**

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SYSTEM
UW

The University of Wisconsin System, or UWS, consists of 13 universities across 26 campuses and has a statewide extension network with offices in every county. It educates ~165,000 students every year and employs 40,000 faculty and staff. (Note: UW-Madison has a separate implementation of Canvas LMS and is not included in this case study)

THE CHALLENGE

In the early 2000s, UWS signed a contract with their previous LMS vendor excited at the prospect of influencing product development. However, implementation of this LMS ultimately resulted in significant barriers to collaboration such as inaccessible data and separate instances of the LMS on every campus, according to Renee Pfeifer-Luckett, the Director of Teaching & Learning Technology at UWS.

With this previous contract set to expire, UWS took the opportunity to reimagine how their learning technology ecosystem could "better harness both technology and data in order to maximize student success" through an extensive system-wide stakeholder engagement with students, instructors, and administrators.

A key recommendation from stakeholders was the development of a digital learning environment (or DLE). DLE was defined as one comprehensive, federated, online environment with services and tools purposefully brought together to support teaching and learning across the system – whether in-person, blended, hybrid, hyflex, or fully online. In order to be successful, it had to be a personalized environment for students that was accessible, provided access to administrative analytics, collaborative, standards-based, and interoperable.

Key Insights

- Canvas LMS has reduced workload on campus resources to create, maintain, and support customizations since the platform is centrally managed and any changes implemented are formally managed and transparent.

- Canvas LMS's open, cloud-based nature empowers UWS with access to their data - wherever, whenever, and at no additional cost.

- At UWS, onboarding instructors onto Canvas LMS is automatic, streamlined, and driven by data passed through the SIS integration.

- Canvas Catalog benefits UWS programs by providing adult learners with courses to stay current with or advance their professional credentials.

THE SOLUTION

"The RFP included vendor demonstrations of how their products met the needs articulated in UWS teaching use case scenarios, stakeholder sandbox testing, and stakeholder surveys; we ultimately chose the Canvas platform as the core of the new DLE." Pfeifer-Luckett said.

Some standout product features of Canvas LMS were its ease of use, stability, security, and flexibility. Through structured collaboration between UWS's institutions and Instructure, implementing Canvas as the core of the DLE resulted in a more data-informed teaching and learning environment. The combination of a formal project management approach to implementation as well as the robust features of Canvas LMS resulted in the transition being completed on time and under budget in June of 2020.

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CANVAS LMS AT THE CORE: CONSISTENT AND ACCESSIBLE

UWS implemented one shared instructional instance of Canvas LMS for all for-credit courses with each campus having its own sub-account.

"We refer to this as the fixed/flexible service management model, as certain functionalities are set at the root level and apply to all sub accounts, while also allowing some tweaking at the campus level to meet the unique needs for teaching and learning. The driver for this model was the need for an easy to use system for students. Students told us loud and clear that they wanted a more consistent user experience..." Pfeifer-Luckett said. The fixed/flexible service model would turn out to be a significant upgrade.

Now, students who take classes anywhere throughout the UWS system can access all of their courses with a single login to the Canvas LMS dashboard - providing another critical component of the student-centered DLE that UWS envisioned. UWS continues working to provide a consistent student experience in Canvas by developing resources and best practices for faculty like the Canvas Course Template used at UW Milwaukee. One of the most significant benefits UWS realized with Canvas LMS was the successful integration of key instructional tools as well as campus student information (SIS) data that automatically granted students (including non-matriculated ones)and instructors access to the Canvas environment.

"...The open-source nature of Canvas allowed us to access our data, so that was a big win," Pfeifer-Luckett said. "We also decided early on to automatically create courses driven by the data passed through our SIS integration...every course has an inactive shell created and available for the instructor to use. If instructors were not currently using Canvas, they could easily populate the course with content and activate it..."

This decision proved to be helpful when the system had to quickly pivot to fully remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and be an important step in developing a future-proof DLE.

CANVAS CATALOG: SIMPLIFYING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Canvas Catalog is also used to provide diverse opportunities for adult learners to both stay current with and advance their professional credentials. For example, at UW-Extended Campus, Catalog is vital for instructor training. At UW-Green Bay, Catalog provides the critical training learners need to complete required orientation for Crisis Intervention and Comprehensive Community Services, through a Behavioral Health Training Partnership. UW-Whitewater uses Catalog to offer a free course called Beer Matters. This course, while not professional development, provides the "hopportunity" to learn about the history of beer.

> Setting clear intentions that put students, faculty, and administrators front of mind is a critical piece in the puzzle of building a cohesive tech ecosystem like the DLE at UWS.
> Learn more about how your institution can provide a scalable, equitable, engaging learning experience by choosing the right LMS here.

THE RESULTS

Thanks to Canvas LMS at the core of their DLE and the nimble, adaptive implementation strategies of UWS, the transition's impact has been positive. Students, meanwhile, are more engaged and benefit from the innovative teaching practices implemented by their instructors.

DLE design increased reporting capabilities and reduced barriers to access for administrators have resulted in a future-resilient learning technology environment for students.