

Virginia Union University

A comprehensive LMS that seamlessly integrates third party applications and scales with need? That's Canvas.

 Richmond, VA  1,880 Users  Adopted Canvas: 2021



Virginia Union University (VUU) was satisfied with their LMS until time to scale. Unable to use many of the enrichment features offered through textbooks, book vendors, and third party applications, Tunesha Witcher, director of integrated technology at Virginia Union University, sought a robust LMS to enrich learning and streamline processes. Adopting Canvas provided the one stop solution she and the VUU team were looking for.

THE CHALLENGE

The Jenzabar platform worked for VUU right up until time to scale. Because the university was unable to use many of the enrichment features from their textbooks, vendors, and third party applications, they needed a robust LMS to enrich courses and enhance learning.

They learned what needed to be improved, what needed to be enhanced, and what their previous LMS was lacking. The shift to Canvas allowed the VUU team to transform pain points from their previous LMS into areas of opportunity.

VUU sought a “one stop shop”—an LMS that could handle third party integrations, had a mobile app to optimize student experience on the go, and could seamlessly integrate Microsoft Teams, their virtual platform.

In addition to transitioning to a new LMS, the onset of a widely remote instructional system brought added tasks—the need to convert all courses into a virtual format within a two week timeframe.

Key Insights

- Canvas provided VUU students an LMS that met them where they were with the simplicity of a single application.
- Canvas’s robust analytics allowed VUU to track important data, such as login statistics used for student retention efforts.
- Early adopting faculty participated in intensive summer Canvas training. Excited by the LTI tools, they championed the transition, sharing their knowledge with others in the organization.
- Prior to the pandemic, VUU had 17 virtual courses and were in the process of launching their first fully online degree program. During the pandemic, in order to sustain the university and classes, they transitioned their remaining 364 courses within two weeks.

THE SOLUTION

Witcher and Lisa Capra, formerly with the Canvas LMS training and instructional design team and currently serving as revenue knowledge strategy manager for Instructure, collaborated with the VUU team, uncovering priorities to create a multifaceted plan to both accelerate adoption and ensure success. One such opportunity centered on the desire for consistency within the student experience.



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Tunesha Witcher, director of integrated technology, Virginia Union University



CREATING COMMUNITY THROUGH DESIGN

Faculty members were excited about a consistent course design and felt that a custom template would support faculty adoption and student navigation within Canvas. Early adopters defined what an optimal, functional, and customized template would look like. Capra created the template with the VUU branding and settings to provide students with a seamless experience.

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SUCCESS THROUGH TRAINING

Those early adopters and subject matter experts attending intensive Canvas training over the summer shared their passion for the LTI tools and ease of use, championing the transition to the remaining faculty and staff into the new semester. With continuous training throughout the fall, all faculty and staff had support as they created individual sandbox courses. Capra led by example as she showed faculty how to optimize everything from the welcome message to inserting video clips. She walked them through every step of the process.

The comprehensive training plan was carefully crafted so that faculty would participate in a synchronous session

followed by time to leverage the template in a sandbox course of their own, where they could practice and refine their skills. A recording of each 90-minute training session was added to the faculty training course for reference and review as needed.

Because Canvas' robust analytics make statistics easily accessible, faculty and staff have been able to further personalize their approach to student success. For example, increasing student retention by using login statistics as a catalyst to check whether a student needs a simple password reset or if there's a deeper need to be revealed.

THE RESULTS

In addition to transitioning 364 courses within a two week period, allowing VUU to sustain classes and therefore the university during the pandemic, students benefited from the enhanced learning environment. Having course content, assignments, quizzes, and grades all in one place eliminated the need for multiple platforms and apps, providing easier access to content. With mobile learning and accessibility built into the LMS, VUU was able to meet their students where they were. With announcements, messaging, audio notes, and video built into the interface, two-way communication now reigns. Plus with a branded, customized, easily recognizable interface, even remote students feel a part of the larger VUU community.