

Canvas LMS Pilot Project Recommendation

CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	1
Introduction	1
Process	1
Recommendation.....	1
Timeline for Recommendation	1
Rationale, Justification, & Supporting Perspectives	2
Introduction	2
State of Idaho & Other Education Institutions	2
University of Idaho “Online Education working group”	2
LMS Market Trends.....	2
University of Idaho Canvas Pilot	3
Overview	3
Background and Context.....	3
Spring Pilot: Process, Goals, and Results	4
Summer Pilot: Process, Goals, and Results	4
Survey Feedback	5
Testimonial Responses.....	5
Additional Evidence of Support for Canvas	7
Summary and Conclusion of Pilot	8
Recommendation Cost & Cost/Risks of Alternative	9
Cost & Savings of Recommendation	9
Alternative & Risks of Alternative.....	9

Executive Summary

Introduction

The University of Idaho has an opportunity to use the Canvas Learning Management System (LMS) at no cost through Summer 2023, due to an Idaho State Board of Education (SBOE) decision to pay for the use of Canvas LMS state-wide. A pilot project was conducted between January and July 2021 to evaluate the feasibility of transitioning to Canvas from the current LMS, Blackboard.

Process

The Canvas LMS pilot, which was open to all faculty, allowed them to gain exposure to Canvas and solicited feedback on whether Canvas meets their LMS needs. The pilot also allowed faculty to instruct Summer 2021 courses using Canvas if they elected to do so. The results of the pilot and feedback are summarized in this recommendation document, with the aim of facilitating a decision by relevant University of Idaho leadership.

Recommendation

The pilot project team recommends that University of Idaho implement Canvas LMS as a replacement for Blackboard. This recommendation is supported by positive feedback from faculty and students collected throughout the pilot and from CETL, ITS, and the Registrar’s Office experiences. Implementing the Canvas LMS platform is expected to enhance instruction on campus and remotely, facilitate collaboration among institutions, and support development of education opportunities through Dual Credit and Idaho Online programs.

Cost savings of proceeding with Canvas instead of Blackboard is estimated at \$287,088 by Fiscal Year 2026. Savings will be realized starting in Fiscal Year 2023 and continue to increase year-over-year. Total known 5-year costs to proceed with Canvas is \$951,089. These costs are outlined in detail on Page 9.

Timeline for Recommendation

Provost Review/Decision Content Transfer (1 month)	Faculty Prep for Spring 2022 in Canvas Faculty Teach Fall 2021 in Blackboard (3 months)	Winter Break (3 weeks)	Spring 2022
---	--	----------------------------------	--------------------

- August 9 to September 10, 2021 – Provost obtains feedback from Faculty & makes decision
- August 23, 2021 – initiate transfer of relevant course content from Blackboard into Canvas
- Fall 2021 semester – all courses will be taught in Blackboard (i.e. no instruction in Canvas)
- By September 13, 2021 – send a university-wide communication regarding decision on LMS
- September 13, 2021 – transfer of relevant course content into Canvas completed
- September 13 to December 17, 2021 – faculty work to ensure their Spring 2022 courses are ready be taught in Canvas, with assistance from CETL
- Spring 2022 semester – all courses will be taught in the Canvas LMS

Rationale, Justification, & Supporting Perspectives

Introduction

The pilot aimed to collect faculty input on Canvas and determine if there were significant obstacles (technology or efficacy based) to adopting it as the university LMS. It was not a direct comparison between Blackboard and Canvas. The pilot results herein convey the feasibility of transitioning to Canvas and demonstrate that no insurmountable obstacles were identified by those involved.

State of Idaho & Other Education Institutions

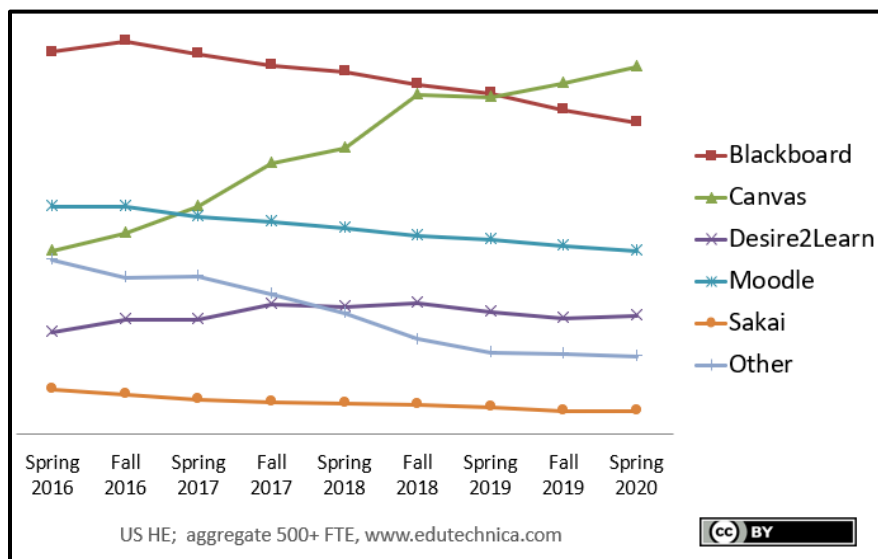
- During summer 2020, the Idaho State Board of Education (SBOE) began the Idaho Online Initiative. This has been an effort to consolidate online courses offered through Idaho’s eight public postsecondary schools, to streamline pathways to degrees and certificates, and improve digital learning infrastructure. As part of this effort, the Idaho SBOE selected Canvas as its LMS.
- Locally, the Moscow School District adopted Canvas as its LMS.
- Within our state, almost all two-year and four-year public institutions have either adopted Canvas or are considering adopting Canvas as their LMS.

University of Idaho “Online Education working group”

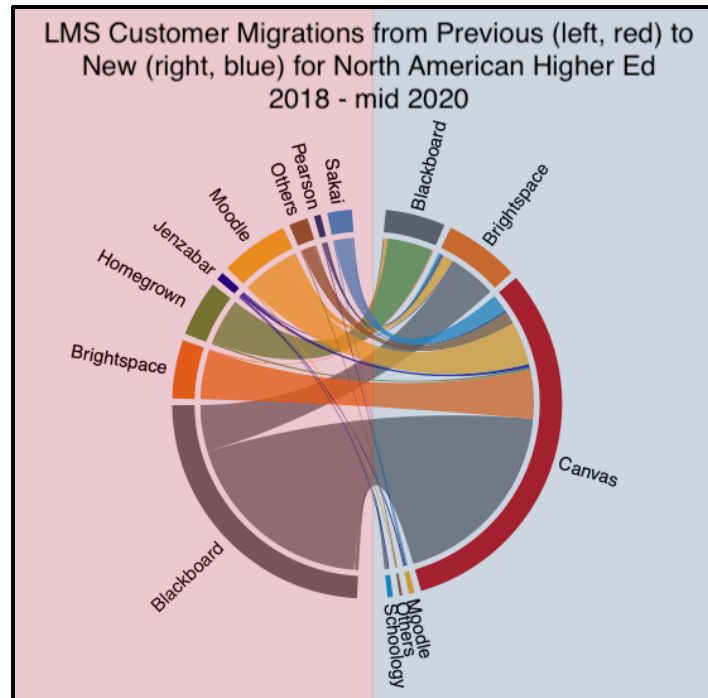
- In spring 2020, President Green created a working group to examine how the University of Idaho could move rapidly into the online course and program delivery market. The technology support and infrastructure sub-group recommended the following as part of their overall plan:
 - “Adopt the Canvas Learning Management System (LMS) which will be supported initially by the SBOE and develop training and transition plans from the Blackboard platform.”

LMS Market Trends

Canvas continues to expand market share as an LMS for higher education institutions nationwide, as shown by the two graphs below (continued on next page):



Higher Education institution usage of LMS platforms (2016 to Spring 2020)



Migration trends from one LMS to another (2018 to mid-2020)

University of Idaho Canvas Pilot

Overview

- Faculty were asked to provide feedback on Canvas features, their experience migrating to Canvas, what support is needed during migration, and any recommended practices for teaching effectively with Canvas.
- Spring 2021 Canvas Pilot: 58 faculty from nine colleges (CAA, CALS, CBE, CLASS, CNR, EHHS, ENGR, LAW, SCI) participated in "getting to know" Canvas, experimenting with its key features, and providing feedback about their experience.
- Summer 2021 Canvas Pilot: 20 faculty from six colleges (CAA, CBE, CLASS, CNR, EHHS, LAW) went on to teach 23 summer courses in Canvas to a total of 312 students.

Background and Context

At the request of the Provost and Vice Provost for Academic Initiatives, the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) designed a Canvas Pilot to solicit faculty input on the Canvas Learning Management System and to inform the University of Idaho's decision to adopt Canvas as part of the Idaho State Board of Education's Online Idaho initiative. Using a two-stage design, the pilot was scaffolded over the spring and summer of 2021. The goal of the first stage (spring) was to assess faculty experiences with Canvas's core functions and features. The goal of the second stage was to investigate and gather feedback on faculty and student experiences using Canvas as the LMS for live classes during the summer.

On February 10, 2021, CETL issued a university-wide call for faculty to participate in the Canvas Pilot program. CETL also enrolled faculty who expressed an interest in participating via email or through direct correspondences with CETL staff members. Combined, CETL was able to attract 58 active participants from all ranks and representing all colleges at the University of Idaho.

Spring Pilot: Process, Goals, and Results

The spring pilot was largely instructional. Faculty were guided through a well-developed process of gaining exposure to, and then experimenting with key features and functions of the Canvas learning management system. It was designed to walk faculty through the process of migrating online content from Blackboard into Canvas and then to gain familiarity with, and feedback on, the following tools: Pages, Modules, Home Page, Syllabus, Announcements, Discussions, Assignments, Tests, and the Grade Book. The pilot was designed to gather feedback in real time (as each module was completed) and overall.

During the Spring pilot, participants consistently reported that Canvas was intuitive, easy to use, and provided useful help pages and videos. Participants further indicated a preference for Canvas's modern interface, logical structure, tool functions, and efficiency. In short, and as evidenced in the faculty testimonials, the pilots agreed that Canvas could both improve and economize their instructional effort. All participants who volunteered a response indicated they favored a move from Blackboard to Canvas.

Summer Pilot: Process, Goals, and Results

As one of our primary interests lies in the teaching and learning experience, CETL continued the pilot in live classes through the summer of 2021. CETL desired feedback from instructors and students using Canvas in face-to-face and fully online classes. Twenty faculty members piloted Canvas in their summer classes and CETL gathered feedback on the teaching and learning experience. From the information shared with us, students and faculty alike reported a preference for Canvas. Both populations appreciated the "clean" look and feel of the product, its ease of use, its familiarity to students entering the U of I from area high schools, and its adaptability to technology-enhanced teaching and learning.

One faculty participant with expertise in both educational technology and pedagogy indicated:

"With Canvas, I'm able to easily connect and present a variety of media and resources to my students. Whether it's a page I created, video clip, selected reading, Flipgrid reflection, or some other web resource, the Modules help me organize and facilitate an engaging learning experience".

One of the faculty's students, who has experience as both an instructor and a student with Blackboard and Canvas, added:

"I have been using Canvas for almost a year now, first as a parent helping my 3rd grader who is a student in the Moscow School District and now a doctoral student in a Canvas pilot course this summer. I appreciate the user-friendliness of Canvas. It's clean, easy to navigate, and the modules are easy to keep track of. I have been both an instructor and a student in Blackboard since 2006 and I have to say, I think Canvas is far a superior platform from the student perspective. The best part of Canvas so far is when I submitted my first assignment, I got a burst of virtual confetti, just like my 3rd grader did when he submitted his assignments. It was an instant little burst of encouragement".

From an engaged learning perspective, it is important to recognize the value of experiences like these, for they reveal critical dimensions of genuinely engaged learning opportunities that are positively associated with student success.

Survey Feedback

CETL created brief surveys on the tools listed above as well as on participants' overall experience in Canvas. For each tool, participants were asked to rate its ease of use along a five-point scale, ranging from very difficult to very easy. Participants were also given the opportunity to provide an open-ended narrative response in each of the surveys.

Faculty responses were consistently positive, especially regarding Canvas's ease of use. On virtually all items, our survey results categorically identify Canvas as either good or very good, and faculty overwhelmingly recommend the adoption of the Canvas Learning Management System at the University of Idaho. Representative of the positive experiences of our faculty, in responses to the question "What else would you like us to know about your experiences with Canvas?", pilots indicated:

- *The interface was so intuitive! After my brief exposure to Canvas, I am already more confident using it than Blackboard.*
- *I think most of my struggles were just getting used to button placement.*
- *Canvas is so, so, so, so superior to Blackboard.*
- *I've just started teaching with Canvas, so I'm still neutral on discussion/tests, although setting up both types of activities was easy. I recommend going forward with Canvas...*
- *Having used Blackboard and Canvas, I believe Canvas to be a superior product, more robust, and much easier to use.*
- *I feel like it will clean up the courses that have too many items in them. Canvas provides an easier to use interface over Blackboard with drag-and-drop and native responsive design. The modules create an organized space for content, engagement, and collaboration without constricting the advanced course designer or providing "too many options" for the novice designer getting started.*

Testimonial Responses

Across departments and colleges, the faculty pilots agree that Canvas provides superior functionality, ease of use, and a more logical interface for faculty and student engagement. As CETL was asked to focus on the experiences of the faculty in their own words, included here are select and representative testimonial responses from faculty, organized by college:

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND LIFE SCIENCES PILOT PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

- *Canvas is relatively easy to use and troubleshoot. It easily integrates several different systems for online learning. The flow of the Canvas modules seems to be more appealing on the users end. It is easier for me as an instructor to know what it looks like. The discussion tool seems more like a social media wall, which is nice for being able to follow the student responses and where I've responded.*
- **Do you advise the UI to transition to Canvas?** *Yes. This should reduce the number systems for students to learn. In my opinion it is also very user friendly on the instructor side. I find using the instructions to work really well with Canvas where I don't find that with Blackboard. Essentially, I think people need to know they can reach out to a hotline or set up a Zoom freely for advice and troubleshooting.*
- **My advice to other faculty?** *Not to be afraid of the new system. It is easier to pick up than Blackboard.*

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS PILOT PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

- *Positive experience, so far. The interface is certainly easier to use than I remember the first time I used Canvas. I like the drag and drop. GREAT user-interface. Very intuitive.*

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, HEALTH AND HUMAN SCIENCES PILOT PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

- *I have been both an instructor and a student in Blackboard since 2006 and I have to say, I think Canvas is far a superior platform from the student perspective.*
- *With Canvas, I'm able to easily connect and present a variety of media and resources to my students. Whether it's a page I created, video clip, selected reading, Flipgrid reflection, or some other web resource, the Modules help me organize and facilitate an engaging learning experience.*
- *Canvas is much more intuitive to use than Blackboard and offers a lot of flexibility if one wants to personalize their course interfaces.*
- *I feel good about Canvas. The tyranny of the "newness" is diminishing. Feeling almost ready for prime-time. No significant issues in the use of modules and pages. Clear help documents. The discussion tool works well. No concerns. I found setting up assignments to be generally intuitive. No problems appeared.*
- *Overall, pretty positive experience with Canvas -- intuitive interface, lots of help available and YouTube for video talk-throughs. Pages and modules seem very simple to make. There isn't a lot of easy/obvious ways to personalize or "jazz up" the interface, but those options DO exist, which is fantastic.*
- *I have been using Canvas for almost a year now, first as a parent helping my 3rd grader who is a student in the Moscow School District and now a doctoral student in a Canvas pilot course this summer. I appreciate the user-friendliness of Canvas. It's clean, easy to navigate, and the modules are easy to keep track of. The best part of Canvas so far is when I submitted my first assignment, I got a burst of virtual confetti, just like my 3rd grader did when he submitted his assignments. It was an instant little burst of encouragement.*
- *I like the way the icons MOVE — the interface just feels smooth.*
- *Porting a class over to Canvas was very easy. Making a quiz was pretty straightforward. I like the drag and drop feel of the interface in general.*
- *Do you advise the UI to transition to Canvas? Yes. Everyone is making the shift. We need to join the rest of higher education in this change.*
My advice to other faculty? You will be glad you made the change to Canvas (after overcoming the shock of "new").

COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING PILOT PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

- *I'm very happy with Canvas. I think it's more intuitive to use than Blackboard and will be an easier transition for most of our students coming from K-12.*
- *So far, Canvas is very intuitive and easy to get started.*
- *Very impressed so far. Has taken everything I've tried in Blackboard and imported with nearly 100% success. I like that most of my students used it in K-12, so it will make the transition to college a little smoother.*

COLLEGE OF LETTERS, ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES PILOT PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

- *One thing I absolutely love is that everything in Canvas can be accessed from a single module page --- no need for folders because the inline viewing feature allows the user to open files inline and then minimize the view, so scrolling down the page can be easily controlled. And users can also control the size of the inline view by adjusting the size of the window. All good.*
- *Very positive experience with Canvas. This LMS saves me considerable time in maintaining and updating the curriculum for our professional writing courses. Canvas is extremely easy to use. I think in comparison to Blackboard, it was so much easier for me to set my course up and I love the inline viewing feature. Setting up assignments was easy to do and went smoothly. When setting up peer review assignments, Canvas offers easier options to implement than Blackboard.*
- *I'm finding that the Canvas learning curve is not as steep as I had thought it might be at the outset.*
- *I find the interface so much more modern and appealing, and I'm sure students will like it.*
- *If you need an ambassador to sing the praises of Canvas, count me in. I'm going to be seriously bummed out if UI does not adopt Canvas.*
- *Canvas is a game-changer when it comes to online delivery.*
- *My advice to other faculty? Using Canvas compared to Blackboard is like using a land line dialup phone compared to a smartphone.*

COLLEGE OF NATURAL RESOURCES PILOT PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

- *Overall, my experience with Canvas has been good.*
- *Canvas is more intuitive than Blackboard and you can pick it up quickly.*
- *So far, I have found Canvas to be straightforward and intuitive. At times, it is challenging to retro-fit my experiences with Blackboard into Canvas, but it has not been difficult.*

Additional Evidence of Support for Canvas

CETL elicited responses from faculty during the midpoint and the endpoint of the Spring Pilot check-in meetings. These were not focus groups per se as several faculty participated in multiple check-in meetings. Nevertheless, CETL personnel used the opportunity to elicit faculty impressions of Canvas. Based on this process, all faculty members who volunteered an opinion did so favorably towards Canvas, emphasizing that it was both intuitive and easy to use. No faculty members recommended staying with Blackboard.

APRIL 1 MEETING FEEDBACK

Faculty members in attendance reported positive experiences with Canvas. Several reported that Canvas was an intuitive system, with one commenting that they liked:

*"...how intuitive it is. I was able to get lots of the types of things I put in for my classes
VERY quickly."*

Another faculty member stated they liked:

"... drag and drop. GREAT user-interface. Very intuitive."

Faculty at the meeting also reported that it was rather easy to migrate material from Blackboard to Canvas with one stating they were:

*"... very impressed so far. Has taken everything I've tried in Blackboard and imported
with nearly 100% success."*

APRIL 28 MEETING FEEDBACK

Faculty members in attendance reported positive experiences with Canvas in general and the specific Canvas tools highlighted in the Canvas Pilot program. When asked, all responded that they would recommend the University of Idaho switch to Canvas.

The faculty at this meeting volunteered the following advice to fellow faculty members:

- *“It is more intuitive than Blackboard and you can pick it up quickly.”*
- *“Not to be afraid of the new system. It is easier to pick up than Blackboard.”*
- *“You will be glad you made the change to Canvas after overcoming the shock of “new”.*
- *“It is much more intuitive to use than Blackboard and offers a lot of flexibility if one wants to personalize their course interfaces.”*
- *“1) Don't be afraid, 2) Play in the sandbox early! and, 3) Change is inevitable.”*

Summary and Conclusion of Pilot

Overwhelmingly, faculty members participating in the pilots recommend that the University of Idaho switch from Blackboard to Canvas. U of I faculty pilots have found Canvas easy to learn, easy to use, and an overall better system for hosting and delivering classes. Our results are also consistent with national trends in LMS adoption and, importantly, have added value when considering the relatively seamless transition most students will experience when entering the University of Idaho. The consistently positive responses and remarks from faculty (and students) clearly indicate not only that Canvas is a superior learning management system, but that its adoption may provide a better learning environment and experience for our students, thusly enhancing engagement, retention, satisfaction, and degree completion.

Recommendation Cost & Cost/Risks of Alternative

Cost & Savings of Recommendation

Amounts listed were current as of July 1, 2021.

LMS Costs if Proceeding with Canvas	FY 22	FY 23	FY 24	FY 25	FY 26
Canvas Cloud Subscription	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 144,156	\$ 151,364	\$ 158,932
Canvas Tier 1 chat/phone support	\$ 36,228	\$ 38,040	\$ 39,942	\$ 41,939	\$ 44,036
Canvas implementation	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Canvas additional storage	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Course content transferred into Canvas	\$ 6,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Canvas Training Session for Instructors	\$ 500	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Plagiarism detection software	\$ 27,270	\$ 28,634	\$ 30,065	\$ 31,568	\$ 33,147
Ally accessibility software	\$ -	\$ 31,500	\$ 33,075	\$ 34,729	\$ 36,465
Ally integration with Canvas	\$ 3,500	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Blackboard archive server		TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
Additional personnel to support Canvas	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Blackboard software/managed hosting	\$ 273,592	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Cost for Proceed with Canvas	\$ 347,090	\$ 98,173	\$ 247,238	\$ 259,600	\$ 272,580
Current/planned central budget for LMS	\$ 273,592	\$ 287,272	\$ 301,635	\$ 316,717	\$ 332,553
Above/below planned budget	\$ (73,498)	\$ 189,099	\$ 54,397	\$ 57,117	\$ 59,973
Cumulative savings with Canvas (vs. staying with Blackboard)	\$ (73,498)	\$ 115,600	\$ 169,998	\$ 227,115	\$ 287,088

Cost savings of proceeding with Canvas instead of Blackboard is estimated at \$287,088 by Fiscal Year 2026. Savings will be realized starting in Fiscal Year 2023 and continue to increase year-over-year. Total known 5-year costs to proceed with Canvas is \$951,089. The cost of a Blackboard archive server is not currently known, but SBOE has agreed to cover partial costs.

Alternative & Risks of Alternative

The only alternative identified is the continued use of Blackboard LMS. The anticipated annual cost for Blackboard is \$273,592 and greater, as listed in the above table.

The University of Idaho is obligated to transition to Blackboard SaaS in 2022. The risks of continuing with Blackboard and transitioning to Blackboard SaaS are as follows:

- University would not reap financial benefit outlined above, nor the benefits of improved alignment with other state institutions (e.g. simplified collaboration by using same LMS, student familiarity with the LMS as more schools use Canvas).
- Many Blackboard customers have faced unexpected costs and difficult contract negotiations.
- Additional implementation costs to move to Blackboard SaaS (required).
- Continued and possibly increasing overage costs with Blackboard.