

ELearning Platform Review: What did we decide?

The Blackboard Learn Software as a Service (SaaS) is the best overall solution for Framingham State University!

Following an exhaustive review of eLearning platforms the recommendation of the Learning Management Task Force is to **remain with Blackboard Learn but move our hosting services to a SaaS deployment** or in other words “to the cloud.”

The team looked closely at five Learning platforms (Blackboard Learn, Canvas, D2L, Moodle, and Schoology). Instructure's Canvas and Blackboard's Blackboard Learn solution were the finalists. Based on all of the due diligence performed over the past several months, Blackboard Learn was selected by the team tasked with the review of alternatives. In the final analysis, the move to the Blackboard Learn SaaS solution will be the least disruptive to faculty and students. It will save the University money. And, it will provide added features and functionality that address both current and anticipated needs.

How was the decision made?

The ELearning Platform Review began in fall 2016 and concluded in spring 2017. The Learning Management Taskforce of faculty and staff met for each milestone to review survey results, scenario based webinars, a product sandbox, faculty focus group discussion and a meeting with SGA, all to inform a detailed RFP (request for proposal) process. To inform the final recommendation, proposals were distilled using a SWOT framework based on live vendor presentations, pricing proposals, conversations with our peers and a Gartner Research Analyst who specifically focuses on learning platforms for Higher Education.

What does this mean to you?

The move to the Blackboard Learn SaaS solution will not require anyone to change the way they currently use Blackboard. **But the change will create opportunities to clean-up courses and introduce new functionality into the ELearning environment. In addition, new functionality will include a new Program Assessment platform ([Outcomes](#)), an accessibility checking tool ([Ally](#)), as well as the ability to pilot the new user interface on a course by course basis.**

What are some other benefits of Blackboard Learn SaaS?

The system will be kept up-to-date without any downtime for software updates and bug-fixes, and much shorter downtime for major upgrades. When a new feature or bug fix is introduced it will be added to the environment for testing and then turned-on with no disruption to service. As a comparison, we currently have to schedule a minimum of 12 to 24 hours of downtime just to update the software or to install patches. So this move to Blackboard Learn SaaS will be a significant improvement.

What is the next step?

Moving to the Blackboard Learn SaaS solution is similar to moving into a new office location. It is an opportunity to purge old files and rethink how we display information. Over the summer the Education Technology Office will work on the migration plan with Blackboard. In the fall, we will ask for volunteers to be part of a working group that will frame the new environment. If you wish to participate in the discussion please email robinson@framingham.edu and I will add your name to the group. Our goal is to be fully on Blackboard Learn SaaS by the end of the next academic year.

The LMS Review was a team effort. Thank you to the faculty and staff who participated in the process.