CHANGE:
It's Worth It

Migrating Your University's LMS Is Much Easier Than You Think

DIVE BRAND STUDIO | ○ canvas

HESITATION IS NOT UNCOMMON when considering a transition to a new learning management system (LMS), especially given everything involved: switching and integrating systems, moving courses, training faculty and students, and investing a lot of time and money.

Still, administrators are looking for a change; their current LMS is aging, offers little flexibility and isn't meeting the needs of their faculty, staff and students. They need an LMS offering the ease of use and functionality that their current systems lack, as well as a smooth and simple transition between systems. Impossible, right?

On the contrary, many universities have already made the switch, and their experiences reveal the reality: migrating your LMS can be effortless.

This playbook highlights the easy LMS migration process of today, one that is not complicated; is incredibly easy to use; and, is definitely worth the time and effort. This is especially the case, we believe, when using a best-in-class solution, like Instructure's Canvas LMS.

What follows are some broad reflections and advice from system administrators representing three very different college and university systems, including Richland Community College, Alamo Colleges (Northwest Vista College) and Northwestern University – schools all in agreement that transitioning their old LMS system to Canvas has been totally worth it.

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A 'LOVE HATE' Relationship

The State of LMS on Today's Campuses

Did you know that LMS solutions began as relatively complex tools used specifically by trained administrators? With that said, it's not surprising that a stigma still remains today among many university officials with regard to an LMS' ease-of-use.

Many universities admit their current cumbersome LMS applications are not very popular among faculty and students, lacking functionality, flexibility and integration. On one hand, they say it's technology "they can't live without," but on the other hand, it's a source of constant frustration and exasperation for those who use it.

After speaking with several system administrators, we discovered that for some universities, outdated LMS technology: it acts as a barrier to learning and often has ineffective training and support.
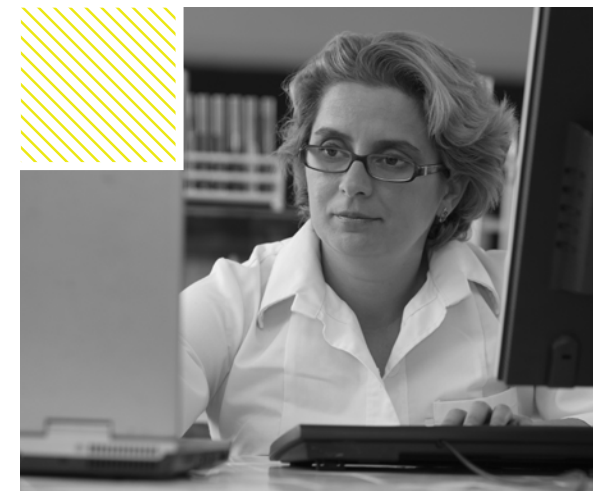
1 | Acts as a barrier to learning.

"I referred to our previous LMS as the 'wild west,' especially because we would often watch various staff members doing lots of unnecessary, complicated tasks with it," said Kona Jones, Director of Online Learning at the Decatur, Illinois-based Richland Community College. "Our old system was basically silos inside of silos, inside of silos, with no real sense of organization or centralization."

However, platforms like Canvas bring the LMS of the future to today. These platforms allow for easier access, helping students retrieve and learn the content they need in a simpler, more seamless manner.

"I believe technology should never be the barrier between students, faculty and the actual learning of content," Jones said.

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2 | Often has complicated, ineffective training and support.

Many LMS systems lack in-depth training, implementation, and 24/7 support for teachers and students, contributing to further staff confusion and frustrated students. Additionally, many LMSes tend to have lower than average adoption rates among staff and students due to system complexity, among other reasons.

With its previous system, Jones said Richland Community College had no true standard LMS training available, resulting in frequently frustrated faculty, and much lower than average adoption rates among staff and students.

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The FUTURE of LMS is Now

It's no secret that students and faculty are more mobile than ever. Let's not leave out the fact that enhanced learning analytics are playing an enormous role in the higher-ed environment. Therefore, it can be challenging to find the right LMS solution that specifically meets the individual needs of all parties involved.

In response to this problem, flexible LMS solutions like Canvas combine content, analytics and insights via a more simplified, intuitive, completely secure, customizable, cloud-based learning platform.

"The beauty of Canvas is that it can be shaped and molded to fit into any learning environment," said Jared Stein, Vice President, Product Strategy, Higher Ed, Instructure (Canvas developer). "With our best-in-class service and support team of highly trained experts, we ensure that a school's migration process goes smoothly, and that they are successful in the implementation and use of Canvas down the road."

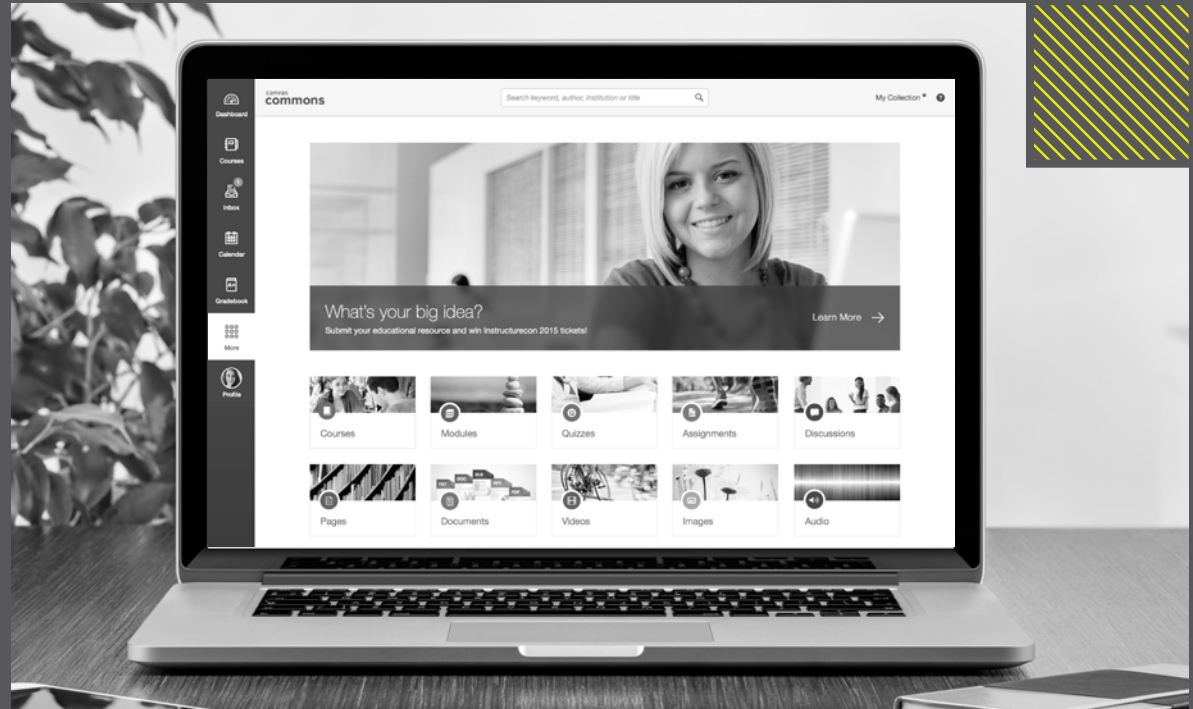> The beauty of Canvas is that **it can be shaped and molded** to fit into any learning environment."
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> **- Jared Stein,** Vice President, Product Strategy, Higher Ed, Instructure (Canvas developer)

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Coming
FULL
CIRCLE

Bearing in mind today's constantly changing digital environment, administrators must seriously consider that maybe what they have done in the past may not get them to where they want to be in the future.

"Yes, these universities should continue to want to do what they have been doing, but we believe they should also want to do so much more," said Stein. "They should seriously consider technologies, like Canvas, that can be put in place now to keep pace as they venture toward the future of teaching and learning."

Stein said schools must increasingly view the LMS as one part of the entire digital learning ecosystem

of an institution, not merely a stand-alone solution. This includes the LMS, content, analytics and other tools.

Canvas delivers a part of that ecosystem: a complete, intuitive LMS, where individual components — syllabus,, modules, assessments, grade books, analytics and more — seamlessly work together, making both the teaching and learning

process easier, more open and collaborative and always connected.

"Canvas provides a completely reliable, secure LMS that is easy-to-learn, easy-to-use, and meets today's students and faculty where they are at to help them succeed," he said.

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Communication
IS KEY

When a lot of time and money have been invested into an LMS, how can a university make the switch without causing major disruption to everyone involved?

It may come as a pleasant surprise that changing platforms is easier than university officials and faculty may realize. Institutions that have done so effectively, share that open, honest communication is vital.

> "
> ## As with so many other issues, **technology may actually be the easiest part of migrating to a new LMS."**
>
> **- Laura Lawrence,** Alamo Colleges' Director of Instructional Professional Development

Texas-based Alamo Colleges' Director of Instructional Professional Development, Laura Lawrence, said because Alamo decided to implement a strategic, communication-oriented transition plan well in advance of their Canvas migration, they were able to alleviate users' apprehensions, resulting in a smooth transition.

"From day one, we conveyed our LMS migration as a 'positive change,' promoting the transition to Canvas via news releases, signage, newspaper articles and briefings," Lawrence said.

Alamo Colleges' administrators said they took this communicative approach to encourage transparency, and better explain to faculty and students why the migration was occurring, what was going to happen and how it would positively impact users.

"As with so many other issues, technology may actually be the easiest part of migrating to a new LMS. It's the planning, training and user-related factors that can pose the real challenges," she said. "Rather than disregard faculty and students' fears and trepidation about such a big change, with our Canvas implementation, we put everything out in the open, right from the start."

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Fostering a **COMMUNITY** of Engagement

Schools that have recently migrated to Canvas, including Northwestern University, confidently report that, "the proof is in the pudding."

Victoria Getis, Manager, for Northwestern University's Information Technology for Faculty Support Services, and Academic and Research Technology, said her school experienced increased adoption rates after transitioning to Canvas. It also has helped everyone save valuable time.

"We appreciate the platform's wide range of flexible tools available to help in so many different ways," Getis said. "Canvas is incredibly easy to integrate with, making teaching and learning at Northwestern that much easier."

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Measurable
RESULTS

As a result of its recent Canvas migration, Jones said Richland College has seen the most quantifiable results in the reduction of its IT department man-hours.

"Because everything about the new system is so simple and easy to use, there's really no room for error, it's really that good," she said. "In fact, thanks to Canvas, our IT team is now able to dedicate time and effort in other ways to help benefit the school."

Faculty members from other schools that have made the switch report increased engagement, as well as enhanced relationships with students. Moreover, students admit that by having the right tools available anytime on any device helps them easily access course material and assignments; complete and submit their work from anywhere; participate in course discussions; and, take advantage of additional educational resources. They can also more easily communicate with classmates and faculty.

Smartphones and other mobile devices are invaluable for this communication, even if instructors aren't using those devices to teach. Students will continue to engage with course materials, look for different ways to create content and do research in innovative ways via mobile devices. An LMS should be flexible, and dedicated to providing first-class tools to students and faculty alike.

"Even something as simple as how our new system's content is displayed, everything is that much easier," Jones said. "Students can find everything they need with a simple click, and customize everything to receive it and learn it exactly the way they want to." Canvas has a large team dedicated exclusively to mobile in addition to their innovative desktop solution.

Northwestern's Getis added: "When compared to other systems, Canvas is much more flexible and straightforward, especially if you are looking up 'how' to do something. The help guides are right there and there's support available, 24/7, if you need it."

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Revolutionizing HIGHER EDUCATION

Be a Catalyst for Change

It's understandable, migrating to a new LMS involves more than the simple click of a button.

And let's face it: change can be difficult.

However, to keep up with a constantly evolving digital environment, higher learning institutions must weigh the importance of implementing technologies that enhance learning versus the impact of continued use of mediocre systems. This is a critical comparison, as recent research reveals that mediocre systems can ultimately put program success, student success and the overall reputation of an institution at risk for failure.

Schools today must provide an environment that is personalized and collaborative, yet easy-to-use, flexible, intuitive and data-driven to help empower students — and the faculty members who support them — to make smart decisions along their educational pathways.

If you ask any of the school administrators interviewed for this playbook, Canvas does just that. "Now, our faculty doesn't have to approach working on an LMS course with dread; with Canvas, the level of simplicity is so much easier, and it's much more engaging," Northwestern's Getis said.

The bottom line: migrating to an LMS does not require a next-generation learning experience strategy, rather, positioning an institution for success in the future does.

Canvas is one part of that next-generation learning ecosystem required for universities to remain competitive, and continue to breed and graduate classes of students that are better prepared for — and able to think bigger — positioning themselves for success.

Stein added: "The goal with Canvas is to make teaching and learning better and easier. We constantly strive to provide faculty and students with the right tools to help give them a sense of empowerment when it comes to education both today and in the future."

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Through open, usable, cloud-based technologies, Canvas enables easy integration of the content, tools, and services that teachers need and students want. Not surprisingly, listening to users about their needs and wants—then rolling out the most usable, customizable, adaptable, and reliable learning platform (think 99.9% uptime)—makes all the difference when it comes to campus-wide LMS adoption. That's why Canvas is adopted faster and deeper (or, is used in more ways by more users) than any other LMS. So, in the end, investing in 21st century education technology actually makes teaching and learning easier (like it's supposed to).

Canvas is the educational revolution by Instructure, the technology company that makes smart software that makes people smarter. In addition to the Canvas learning management system (LMS), Instructure offers Canvas Commons, the learning object repository (LOR) that actually gets used; Canvas Catalog, the customizable, all-in-one course catalog, registration system, and payment gateway; and Canvas Network, an index of open, online courses taught by educators everywhere. Learn more about the expanding Canvas edu-ecosystem at www.CanvasLMS.com.

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