

Chapter 1.6

Preparing Faculty for a Learning Management System Transition

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the impact of a change in the use of a learning management system (LMS) at one university. Survey data captured faculty members' viewpoints on the transition from one LMS to another; specifically, their dispositions toward technology and change, preparation and prior experiences, need for support, and access to available resources. The inquiry focuses on potential activities and infrastructures that can be established to support the faculty, as LMS users, when a new system is introduced. Also, it explores the types of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that faculty may have or need to effectively and efficiently use the new system to support their work. Finally, strategies are recommended to enhance faculty members' dispositions, preparation, support and access to resources.

PREPARING EDUCATION FACULTY FOR A LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM TRANSITION

The recent acquisition of *ANGEL*, a Learning Management System (LMS) company, by *Blackboard* has sparked the latest discussions on the

use of LMSs in higher education. What is an LMS? According to the Office of Information and Instructional Technology (OIIT; 2006), it is a “set of web based tools for teaching, learning, communication and class administration.” Ionannou and Hannafin (2008) identified an LMS as a software system designed to manage course content and course activities. Currently the top U.S. providers of LMSs are *Blackboard*,

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ANGEL, and *Desire2Learn* (Young, 2009). A recent report of the Campus Computing Survey Project that polled college IT leaders stated 56.8% of colleges who use LMSs run *Blackboard* in the United States (Campus Computing Project, 2008). *Blackboard* provides “easy-to-use tools for designing and managing both web-based and face-to-face courses” (OIIT).

Changes in LMS platforms are fairly common in higher education (Ionannou & Hannafin, 2008; Smart & Meyer, 2005). One of the major reasons for switching to a different provider is increased licensing costs (Smart & Meyer). Another reason is an upgrade to a better, faster, and more robust version of the LMS (Corich, 2005; Ionannou & Hannafin). A third reason identified by Smart and Myer was that some institutions need to have one LMS instead of supporting multiple systems.

Change in a system, especially in higher education, brings about diverse responses and reactions from faculty. Smart and Meyer (2005) reported on how faculty from their university viewed the ease of transition from one LMS to another from a course conversion perspective. The report identified that “parts of the course that did not convert are often time-consuming to reconstruct” (p. 69). This resulted in increased workloads and frustration. However, in the same report, faculty expressed their willingness to convert courses to a new LMS despite the inaccuracy of the course content conversion and the workload involved.

Distance education technologies have presented faculty with the need to adapt to new methods of teaching and learning. Faculty must not only learn the technology but they must also understand the “paradigm shift” in presentation and evaluation of online instruction (Berryhill & Durrington, 2006, p. 52). Oblinger and Hawkins (2006) suggested that most faculty lack sufficient pedagogical and technical expertise to self develop effective online courses, yet Lane (2008) noted few researchers have investigated the effect of LMS design on pedagogy. While a well-designed LMS provides a toolkit for faculty

in their development and presentation of courses online, the investment of time is still significant, and the idea of moving weeks or months of work spent in designing and developing a course to a new system often results in a sense of panic on the part of some faculty (Lane, 2008).

This chapter focuses on strategies that can be used to support faculty, when a new system is introduced. What knowledge, skills, and dispositions are needed by faculty members that will encourage effective and efficient utilization of the new system to support their work? What strategies need to be implemented to enhance and provide better support and make resources available and accessible?

BACKGROUND

A year ago, a member institution of the Georgia statewide university system adopted a newer version of their current LMS in the middle of the academic year. This change was prompted by an initiative of the university systems’ technology group to upgrade all campuses from *WebCT Campus Edition* to the *Blackboard Learning System-Vista Enterprise License* (OIIT, 2006). In addition, after this decision was made, *Blackboard* announced it would purchase *WebCT*. Every member institution using the new LMS was allowed to select a name for its specific campus system. For this member institution, University of West Georgia, the new LMS was called *CourseDen*.

A survey was conducted by a group of faculty members (referred as researchers) interested in learning how this transition was managed by the university, and how the faculty perceived such actions. The population surveyed involved the faculty in a College of Education. To develop the survey, the researchers performed a literature search on possible reasons faculty members resist using a new technology-based tool. Very few articles were found that discussed issues specific to the transition from one LMS to another, but

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