

Dear Colleagues,

As you have likely heard by now, Canvas is now available for faculty who wish to begin transitioning away from Blackboard (BB) or Moodle and into Canvas. This has raised many questions about the hidden expense of this cost-saving endeavor, and questions about how the district is planning to compensate faculty for the workload increases generated by this cost-saving transition. Below, you will find a summary of the discussions to date followed by the FA's recommendations to full time faculty members on how to proceed.

Background to the Canvas Transition: AAC Task Force Recommendations

Based on the questions I have received, I'd like to start by offering a quick overview of how we arrived at this point. Late this past spring, acting upon recommendations from an Academic Affairs Committee Task Force and the Academic Senate, the district devised a two year transition plan to move faculty away from BB and Moodle to Canvas. Faculty will have three semesters to make the transition, though most will probably do so in a single semester. Once the transition period ends (following the spring 2018 semester) BB and Moodle will no longer be available.

The recommendation was in large part the product of research conducted by an AAC task force that examined the comparative quality of Canvas and cost of Canvas, Moodle, and BB. The task force rated Canvas as the best choice for many reasons, not the least of which involved cost savings. By making Canvas the sole Course Management System (CMS) supported by the district, the cost of Canvas will be waved and the district will save tens of thousands of dollars on an annual basis in fees currently paid to BB and Moodle.

Costs to Faculty

As many of you have already concluded, while the district's costs will be greatly reduced by the transition to Canvas, the cost to faculty in time and workload is substantial. Faculty will have little choice but to spend many hours learning the new system, transferring materials from their current online platform to Canvas, and reconstructing design elements that help guide students through your courses and improve upon student success. Some of the work relates to professional development as faculty will be learning a new online system, but much of the workload involved will be a repetition of tasks already performed by faculty in BB and Moodle. Without question, this work is a byproduct of a district decision rooted in cost savings.

Very shortly after the FA learned about the impending transition, FA leaders approached the district to begin negotiating support and compensation for our members. The discussions began in April of 2016, and since then this issue has been the topic of well over a dozen discussions between the district and the FA leadership. These discussions extended across the summer, into the fall, and continue to the present. Throughout, we have emphasized the need to resolve the compensation and support issues well ahead of the spring 2018 starting point for the transition. As many of you have pointed out, a portion of the annual cost savings could be reinvested into providing faculty with the time necessary to make the transition successful.

While I cannot discuss the specifics of confidential negotiations, I can point out that the AAC task force recommendations—recommendations that the district agreed to support—not only encouraged the move to Canvas, but pointed to the need for the district to support faculty with a well-trained faculty transition team, professional development opportunities, and staff support (including hiring “an instructional designer to provide individual support for course redesign”). As well, the recommendations call for the district to consult with the FA to address “workload incurred by faculty in the process of switching to transition.”

So far our consultations are yet to have produced an adequate plan and time is running out. After six months of discussions, we still do not have an agreement that will provide faculty with the support and time necessary for a successful transition. Such an agreement is important not only because it would provide faculty with fair compensation for significant, additional work duties, but because it will help provide the time necessary to ensure that students are not negatively impacted by the transition.

Progress?

Some progress has been made. Early this fall an agreement was reached that provides a five person faculty transition team with reassigned time for this fall and the spring of 2017 (10% RT per team member, per semester) so that the team members have been able to learn the Canvas system and provide some assistance to faculty in making the transition. However, this compensation is certainly not adequate to provide more than a modest amount of support, and at this point in time no other compensation has been made available for any faculty making, or preparing to make, this transition.

Over the last two weeks the district has agreed to a long-standing request by the FA to establish a workload committee comprised of three faculty and three administrators who will more clearly identify the work involved with the transition, and develop a more comprehensive plan for ensuring a timely transition. This is a positive sign, but it will take time to get results and time is running short. It is our position that a smooth transition is one that will provide faculty with certainty of compensation and at least a few weeks prior to the start of a semester to begin the transition. It is our hope that the work of this committee will provide a basis for a reasonable agreement.

So what should FA members do?

At this point in time, the FA is recommending that FA members do the following:

1. Wait to transition materials currently residing in Blackboard and Moodle into Canvas until the FA and the District reach a compensation agreement.
2. Wait to *re-develop* existing CMS design elements in Canvas until the FA and the District reach a compensation agreement.
3. We are also suggesting that for faculty developing *new* courses (or newly online courses) it would make sense to create those in Canvas.

What if FA members do not follow this advice?

There will be absolutely no repercussions for failing to follow this advice. The FA will continue to support faculty even if those faculty no matter what decision one makes. In making these recommendations we are asking for your support of the FA’s efforts to negotiate reasonable compensation for a significant new workload.