Learning Management System Update

What is a Learning Management System or LMS?

A learning management system stores and manages course content and activities online. At Cal Poly, the primary learning management system (LMS) is the Blackboard course management system. ITS also supports Learning Objects for wikis and blogs and Respondus for quiz development. In addition, some faculty use unsupported tools to meet their teaching needs. Since the number and types of tools that can be used to support teaching and learning is growing rapidly, Cal Poly would like to provide a more flexible and customizable technology platform to meet the needs of faculty and students.

Why is Cal Poly considering a different LMS now?

There are several reasons to consider a change in the campus LMS:

- The number and types of tools to support teaching and learning is growing rapidly. To better meet the needs of faculty and students, Cal Poly would like to provide a more flexible and customizable technology platform which includes current technology and allows for adding new technology as it becomes available.
- Cal Poly’s current licensing contract with Blackboard expires in March 2012. By then, our current version of Blackboard will no longer be supported by the vendor. This forces us to choose between a new version of Blackboard or a different learning management system.
- The next generation of Blackboard has major changes to the look, feel and functionality and the level of effort to change to it is comparable to moving to a completely different system.

These factors provide an opportunity to consider change.

How did Cal Poly narrow the options to Blackboard and Moodle?

Fortunately, a lot of the work to identify and evaluate LMS options has already been done by other universities. Also the CSU has sponsored and facilitated an extensive investigation of many different LMS’s with participation of faculty, staff, and students.

Based on the information from other universities, an analysis of the LMS products, and CSU pilots involving many campuses, the CSU has recommended that campuses use either Blackboard 9.1 or Moodle.

Cal Poly would like a more responsive, reliable, customizable, and cost effective system than our current version of Blackboard. Since Moodle has no licensing fees, allows easier customization, and has a reputation for high reliability, we are currently piloting Moodle. Assuming it is a good fit for Cal Poly’s needs, we are likely to adopt it.

What factors will influence which LMS the campus will support?

ITS is working with faculty and student advisory committees, running pilots with volunteer faculty, and gaining experience running Moodle. Information from all these efforts will be used to make a final decision. There is a very long list of things that will influence decision. Some of the more important considerations are:

- Functionality that meets the current needs of faculty and students as expressed in annual surveys conducted by the faculty and student computing advisory committees, namely the IACC and SC3. In addition to standard LMS features like grading and quiz creation and management, we are evaluating a broad range of attributes of the systems like ease of use,
What is this Moodle Pilot About?

- Ease of learning the system, availability of training and support materials.
- The flexibility and openness of the system to provide additional functionality to faculty and students at a reasonable cost to the campus.
- Support for mobile access.
- The reliability, performance, and stability of the system; the availability of support if problems occur. Both Blackboard and Moodle have large user bases and others who can help support the product in addition to that provided by the organization that created the system.
- Total cost including software licensing, hardware, personnel costs for support, etc.

Universities that have switched to Moodle from Blackboard have generally seen costs rise in the 25% to 50% range during the transition year largely due to the costs of supporting two systems. Costs then fall significantly due to the lack of licensing costs. Blackboard costs have risen and are expected to continue to rise. In addition, since Blackboard is proprietary, adding additional functionality beyond what is in the base system can be expensive. For example, adding mobile device support is currently an additional cost.

- Support for accessibility. Cal Poly is committed to providing systems that support the learning of all Cal Poly students.
- Ease of integration with Cal Poly systems.
- Availability, quality and ease of integration with other important components of a learning platform. For example, ePortfolio, Assessment, Course plug-in modules.

What is Moodle?

Moodle was originally developed by Martin Dougiamas, an educator and computer scientist. Moodle is an open source, open standards learning management system. Open source applications are more customizable than proprietary systems and have no licensing fees. Developers can extend Moodle's modular construction by creating plugins for specific new functionality, and many free third-party Moodle plugins are available. As of February 2011, Moodle had a user base of 49,428 registered and verified sites, serving 40 million users in 4.2 million courses. (moodle.org). (Wikipedia, 2011). Plug-ins include:

- Activities (including word and math games)
- Resource types to enhance course content (files, folders, labels, URL's)
- Question types (multiple choice, true and false, fill in the blank, etc)
- Various application development and system integration resources

If you would like to learn more about the component structure of Moodle, you may wish to view a video created by Tomaz Lasic, who is an Education Researcher at Moodle headquarters in Perth, Australia. Link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-p2KqU7QD4

What is Blackboard Learn 9.1?

Blackboard LLC was founded in 1997 as a consulting firm to provide technical standards for online learning applications. Blackboard's vision was to provide a user-friendly means by which college professors could put course information, including syllabi, reference sites, and study guides, on the Web. In 1998, Blackboard merged with CourseInfo LLC, a course management software provider and startup company at Cornell University, and the merged company soon released their first software product for online learning. Blackboard's continued growth and the expanding public profile was driven by acquisitions. Blackboard Learn, Course Delivery.

Is there risk associated with using an Open Source product like Moodle?

With open source software, upgrade development and support is the responsibility of the campus rather than the vendor. This presents some challenges, but Cal Poly has a strong IT infrastructure that is well positioned to support open source applications. We currently use and support open
source for the My Cal Poly portal (uPortal), web servers (Apache), web content management (Drupal), and operating systems (Red Hat Linux). A number of other CSUs have or are likely to adopt Moodle. This gives us a strong user community with whom we have close ties.

Are other CSU campuses piloting or using Moodle?

Based on the CSU investigation in May 2009, which recommended that Blackboard and Moodle are the best options to meet teaching and learning needs and accessibility mandates for the CSU, seven campuses have moved to Moodle from Blackboard or Blackboard Vista (WebCT). Four campuses are actively piloting Moodle to determine whether or not it will meet their needs, and several other campuses have expressed interest. As part of the Moodle Pilot, Cal Poly is participating with the CSU-wide Moodle Consortium, which includes the Moodle Common Interest Group and the Standards and Practices Groups to enable campuses to work together to develop and share Moodle code enhancements, support resources, and system administration strategies. These efforts are facilitated and supported by the Chancellor's Office, and participation is completely voluntary.

What other universities use or are committed to moving to Moodle as their primary Learning Management System?

A few examples of universities using Moodle are:

- Open University of the UK (Completely online with 180,000 students – one of the largest universities in the world)
- Louisiana State University (30,000 students)
- San Francisco State University
- University of Minnesota (51,000) moving in 2012
- North Carolina State University (31,000 students) moving in 2011
- Idaho State University

To see what some other universities are saying about their transition to Moodle visit

University of Minnesota: http://www.oit.umn.edu/moodle/transition/index.htm
Bethel University: https://www.bethel.edu/offices/tlt/resources/moodle/faq-moodle-transition
Florida International: https://ecampus.fiu.edu/moodle_transition.php
Southern Oregon University: http://www.sou.edu/distancelearning/moodlepilot.html and https://sites.google.com/a/pilot.sou.edu/moodle/moodle-news/moodlemaniabegins

How is the Moodle pilot going?

Three Cal Poly faculty members — Brian Greenwood, Peggy Papathakis, and Joseph Ragsdale — participated along with their students in a Fall 2010 Moodle pilot. During this pilot, we surveyed the faculty members and their students to determine if Moodle can support Cal Poly’s teaching and learning needs.

All three faculty participants preferred Moodle to Blackboard and spent ten hours or less to learn to use Moodle.

Of the 73 students who participated in the Fall 2010 survey, 78% preferred Moodle over Blackboard and 89% would recommend Moodle to a friend. Students spend between one and three hours to learn Moodle, most choosing to learn by trial and error rather than asking for help or using online tutorials.

For complete survey results see Fall Faculty Results and Fall Student Results.

During Winter 2011 we expanded our evaluation to 18 faculty members, 23 courses and approximately 550 students drawn from a variety of disciplines and technology backgrounds. Winter 2011 faculty and students will be surveyed and results will be available online during Spring quarter 2011.
Several Fall and Winter faculty participants have already requested to teach additional courses in Moodle. While this may not be possible since the Moodle Pilot system has limited resources and is administered by another CSU campus, this is indeed an encouraging sign.

Has Cal Poly already decided to move to Moodle?

The final decision regarding Moodle has not been made; it is contingent on the Winter Pilot findings and concurrent efforts underway to develop a fully functional production Moodle system at Cal Poly. This production system will allow us to incorporate additional features and functions that are not included in the CSU Moodle Pilot system. The production system will include login via the Cal Poly Portal, links to Blackboard and Moodle courses within the My Classes channel, automatic course shell creation, instructor access, and student enrollment. These efforts will ensure that our teaching, learning, and system needs can be met by Moodle.

If we move to Moodle, how will existing BlackBoard course materials be migrated?

If we move to Moodle, course content will not be migrated automatically from Blackboard to Moodle, and some changes in course "setup" will be an inherent part of moving to a completely different system.

The reason automated migration will not be done is that programs designed to move and "map" content between the two disparate systems have met with only very limited success. While course migration may seem an attractive option, in reality, most faculty have opted to "start fresh" as they learned to use Moodle. In fact, NOT having existing and potentially obsolete content in unexpected locations within Moodle was actually preferable; it enabled them to capitalize on improved file management functionality in Moodle and to structure and design their Moodle courses to best advantage.

If we move to Moodle, transition support teams will provide software, training workshops/labs, and other resources to assist faculty to move content to the new system. Software tools will be available to pull content and quizzes from Blackboard. Trained support will also be available to assist individual faculty members to move course content.

What is the timeline?

Depending on the results of the Fall and Winter quarter pilots, and if the campus determines a change is appropriate, Cal Poly may have a production Moodle version 1.9.9 system available to faculty members for course development sometime in late Summer 2011. If the change is implemented, Moodle and Blackboard would run in parallel sometime in Summer 2011, and through Fall 2011 and Winter 2012 in order to give faculty time to transition to the new learning management system.

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<tr>
<th>Fall 2010</th>
<th>Phase I Pilot</th>
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<td>• Three faculty</td>
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<td>• Three courses</td>
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<td>• Approximately 100 students</td>
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<tr>
<th>Winter 2011</th>
<th>Phase II Pilot</th>
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<td>• 18 faculty</td>
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<td>• 23 courses</td>
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<td>• Approximately 550 students</td>
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What is this Moodle Pilot About?

http://blackboardsupport.calpoly.edu/content/about/LMS_Faq.html

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<th>Spring 2011</th>
<th>Phase III Pilot</th>
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<td>• 20 faculty</td>
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<td>• 28 courses</td>
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<td>• Approximately 650 students</td>
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| April 2011 | Recommendations and final decision regarding Moodle. If the decision is to move forward ... |

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<tr>
<th>Summer 2011</th>
<th>Production Moodle available sometime in the Summer for Course Development</th>
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<td>Training and transition support available</td>
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<th>Fall 2011</th>
<th>Production Moodle available for all</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>March 23, 2012</th>
<th>Blackboard is turned off when licence expires</th>
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| Spring 2012 | Moodle is in sole LMS in use at Cal Poly |

Will all courses need to transition to Moodle right away?

No. If the change is implemented, Moodle and Blackboard would run in parallel from Summer 2011 through Winter 2012 in order to give faculty time to move online course content. Some faculty will want to move right away and others will choose to wait. If we move to Moodle, Blackboard will be turned off and no longer available as of March 23, 2012.

How will you help faculty transition from Blackboard to Moodle?

If we move to Moodle, faculty will have from Summer 2011 through Winter 2012 for the transition. The current Blackboard support team will be available to ease the transition to Moodle. They will provide software, training workshops, open labs and other resources to assist faculty to move content to the new system. Software tools will be available to pull content and quizzes from Blackboard. Trained support staff and student assistants will also be available to help individuals in their transfer of course content from Blackboard to Moodle.

Didn’t we just have a Blackboard change? How can I teach when you keep changing technology?

A commercial vendor like Blackboard requires customers to upgrade to newer versions on a regular basis and eliminates support for older versions as they age.
We do not have a say in what versions they will support or require, nor what changes in user interface or functionality are implemented. This gives Cal Poly less control over the pace of technology change than participating in an open source product such as Moodle. In this case, we must move off our current version of Blackboard no later than March 23, 2012.

On the other hand, as an open source product, even older versions of Moodle will be supported by its user community as long as they can be properly secured. It has also been Cal Poly's experience with open source products that their user interface and general design tend to remain more stable over time than commercial systems because its large user community has greater influence on what changes are incorporated into the core design of future versions. Even if we don't change to Moodle after the pilot, faculty will still have to change technology. The new version of Blackboard is so different from our current system that the required learning curve would be equivalent to that of transitioning to Moodle. We believe that a change to Moodle will allow us to pace technology change on our own schedule.

**How can I give you my feedback regarding the LMS?**

We would be happy to hear your thoughts on how Cal Poly's learning management system can better serve your needs. Particularly, we would like to know about the features that are most important to you and the problems with the current LMS that you would like to see resolved. Please send your feedback and questions to Luanne Fose, Ext., 6-7360 or lfone@calpoly.edu.