

Assessing Canvas as an alternative to Blackboard

During the fall 2020 and spring 2021 semesters, UAF has been involved in a pilot program spanning all of University of Alaska (UA) to assess the Canvas learning management system (LMS). Canvas was chosen in part because it consumes less bandwidth than Blackboard Learn, making it more easily accessible for students and faculty living in areas with low bandwidth. Across UA, more than 1,000 students and 45 faculty are using Canvas in 66 courses during this academic year.

Pilot participants are asked to evaluate their experiences by giving structured feedback at set points during the semester. For the fall 2020 semester, 70% of student respondents and 100% of participating faculty indicated they would like to have more courses in Canvas!

Open-ended feedback from faculty and students using Canvas typically reference the ease of use and navigation as well as the streamlined design.

EASE OF USE AND NAVIGATION

Ninety percent of the student respondents last fall mentioned that Canvas was easy to use and navigate, and that material was clearly organized and well laid out. When asked what parts of Canvas faculty liked, they responded:

- “The ability to create modules using the page function, ability to insert graphics, pictures, links, and other supportive materials into the module to create a narrative, speedgrader, overall a diverse set of options to communicate with students and develop ‘modern-looking’ modules.”
- “Very easy, simple, and intuitive. Has a clean look.”

A student responded:

- “I just like how it’s so easy to navigate around and how easy it is to submit your assignments, because sometimes I have a hard time trying to submit other assignments for my other classes on Blackboard.”

CLEAN, MODERN USER INTERFACE

Participants indicated the clean and more modern design of the Canvas LMS as one of the best parts of the pilot. Students said:

- “It is a simple layout that looks modern. It tells us scores effectively, and it lets us fiddle with what-if scores. Not only that, we can see means, highs, and lows on graded items which is nice.”

- “Canvas has a very user-friendly interface and is incredibly easy to navigate with less complications of the numerous and varying tabs that Blackboard can have.”

MOBILE APP

Students really like using the mobile app, [Canvas Student](#), and find they are able to do all the work for a course within the app. Take a look at [this demonstration](#) (passcode: %2t3HARR) of the app to find out how faculty and students alike can go to class on a mobile device! As more students use mobile devices to complete their online coursework, [creating mobile-friendly content](#) should be strategically built into course development and delivery.

FAVORITE FEATURES

Faculty members in the pilot program all mentioned [Speed Grader](#) as the feature that saves them the most time in the course. This feature provides streamlined, inline grading for assessments of all kinds. Another great feature found in Grades is “[Message students who](#),” which allows faculty to create custom messages to send to students based on submission status or grade range.

Canvas makes it simple to track class progress using the [New Analytics](#) feature. Course data is refreshed every 24 hours, making it easy for faculty to monitor student progress, grades and participation trends in order to conduct targeted student outreach.

Canvas was designed by students for students with a focus on giving students control over how they interact with both the platform and with course content (see [Our Company Story](#)). Students in the UA pilot program spoke of how easy it is to keep track of their course progress by [customizing Notifications](#) and utilizing the [Calendar](#).

The UA pilot program has been set up with many third-party integrations that are also available in the Blackboard LMS. If you are interested in exploring Canvas for yourself, check out the free version of Canvas called [Canvas Free For Teachers](#). For more information on the UA Canvas pilot and future updates on progress and outcomes, visit the [UA Canvas Pilot Google Site](#).



UAF eCampus has weekly and monthly Canvas demos and sessions.
[View the faculty development calendar for dates and information.](#)