Blackboard Pilot Report
July 12, 2013

Introduction

DeSales will adopt Blackboard Learn 9.1 as its Learning Management System to replace ANGEL in AY 2013-14. All courses starting on or after August 19th, 2013 will be offered in Blackboard. The decision to adopt Blackboard Learn was approved by the Academic Oversight Committee on October 24, 2012. To help ensure a smooth transition from ANGEL to Blackboard Learn, a pilot has been conducted by the Department of Distance Education and Instructional Technology (DEIT) with selected courses in ACCESS Session 5.

The objectives of this pilot study are:

- To discover and document faculty's and students' perceptions of Blackboard Learn.
- To identify technical issues faculty and students encounter when using Blackboard Learn.
- To discover and document best practices using Blackboard Learn.
- To discover and address concerns proactively when DeSales migrates from ANGEL to Blackboard Learn.

The findings from this research will be used to make informed decisions regarding configuration of the DeSales' Blackboard Learn system, migration to Blackboard Learn in August 2013, and continued training and support for faculty and students.

Pilot Preparation and Evaluation Processes

The Blackboard Learn pilot took place in ACCESS 2013 Summer Session 5 (April 29 to June 22). The pilot included four online courses and four hybrid courses, totaling 101 enrolled students.

The Department of Distance Education and Instructional Technology hosted two information sessions for pilot instructors in early March, detailing the pilot process and introducing Blackboard Learn. In April 2013, Blackboard provided four synchronous web-based workshops to faculty participating in the pilot. The Blackboard Services staff conducted these on week nights and weekends to DEIT staff and pilot faculty gathered in a computer lab. DEIT moderated these workshops and provided live assistance. During the week of April 22, DEIT provided three online student orientation sessions for students enrolled in the pilot courses. On June 15, 2013, an online survey was distributed to faculty and students to gather feedback about their pilot experiences. Faculty were also invited to personal interview sessions to share their perceptions and experience.

Faculty Interview Findings

In general, pilot instructors liked the interface of Blackboard Learn, finding it somewhat similar to ANGEL. They identified these strengths of Blackboard Learn:

- Content posting is simple and intuitive, and similar to that in ANGEL.
- It is easy and convenient to email students especially the time when an announcement or content item is posted.
• Drag-and-drop content builder makes it easy to organize items and move things around.
• It was easy to grade assignments and exams with grades automatically transferred to the Grade Center.
• The “Needs Grading” alerts in Grade Center are very helpful.
• Blackboard Collaborate is part of Blackboard Learn, easy to use and schedule sessions and find recordings.
• Content editor made it easy to Integrate YouTube, images, and other media components.
• SafeAssign is a helpful plagiarism detection tool.
• Faculty like the “force completion” feature in tests.

They also pointed out some of the weaknesses of Blackboard Learn:

• Sometimes it takes too many clicks to get what needs done.
• They were not able to customize the look and feel of a course to the level they were in ANGEL.
• The Grade Center seems to be convoluted; faulty recommend creating everything from the beginning; you can’t give partial credit.
• Some email messages sent from within Blackboard using the DSU Email link seem to be missing in DSU mail.
• Difficult to insert mathematic formulas or copy directly from Word
• Laborious to set up tests (It seems to be a two-step process to create and deploy a test; also it is difficult to import test questions from Word.)

During the pilot, faculty had an opportunity to integrate a third-party plagiarism tool Respondus LockDown Browser for online testing security. Most instructors found it helpful except for a few technical issues. They mentioned it is important to know that Respondus randomly generates a password that should not be changed by the instructor.

All the pilot instructors interviewed by DEIT found the training sessions provided by Blackboard and DEIT to be beneficial, and several mentioned that they were impressed by the timely and attentive support provided by DEIT during the pilot. Participants made the following suggestions for DeSales’ faculty who will be teaching in Blackboard Learn in Fall 2013 and beyond:

1. Be sure to attend professional development workshops on Blackboard Learn.
2. Refer to the Faculty Orientation section in the DEIT faculty community.
3. Start building courses early and get the course structure organized (especially for the Grade Center); review content imported from ANGEL.
4. One pilot instructor suggested that Blackboard Fundamentals workshop should be mandatory for all faculty who will be using Blackboard Learn.

Faculty Survey Findings

Six of the eight pilot instructors completed the faculty survey, and the results are consistent with the findings of interview sessions. Participants were moderately (66.67%) or highly (33.33%) comfortable with ANGEL, DeSales’ current LMS. During the pilot, instructors accessed Blackboard Learn on average
from 3 to 7 times per week. Firefox (57%) was the top choice of web browser used for Blackboard Learn, followed by Google and Safari. Three instructors tried mobile access on iPad.

In general, 50% of the participants were satisfied with the transfer of their ANGEL course archives into Blackboard Learn. Over 66% were satisfied with the visual appeal of Blackboard Learn, and 83% were satisfied with the overall navigation, the My Institution Page Layout, and ease of use of the system. All participants were satisfied with the Course Homepage Layout. Half of the participants were satisfied with Customization of My Institution and Course Home Pages.

All participants liked the Announcement tool. Of the participants who tried the Add Alignments feature, 66.67% were satisfied; and of those who used blog, Calendar, Blackboard Collaborate, Panopto Lecture, Chat and Virtual Classroom, 50% were satisfied (50% were neutral). Two-thirds of the participants were satisfied with Discussion board, while one-third were satisfied with Groups. Of those who used Repondus lockdown browser, one-third were satisfied (others were neutral). Half of the instructors were satisfied with online tests, 25% were neutral, and 25% were unsatisfied. SafeAssign was rated “satisfactory” to 67% of the instructors, Grade Center to 50%, and Reports to 33%. Among the less used tools, Wiki was satisfactory to 50% of instructors, while publisher content and Mashup to 17%.

When it comes to the functions of Blackboard Learn, all participants were satisfied with content creation; 50% were satisfied with communication and collaboration; 33% were satisfied with assessment, and 17% with reporting. And finally, 67% were satisfied with accessibility of Blackboard Learn.

Among the help and support resources, instructors were very satisfied (50%) or satisfied (33%) with DEIT staff. About 17% were very satisfied and 50% were satisfied with the Faculty orientation sessions provided by Blackboard trainers. Only 17% of the participants were satisfied with the Instructor Help Guide at help.blackboard.com (67% did not use it), and 17% were very satisfied with the Resources tab in Blackboard Learn (33% neutral, 50% no answer). When having technical issues, pilot instructors tend to seek assistance directly from DEIT.

When asked to rate the overall experience of the pilot, 67% of the participants were satisfied and 33% were neutral.

Below are some comments participants made in the open-ended question section of the survey:

- Very satisfied with the general design of BB
- Instructors may want to contact DEIT staff should they need to do any transfers. This will help them avoid losing materials.
- While all content seems to transfer, it does not function in the same way in Blackboard and thus, you think everything is functioning in the normal ways, but in fact, it is not. However, it is not always clear what is functioning the same way and what is functioning differently, so you are in an academic minefield at all times.
- I suggest that faculty start from scratch, especially if they have the time to do so.
- The word “institution” is well chosen.
- The pages often look very sterile and unappealing. However, within one's own course, one can use photos and other visual tidbits to help students feel less removed from the whole process.
- It gets a little confusing when you are so used to ANGEL.
• I think the course tools work fine when you get use to using them.
• Generally, Blackboard has more tools than I am likely to use. I do realize that a program this extensive is necessary for the University to appeal to a wider range of student needs and their time constraints.
• Instructors will need ongoing support to get their hands on the tools effectively
• Again, you just need to continue to work with the functions until you are comfortable. I'm very happy I was in the pilot group. Next time around, it will be a piece of cake!
• Student orientation is very important to enable them to do well especially taking their exams. Some students do not undergo the orientation. This was evident with some of my students during the exams.
• Start working on your courses early! Try to use all of the features and functions. Get the training, and if you need additional information, there are excellent YouTube videos you can watch on how to use specific functions of BB.
• I don't know what we would do without DEIT. I must say that I was extremely disappointed with the HELP Desk. I understand that they were not very helpful to students when they actually had IT issues, not BB issues. DEIT staff was phenomenal! They are always cordial, helpful, kind, and courteous, no matter what the situation.

Student Survey Findings

Eighty-one (or 80%) of the 101 enrolled students participated in the survey. The results show that over 55% of the students participating in the pilot were highly comfortable with ANGEL, and 44% were moderately comfortable. About 60% of the students accessed Blackboard Learn from 4 to 10 times per week; 70% of the participants used a PC, 12% used a Mac, while others accessed Blackboard on an Android or iOS mobile device. Google Chrome, Firefox, and Internet Explorer were the top three browsers used to access Blackboard, each used by about 30% of the users.

In general, 53% of the students were satisfied and an additional 23% were very satisfied with the visual appeal of Blackboard. However, when asked about the overall navigation, only 44% were satisfied; an equal percentage was unsatisfied. Half of the participants were satisfied with the My Institution page layout and course homepage layout. About 41% were satisfied with the ease of use, while an equal percentage was unsatisfied.

For the communication tools available in Blackboard, 55% of the participants were satisfied with Announcements. About 60% were satisfied with discussion board, 35% with DSU Email, and 20% with Blackboard Collaborate.

For tests and assignments, over 55% of the participants were satisfied with the online tests in Blackboard and 70% were satisfied with the My Grades feature. About 55% of the participants did not have a chance to assess Respondus Lockdown Browser, but of those who used it, one-third were satisfied. A majority of the participants (58%) did not assess SafeAssign, but among those who did, about one-third were satisfied with this new plagiarism detection tool.

As for the other tools, about one-third of the participants were satisfied with Calendar and Groups. One-fifth were satisfied with Blog and Collaboration. Over 60% of the participants did not get a chance to
evaluate Panopto Focus content, but among those who did, 37.5% were satisfied. And finally, 70% did not use wiki, but among those who did, half reported that they were satisfied and others were neutral.

When asked about the help and support resources, two-thirds of the participants were satisfied with DEIT support, one-third were satisfied with online student orientations, and the Resources tab in Blackboard, and 23% were satisfied with Blackboard Help Guide at help.blackboard.com. When experiencing technical difficulties during the pilot, participants were most likely to turn to their instructors (42%), DEIT (30%), and DeSales Helpdesk (13%).

Finally, 16% were very satisfied, 35% were satisfied, 16% were neutral, and 28% were unsatisfied with the overall pilot experience.

Below are some comments participants made in the open-ended question section of the survey:

- I LOVE the Blackboard app for the iPhone. I thought it was easier to look at my grades and navigate around easier than on the computer. Not to mention I have it in my pocket at all times!
- It’s a new system, so it will take some getting used to. LIKES: Tests - FINALLY you can save your work throughout. DISLIKES: grades no reference to % - just a number - that means I have to go back and look. Discussion board seems much harder to navigate through multiple discussions than Angel.
- Navigation got easier as class went on. Email feature in Angel is better, in BB your email responses (or at least mine) didn't show up - I had to go to DSU email.
- Angel is a lot more simple and accessible. Blackboard makes work more difficult.
- The Course Page and Discussion Board for the courses are not really user-friendly for me. It either takes too many clicks to get to what I want or the links are not very visible and you have to search around on the page to find what you want. It’s not very intuitive for a new user.
- I believe this is a good program to use, but I have not been able to utilize blackboard collaborate on my laptop. I have everything that is required, according to my syllabus, but it was not working.
- Overall, I think this is a good program.
- I could not figure out my email. Such as where to find older emails sent and where to find my emails I sent out. Blackboard was very slow at times and I just feel Angel is so much easier to navigate.
- I didn’t like the fact that I couldn’t access my email from blackboard. Overall I like blackboard.
- Take the time to get to learn it. It’s not difficult, just different from Angel.
- I enjoyed the tool. It was really easy to use. As far as the email. The options to simply send an email is a bit confusing. It might be easier to just try and create an email database like Angels.
- I did not like that I could not view my sent items in the email system. Only because then it required me to bring up another tool.
- The email is a little confusing with the threads.
- Do not expect the instructors to be proficient in it. The Discussion Board is not as user friendly as in Angel.
- Found it very confusing to navigate through, and was very unsatisfied with email.
- There are simply too many features. Dial it back. Clean up the interface. Less is more.
• ANGEL is much more pleasant and simple to work with. Blackboard allows you to truly stay connected to your coursework by leveraging the capabilities of your mobile devices! Angel is like computing via a rock by comparison.
• I really liked Blackboard over Angel. Easier to use, files open much faster. I LOVE the app for the iPhone, it allowed me to check my grades, assignments etc from anywhere. I was VERY disappointed when I found out my last two classes are on ANGEL and not Blackboard.

Next Steps and Proposals

The pilot study has yielded useful information in managing the transition from ANGEL to Blackboard Learn. To address the issues found during the pilot and improve the experiences for all faculty and students, DEIT has made the following improvements:

• Created a Blackboard Tour video for faculty and students that orients them to navigation
• Produced a Blackboard Quick Start Guide and new series of TIP tutorials for faculty to smooth the changes from ANGEL
• Upgraded Blackboard Learn to SP11 to address known issues and discussion forum concerns
• Recorded workshop sessions for those who cannot join at the time of the workshops
• Changed DSU Email link to Send DSU Email

DEIT has scheduled three online Blackboard overview sessions for students in August and will continue offering faculty and student professional development workshops on Blackboard Learn that highlight other integrated instructional technologies such as Panopto Focus, Blackboard Mobile App, Blackboard Collaborate, and Respondus. Further, DEIT has been using different channels to communicate with students and faculty regarding the training and support services and will continue to do so. Those channels include print and video communications to the Distance Education Advisory Group, the Academic Technologies Committee, direct email to academic program coordinators/staff assistants, postings on the DSU Daily, DEIT Department website and the DEIT Word of Mouse blog.

Finally, we propose follow up with the same group of faculty with these same survey questions in a year to track experiences. We will also poll or survey faculty and students post-fall rollout to make further enhancements for spring. DEIT will also communicate through existing committee structures to determine what other support faculty may desire in the form of workshops or job aids. We will upgrade the test environment to v.12 in December to start testing new features.