



Announcing New Learning Management System

Dear Kean Community,

Few decisions at any university make more difference to the lives of students and faculty than the choice of a Learning Management System (LMS). In face-to-face classes, the LMS is a repository of syllabi, assignments, threaded discussions, access to grades and more, replacing or backstopping distribution of material on paper or through email. For fully online instruction, the LMS takes centerstage: It becomes the central platform for teaching and learning.

That lesson was brought home with a wallop two years ago. In February of 2020, fully online courses constituted less than five percent of all course sections offered annually at Kean. Just weeks later, we were 100 percent online, requiring that every faculty member and every student become acquainted with our remote learning platform. Like every other university in the country, we moved out of the classroom and onto our LMS.

Blackboard has been Kean's LMS since 2005. It was the dominant player in the market at that time but has been steadily losing ground to competitors in the years since. Criticisms range widely, but most have to do with the complexity of the interface, the quality of support, and the difficulty of performing even routine actions.

Similar concerns were voiced at Kean as well. In response, the University Senate commissioned a Task Force which filed a report in August of 2020 asking for a thorough review of Blackboard and at last two alternatives: Brightspace and Canvas. President Repollet then charged a University Learning Management System Task Force to do just that. It conducted its work during the balance of 2020 into 2021 and deposited its report in April. Responding directly to recommendations from the Senate's report, the University Task Force conducted extensive user evaluations, involving students, faculty and staff in the assessments.

The results were clear. Among all constituencies and on almost every LMS-based task, Canvas came out on top. Brightspace was in second place. Blackboard, even in its newest iteration, was a distant third.

We are therefore pleased to announce that Kean University will transition to Canvas. Our goal is to have all courses on Canvas by Fall 2023. To that end, we will soon be setting up an Implementation Task Force to tackle the platform migration, training and other issues involved with an undertaking of this magnitude.

Even for those of you cheering this decision, we know that this will be disruptive. We are committed to retaining all of the good efforts — assignments, readings, elements of course design, etc. — that you have put into Blackboard and porting that work as seamlessly as possible into Canvas. And we are confident that, once you have become familiar with Canvas, you will find it a more satisfying, functional platform that will enhance instructor-student interactions and save time for everyone involved.

We close with heartfelt gratitude to the Senate and University Task Forces for their diligent, timely work on this issue. They engaged all of Kean in reaching their conclusions. We applaud their outstanding work.

Sincerely,

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