

On the Radar: Blackboard Planner and Blackboard Advise help students to plan a career path and stay on track

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Ovum view

Catalyst

One of the most pressing issues facing the higher education industry today is that students are not achieving their goals. Many students are struggling to complete their degrees, and according to the *Harvard Business Review*, 12.5 million people in their 20s have earned college credits but not received a degree. Even for those that do obtain a degree, several struggle to launch their careers. Learning management system (LMS) provider, Blackboard, has created Blackboard Planner – a new course and career-planning mobile application – and Blackboard Advise – a web-based tool to help advisors better guide their students. Using these tools, students can plan a career path, register for classes, and complete a degree. By creating this student planning and advising tool set, Blackboard will change how institutions help their students to persist, graduate, and pursue careers.

Key messages

- Blackboard Planner and Blackboard Advise change how institutions help their students to plan a career path and stay on track.
- The new tool set is compelling to use due to its integration with Blackboard's LMS, Blackboard Learn, and mobile application Bb Student.
- Through partnerships with Burning Glass Technologies and Roadtrip Nation, Blackboard Planner is the only mobile application that provides students with current labor-demand data and on-demand videos from professionals.

Ovum view

Blackboard is well positioned to enhance the student success solution landscape in the near future, given the breadth and reach of its products, its understanding of the challenges in the higher education industry, and its influence in the market. Consequently, Ovum recommends that institutions consider the use of Blackboard Planner and Blackboard Advise to support their student success strategies.

Recommendations for institutions

Why put Blackboard Planner and Blackboard Advise on your radar?

Blackboard Planner is the first mobile student planning tool that enables students to explore degrees and careers that align to their goals and interests. Through partnerships with Burning Glass Technologies and Roadtrip Nation, the tool arms students with real-time labor-demand data and on-demand videos from current professionals. Complementing Blackboard Planner, Blackboard Advise combines the insight into student plans with student sentiment and predictive analytics, to help advisors keep students on track.

Through a series of recent acquisitions and partnerships, Blackboard has filled the gaps in its suite of student success tools, and demonstrated its commitment to both career planning and student success. Moreover, by making course and career planning easier for students and advisors, as well as mobile-accessible, and integrated with two of Blackboard's most used products, its LMS Blackboard Learn, and its mobile application Blackboard Student, institutions can better support their student success strategies.

Highlights

Background

Headquartered in Washington, DC, Blackboard is most commonly known as the provider of Blackboard Learn, the company's LMS. According to Ovum's *2015/16 ICT Enterprise Insights* survey, Blackboard/WebCT was the most widely used LMS globally, with 17.4% of institutions utilizing the solution. This indicates the overall strength of Blackboard's capabilities and by purchasing some of its suppliers and distributors, and investing heavily in open source, the company has found new paths to success.

Building on its accomplishments, Blackboard has created a new tool set for student success. Launched in 2016, Blackboard Planner is the first native mobile student planning tool that enables students to explore degrees and careers that align with their goals and interests; understand the financial, academic, and career implications of their decisions; schedule and register for classes; and access internships and jobs that align to their pathway choices. Through partnerships with Burning Glass Technologies and Roadtrip Nation, Blackboard Planner also provides students with rich labor demand information and thousands of on-demand videos from professionals.

Designed to complement Blackboard Planner, Blackboard Advise is a web-based advising tool that combines insight into student academic, career, and financial plans alongside predictive analytics to help advisors offer better proactive guidance and more easily identify at-risk students. Both Blackboard Planner and Blackboard Advise are changing the way students explore degree and career pathways to increase the likelihood of success.

Current position

Over the past two years, Blackboard has evolved by acquiring MyEdu, launching Job Genie, and has now partnered with Burning Glass and Roadtrip Nation, to create Blackboard Planner and Blackboard Advise. Undoubtedly, these actions demonstrate Blackboard's commitment to both career planning and student success, and has filled the gaps in its suite of student success tools. In 2015, Blackboard entered into a strategic partnership with Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (NWTC) to collaborate in the creation of its new student success tools. Both Blackboard Planner and Blackboard Advise were built together with NWTC through a development process that incorporated feedback not only from NWTC staff and students, but also in-depth student success research with other institutions.

With Blackboard Planner and Blackboard Advise, Blackboard's goal is to solve the problem of student success, which includes the broader focus of giving students a clear path toward graduation. With Blackboard Planner, students can learn more about themselves by exploring career paths based on their interests, and identify majors and degree programs at their institution that lead in that direction. If they are interested in learning more, they can watch videos – provided by Roadtrip Nation – of people

describing their own paths toward a particular career. Students can see their progress toward completing a major, and identify the amount of time it would take to attain a credential that steers them toward completion. They can also use the academic planning tools in Blackboard Planner to view their major and course choices in the context of job opportunities as provided by Burning Glass.

Blackboard Planner can be accessed from inside of the Blackboard Student mobile app. Institutions that license both products can provide their students with a seamless experience between planning capabilities and everyday teaching and learning capabilities. Paired with Blackboard Planner, Blackboard Advise provides student advisers and career counselors with a 360-degree view of the student experience, their course selections, grades, and how students are engaging with Blackboard Planner. This allows advisers to provide students with the best support possible to help keep them on track. While there are other tools in the market that offer similar capabilities, they are not in the form of a mobile application – where students spend the majority of their time – neither are they integrated as are Blackboard Planner and Blackboard Advise.

The future success of Blackboard Planner and Advise will depend on how well the tools support institutions in their commitment to improving student perseverance and success, and help to bridge the gap between higher education and employers. Moreover, institutions will have to ensure that students are actively engaged with the tools and are using them on a consistent basis. Currently, there is a small group of early adopters, which includes NWTC. However, these institutions can be used as examples to encourage greater adoption by other institutions. At the end of the day, whether institutions partner with Blackboard or another student success solution provider, institutions have a moral and financial obligation to go above and beyond to help students succeed.

Data sheet

Key facts

Table 1: Data sheet: Blackboard

Product name	Blackboard Planner and Blackboard Advise	Product classification	Mobile student pathway-planning, scheduling, and registration, and integrated advisor tool
Version number	n/a	Release date	2016
Industries covered	Higher education	Geographies covered	North America
Relevant company sizes	Large	Licensing options	Multi-year licensing available
URL	www.blackboard.com	Routes to market	Via Blackboard
Company headquarters	Washington, DC, US	Number of employees	2,500

Source: Ovum

Appendix

On the Radar

On the Radar is a series of research notes about vendors bringing innovative ideas, products, or business models to their markets. Although On the Radar vendors may not be ready for prime time, they bear watching for their potential impact on markets and could be suitable for certain enterprise and public sector IT organizations.

Further reading

"Blackboard starts to deliver against its vision for online learning", IT0008-000276 (July 2016)

Ovum Decision Matrix: Selecting an Online Learning Platform for Higher Education, 2015–16, IT0008-000245 (September 2015)

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