

California State University, Chico

LET'S TALK: BLACKBOARD'S CONVERSATION WITH CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, CHICO

California State University, Chico selected Blackboard Learn, 9.1™ to replace WebCT Vista as its learning management platform after a comprehensive evaluation against Moodle earlier this year. Numerous factors were involved in their decision, but the ability to use the full breadth of the Blackboard Learn platform and leveraging Blackboard's open standards including the full support of Common Cartridge and Basic Learning Tools Interoperability were significant factors in their selection.

Chico State also cited the wide range of Community Programs that are available to clients as an invaluable resource for impacting future releases and sharing best practices with peers – a resource that was unmatched by other commercial and open source management systems that were evaluated.

We engaged in a conversation with Scott Kodai, Manager of Distributed Learning Technology and Classroom Technology Services at CSU, Chico, to learn what went into the evaluation process and what he is looking forward to as his institution prepares to upgrade to Learn 9.1.

The evaluation: Blackboard vs. Moodle

CSU, Chico selected Blackboard Learn 9.1 to replace WebCT Vista as its learning management platform after a comprehensive evaluation against Moodle – what are your thoughts on this decision?

From my perspective when we looked at Blackboard versus Moodle, Blackboard had a road map saying that they're going to provide the features in Vista that we rely on like learning modules, gradable rubrics, and term support. Nowhere in Moodle could I find that road map; the response was usually, "Well, it's open source, you could build those features yourself."

QUICK FACTS

- ▶ Blackboard client since 2005
- ▶ 15,000 students
- ▶ 1,000 faculty members
- ▶ 2,500 Course Sections on Blackboard every semester



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blackboardlearn.com/clientstories

What it came down to was, whether we wanted to have a learning management system that we could control, where we could implement the features we want the way we want them and fix our own bugs and spend all of our focus on the learning management system? Or do we want a learning management system that's supported by Blackboard, where the features that we need are being developed by Blackboard, so we can focus our efforts on integrating with the campus? Blackboard allows us to focus our efforts on third party tools, on reporting, on analytics, on grade exchange with the student information system and on those types of things.

Chico State's evaluation of commercial and open source course management systems was one of the most extensive we've heard of - can you describe the process?

We had a team of faculty and a team of instructional designers that went through a rubric of all the different features and capabilities and they rated them for ease of use and whether or not they met our needs or exceeded our needs. Blackboard won ninety-five percent of those categories.

Then we looked at it from a technical perspective. The main differences from a technical perspective were that Blackboard supported Oracle, but I think what really sold us was that fundamental philosophy of, "Do we want to perfect a learning management system or do we want to have a learning management system that we can perfect its integration?"

That was really the compelling thing for us - having the content module, having the community module, having the ability to have the standard base support, having the learning tools Interoperability (LTI), having the LIS services available, having the common cartridge availability was really the thing that tipped us over the line to go with Blackboard Learn.

To learn more about the Release 9.1 Upgrade Cohort program, visit blackboard.com/cohort today.

To learn more about upgrading to Learn 9.1, visit blackboard.com/upgradecenter.

If you are considering an upgrade to Blackboard Learn™ 9.1 and want to know more about how other institutions have conducted their own LMS/VLE evaluations, visit blackboard.com/evaluationresourcecenter.

As you prepare to upgrade to Blackboard Learn 9.1, what are you most looking forward to?

We're excited about Blackboard Learn because, after five years on WebCT Vista, we're now on a product that is being actively developed and we have a voice in what features get implemented. We're involved in the Service Pack Six Beta, we're involved in the Collaborate Beta, and we're involved in the Product Development Partnerships for Service Pack Eight. We're involved in the 9.1 Cohort Program, the Suggestion Squads, Bug Squads, we are actively engaging with Blackboard to get the features that we need in the product.

How important are open database, building blocks, and open standards for Blackboard Learn?

Some of the most exciting things about Blackboard Learn are the open standards, the open database and the ability to add building blocks to expand the capabilities. As I've said before, we're all about meeting faculty needs. So, if a faculty member comes to us and says, "I want to do this special thing" the ability for us to make the learning management system do that, without having to modify the base code, and participate in that environment is key.

How do you think Blackboard excels at partnering with their clients?

The partnership with Blackboard has improved dramatically. We need to be involved in what features are developed, how they are developed and when they are rolled out. We want to be involved in early design, mid development testing and then rolling them out. We want to stay right on that cutting edge.

We're working with Blackboard all the time and the response has been good. Blackboard is engaged, they're asking questions, they're giving the right answers and we're starting to see, with Service Pack Six, some delivery on those results. I am very, very happy.

