

# Planning and Executing an Upgrade: The Cohort is Key

Through past experience and lessons learned, the University of Richmond determined that premeditation was essential when upgrading their learning management system. By participating in the Upgrade Cohort program, the University was able to compare notes with their peers, and experts at Blackboard, to develop and execute their most successful upgrade to date – a move to Blackboard Learn, Release 9.1.

Home to one of the highest ranked liberal arts schools in the U.S., the University of Richmond supports a growing population of 4,045 students and 379 faculty members. Within the University's 60+ majors and thousands of courses, zero will be taught by teaching assistants. This means Richmond's faculty is involved at every step of the educational process and not surprisingly, highly invested in educational technology like Blackboard Learn.

## A Guided Approach to the Upgrade

In an effort to maximize their return on these investments, the University of Richmond began planning in the fall of 2009 for an upgrade to Blackboard Learn, 9.1. As part of that undertaking, the University joined Blackboard's Upgrade Cohort program, a series of virtual meetings designed to help organizations plan and execute their Blackboard upgrades.

"The Cohort program was awesome! I highly recommend it for institutions planning an upgrade. It takes you through the entire upgrade process, from start to finish." said Fred Hagemeister, Academic Technology Services Coordinator at the University's Center for Teaching, Learning & Technology.

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## Training the Faculty

Through the Cohort sessions, the University of Richmond gained access to training best practices and documents for use with their faculty. These resources formed a significant part of their outreach efforts to course instructors and faculty. “The more you can do to help your faculty get familiar and comfortable with the upgrade the better. That way, there’s less of a ‘shock factor’ when they wake up one day and Blackboard is different.” Training documentation was just one part, however, of the upgrade plan developed and implemented by the University of Richmond. In addition, the Center for Teaching, Learning & Technology developed live, face-to-face training sessions for their faculty.

“We created several workshops; one on the ‘basics’ for those who have never used Blackboard before, and a ‘changes’ workshop for those who had. It really helped them feel more comfortable with the features and functionality available to them.”

These sessions allowed faculty to have hands on practice with features like test creation, calculated columns within the grade center and other functionality new or polished in Release 9.1. This enabled Fred’s team to focus more on the big picture, and less on training, when their institution switched exclusively to their new learning management system in the summer of 2010.

## Advice for Peers

“The biggest thing I would recommend, to my peers, would be to start planning early,” said Fred, “because you can never plan enough.” By thoroughly investing in their upgrade plan, and participating in the Upgrade Cohort program, the University of Richmond was able to successfully upgrade from Blackboard 8.0 to Release 9.1 and acclimate their faculty and staff to the platform before, and not during, their LMS transition.

**To learn more about the Release 9.1 Upgrade Cohort program, visit [blackboard.com/cohort](http://blackboard.com/cohort) today.**

**To learn more about upgrading to Learn 9.1, visit [blackboard.com/upgradecenter](http://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](http://blackboard.com/evaluationresourcecenter).**