

Rationale for Proposed Charge on Learning Management Systems (LMS)

Submitted by Robert Boikess

Rumors began circulating late in the fall 2016 semester that the Rutgers administration was considering adopting Canvas as the sole learning management system (LMS) supported by the University. These rumors gained some credibility when an e-mail was sent to all faculty members urging them to attend one of a series of workshops on Canvas. Soon a number of IT staff members began to tell faculty members off the record that they had been told that the decision had already been made to adopt Canvas and eliminate support for Sakai and Blackboard. These rumors caused an outcry of alarm from faculty members, particularly New Brunswick users of Sakai. Perhaps as a response – at least in part - to this outcry, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs Barbara Lee appointed a predominantly faculty ad-hoc committee, chaired by Prof. Doug Blair, and charged it with recommending the best LMSs for Rutgers. The charge seems subsequently to have been modified to include recommending if it is practical to reduce the numbers of LMSs used in the University to only one.

In part to respond to this situation and in part to advise the Blair Committee, the New Brunswick Faculty Council adopted the following resolution

Be it resolved that the New Brunswick Faculty Council

1. very strongly recommends that Sakai be retained and fully supported as a Rutgers University learning and project management platform, at least in New Brunswick.
2. asks that faculty teaching Rutgers courses be involved from the beginning in discussions of future changes to instructional technology and course support.
3. asks the Rutgers administration to take great care to ensure that the instructional technology needs of the Division of Continuing Studies does not take precedence over the needs of our traditional undergraduate and graduate programs.

Since the number and nature of Learning Management Systems is a matter of concern to faculty, students, and staff all on the campuses of Rutgers, and since there is considerable variation among campuses in the Systems that are in use, it seems appropriate, indeed vital, that the appropriate Senate committee look into this matter.

I suggest that the Committee on Instruction, Curricula, and Advising be charged as follows:

Consider the nature and use of the available Learning Management Systems on all the campuses of Rutgers and make recommendations to the Administration for improvements that also protect the rights and interests of faculty and students.