

Chabot College
Canvas Sandbox Faculty Feedback as of 4/26/16

At this point, we have heard from about half of the Chabot Canvas sandbox Faculty.

To Whom It May Concern:

I have been teaching online at Chabot College for over 5 years using Blackboard. I have experience developing vodcasts, consider myself to be computer literate, and offer several online courses each semester.

My concerns at this time with Canvas are based on its interface, its usability, and its non-user friendly design:

- It is not as intuitive as Blackboard (too many steps to reach content, instead of accessing content in folders for Bb),
- The overall aesthetic is not-motivating and very confusing. The lack of color and the excessive input of text make it a dull interface,
- The transfer of one of my Blackboard courses proved incomplete (no answers to the tests transferred, visuals (pictures) and links were also missing).

At this time and given my preliminary survey of Canvas, I do NOT perceive any benefits for me (or my students) to use Canvas over Blackboard. Canvas interface is not as user-friendly as Blackboard, on the contrary to say the least.

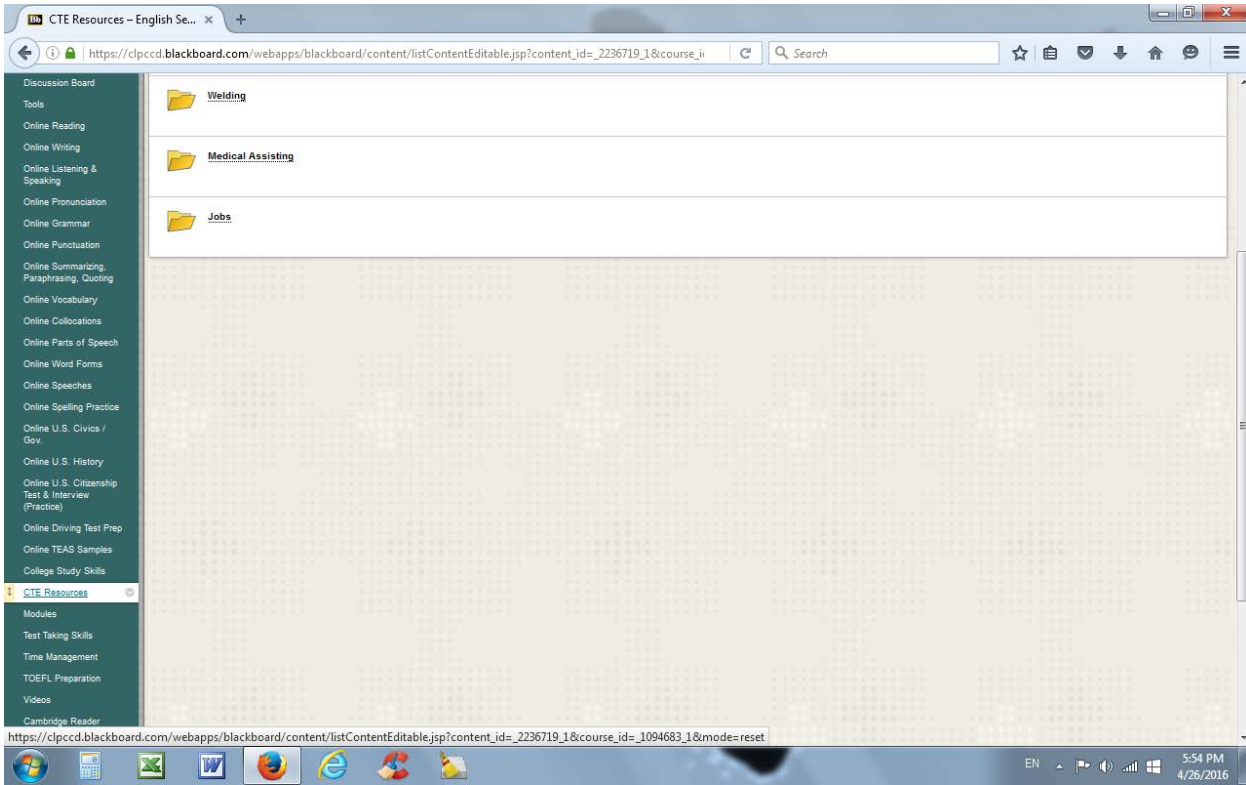
- ⇒ To make a responsible and informed decision about a switch to a better, if not comparable platform, MORE TIME to access and MORE conversation between users (Faculty, students, and staff) is needed. This has NOT been the case at Chabot College.
- ⇒ The process to evaluate Canvas as a viable platform has been rushed this semester (Spring 2016) and done with very little input from the campus community.
The cross-district advisory group is comprised of only 4 Chabot faculty representatives. There is a need for more time to include additional Chabot faculty into the process to evaluate Canvas, and for more students to provide feedback on their experiences with this platform.
- ⇒ Input from vendors or other “campuses” CANNOT replace our own assessment. Not taking the time to complete a responsible analysis with as many users as possible is irresponsible and the consequences could be significant :
 - (1) Online course offerings diminishing as faculty are not trained nor inclined to invest time and energy into a platform with lesser appeal and functionality.
 - (2) Higher attrition rates in online courses with students not invested and frustrated with Canvas.

[Language Arts Instructor]

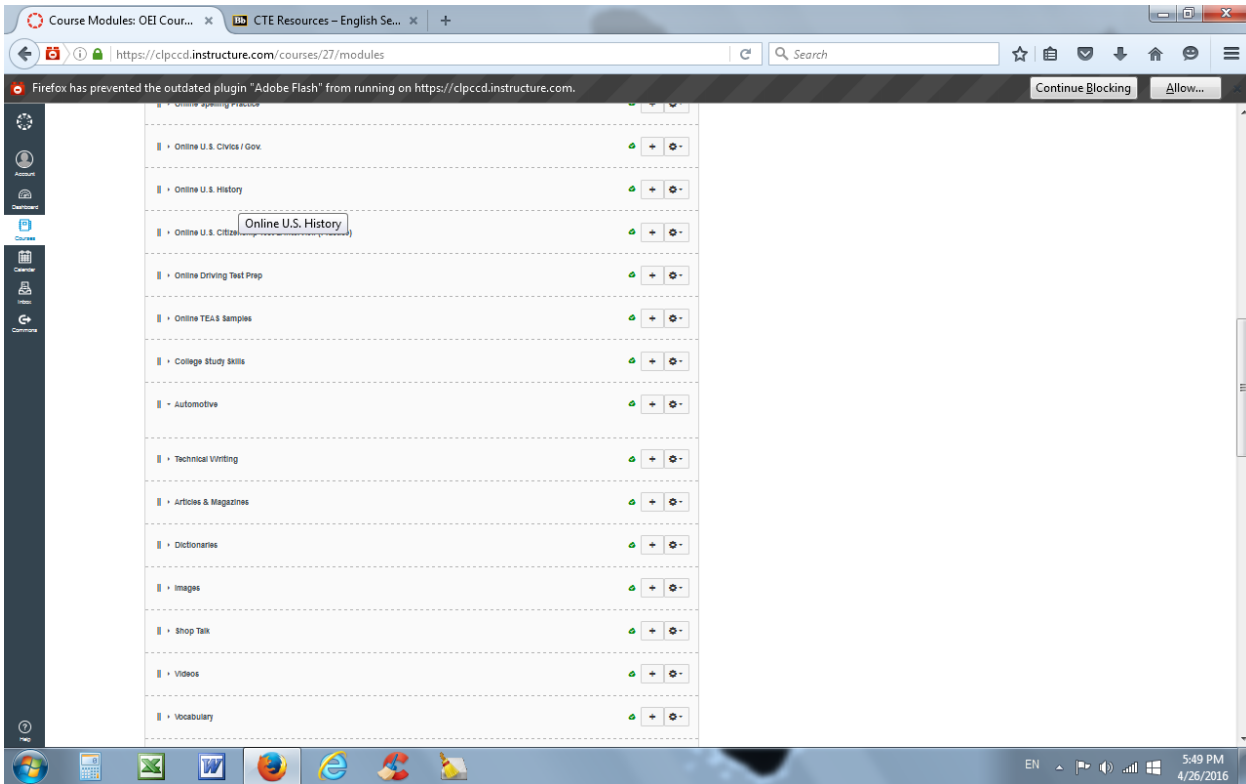
Please share the following feedback based on my experiences. I tried migrating ESL 150 course shell from Bb to Canvas, and here are the problems identified:

Problem 1: I feel disoriented because the hierarchical structure readily visible in Bb is lost in Canvas.

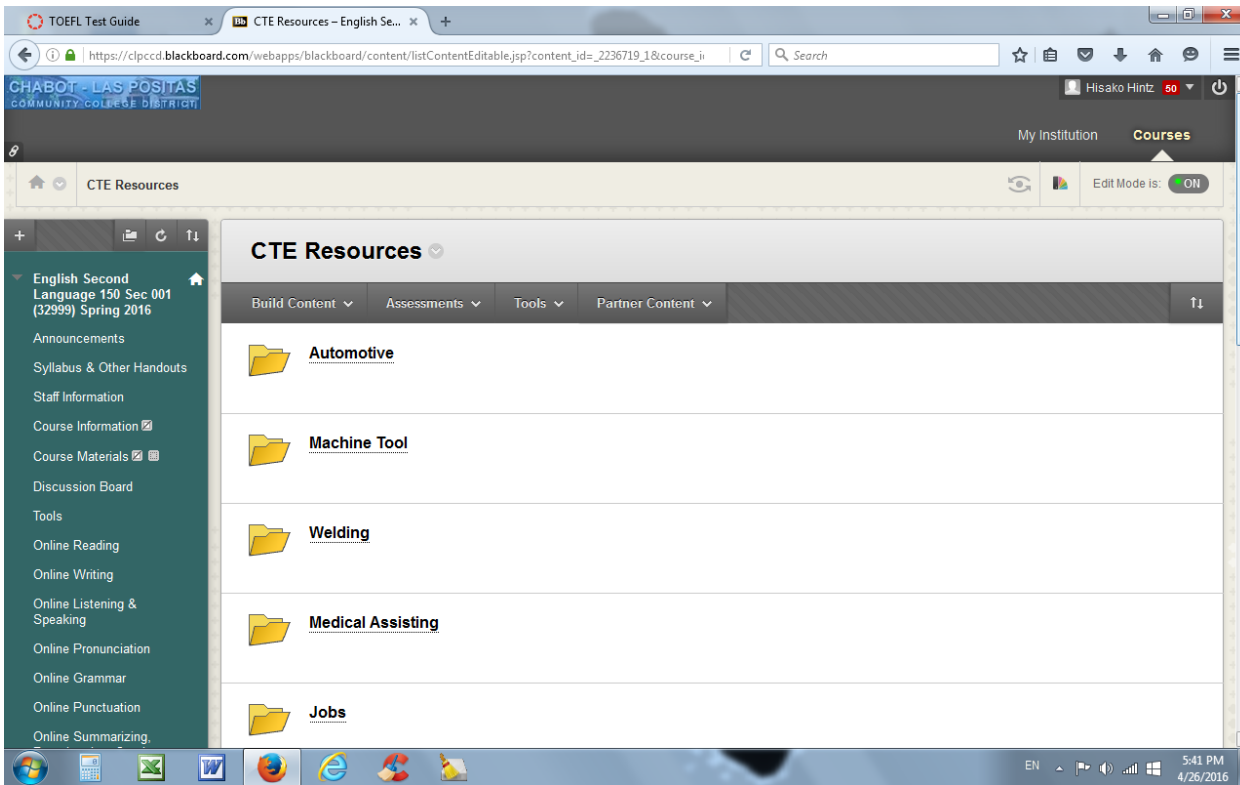
Problem 2: A folder title is lost. Please compare the attachment titled “Bb menu with CTE resources title”:



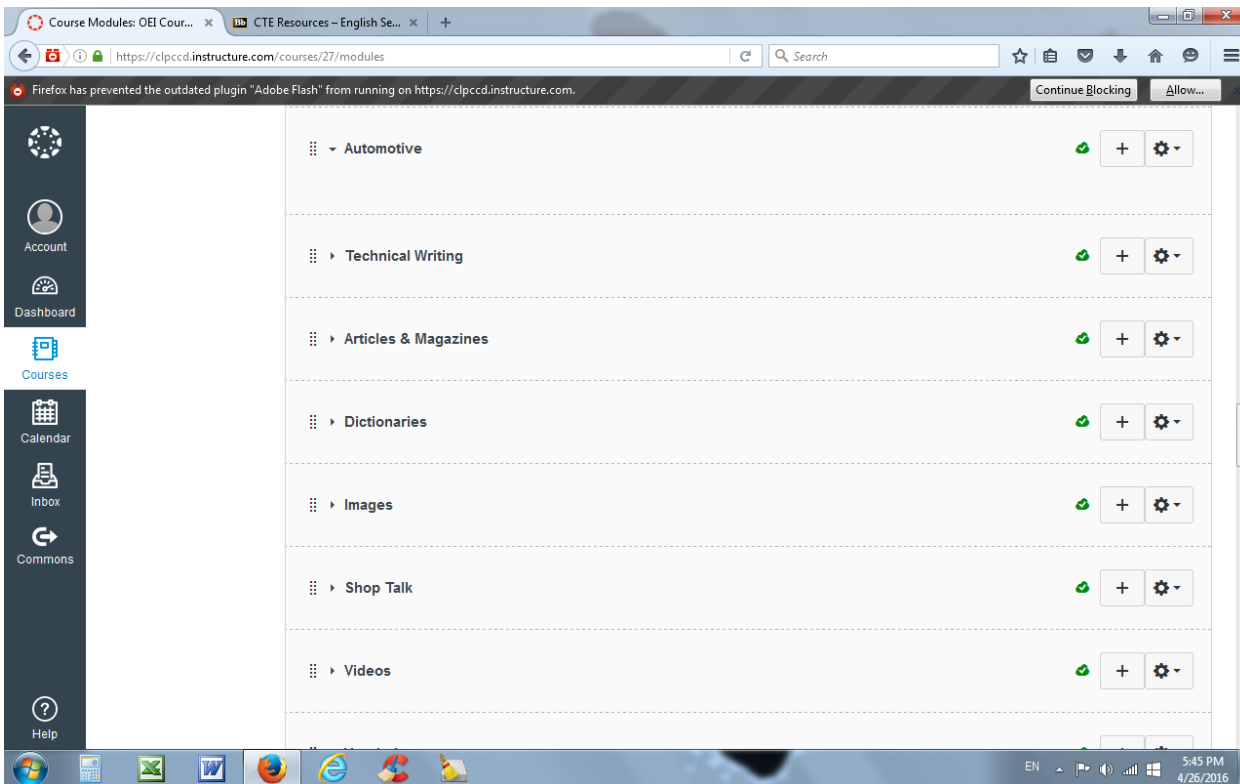
with “Canvas menu without CTE resources title.” The title “CTE Resources” doesn’t appear in Canvas.



Problem 3: There is no folder icons in Canvas. Please compare the folder icons seen in “Bb CTE resources”

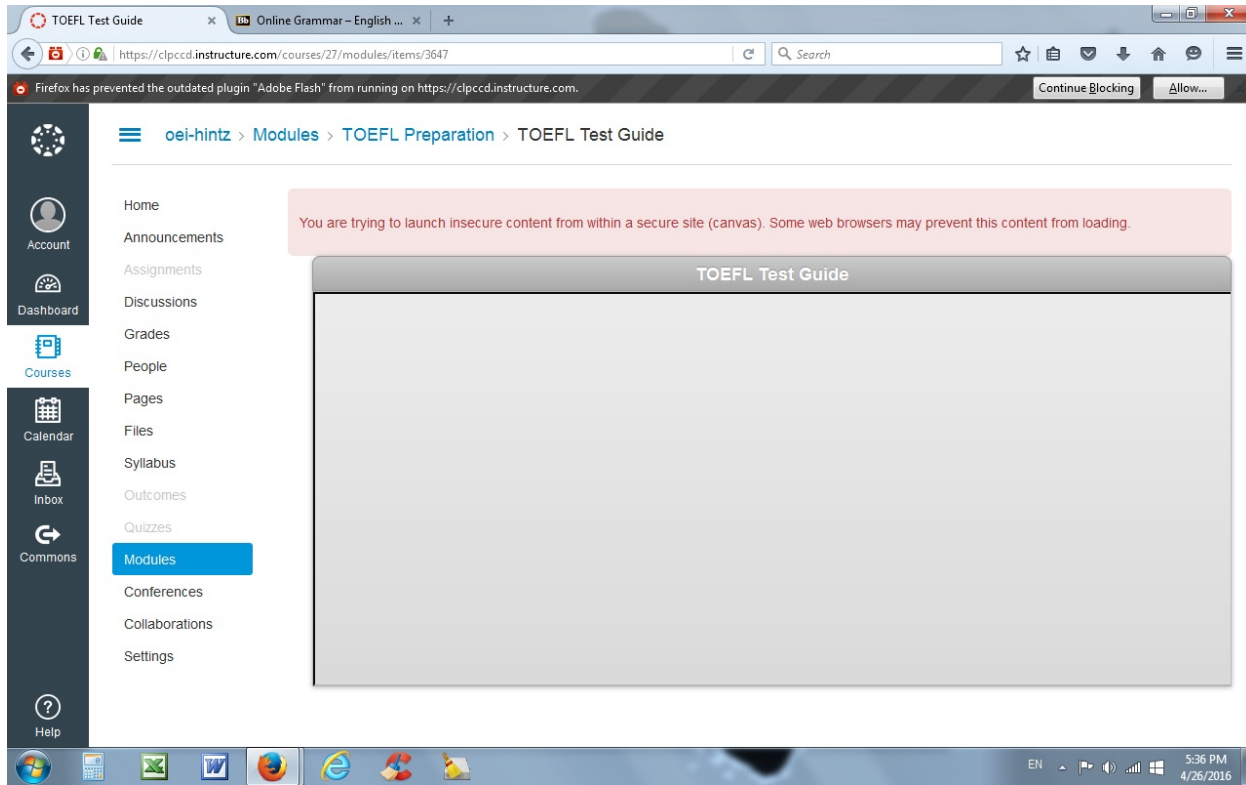


with “Canvas CTE resources.”



How can students distinguish between groups of materials, for example, for AUTOMOTIVE and WELDING with almost the same set of contents?

Problem 4: None of the links I tested showed the content that is shown in Bb. Instead, I got an error message as shown in “Canvas link error message.”



Problem 5: I am not sure if the PDF files migrated successfully or not while Ppt and Word documents did.

Here are my thoughts based on this limited experience with Canvas.

There seems to be no intuitive path for students to navigate through the course shell in Canvas with many folders like 150 or 127 because the hierarchy that exists in Bb is lost in Canvas.

I myself feel disoriented even though I have a map of the contents. Students, with no map to help them navigate, would at least need file folder icons and other visual cues, which aren't available in Canvas.

Within Bb, it took years to build and improve the content, organization, and presentation in a way students independently working can navigate the material successfully.

Especially regarding the CTE folder contents, I am concerned that the collaborative effort of ESL and CTE instructors could be impaired.

Here are the biggest concerns I have at the moment:

- We haven't had sufficient time to make an informed decision. The faculty should have been consulted about Canvas at least a year ago so that we would have had sufficient time to experiment with it and evaluate the degree of difficulty we could anticipate in migrating course contents over to this new, untested delivery system. This issue was brought up at today's BSI committee meeting, and Carolyn was interested in any findings. I told her that we haven't had time to review or discuss in any details

the pluses and minuses of this possible move. I think it is something worthy of the BSI committee discussion and consideration.

- Not all instructors use Bb for online courses. In our ESL program, Bb is used for at least two lab courses that have no textbooks and operate with the online resources collected in it over the years as mentioned above. Language learning, as many of you know, often requires face-to-face interactions and benefits from non-verbal cues and immediate feedback, such as a smile or frown.
- Honestly, Canvas seems messy and it appears to be in the developmental stage. While they are developing the necessary tools (as Bb had to go through to reach its current state from its infancy), how are we going to meet the needs of our students in the interim? At Cal State Hayward, I understand that it took about three years just to transition from Web CT to Blackboard (from 1996 to 1999). The application back then was actually simple compared to the complexity of the current Bb software and what we are trying to do now.

One question that came up as we are discussing this is whether or not those colleges that have adopted Canvas have had significant experience with either Bb or Web CT.

In conclusion, a cursory look at Canvas has given me significant concerns about the negative impact it may have on our program as we go through the pains of migration.

Included in a separate email to members of the department:

I cannot let that Bb to Canvas conversion happen unless the content migration is guaranteed. Two ESL courses (150 and 127) heavily rely on the vast amount of content stored in Bb over the years by colleagues. Angela, Kent, and I visited Linnea last weekend and came home with books and other things that may be of use to us and our students. I also came home with a strong need to fight back the possible move. Here is an excerpt of my letter to Linnea, which may explain why in more detail:

“Speaking of 128, thank you for the books and 128 binders. The 128 binders will be additional, valuable resources for ESL 150, new guided ESL skills lab, which you created. It’s going well, being offered for the first time. Therefore, I must seek support from other faculty in fighting the LMS conversion. I heard Canvas is cheaper than Bb but only about 60-70% of the content is likely to migrate with no guarantee. Do you remember how rich the 128 Bb shell is--because of the years of work you put into that course, which had no common textbook? Many (if not all) Excel students benefited from it because 128 replaced the required ESL CTE supplemental courses, which didn’t survive with only a handful of students. Many of students who took 128 have graduated and/or transferred. I know it from attending the end-of-the-year celebrations until the year Kent took over the coordinatorship. Anyway, I too kept adding resources to the 128 shell, so even if 90% migrates, who has the time to check which links or which files didn’t migrate? Most importantly, without that course shell, 150 cannot operate! The same can be said about 127, for which Angela found and stored online resources that the 127 students continue to use.”

[Language Arts Instructor]

Grading: the window which shows student work is limited to just a few work types and downloading appears to be slow. Speed grading does not seem to move from one student to the next the way it does on Blackboard. Might take a lot more time.

[Applied Technology & Business Instructor]

Here are some of my observations with Canvas:

1. The SCORM LTI is not enabled in Canvas, so all SCORM content will not import into Canvas. I was going to try the SCORMcloud app plug-in, but the free trial account has a 100MB limit, which is too small for my modules.
2. Several external links do not import into Canvas, but some others do. I noticed that many that did not import from BB had statistics tracking enabled, and the ones that did import did not. I didn't examine every link to see that this is true for all, but that seemed to be a pattern. Links to non-secure sites will not display in Canvas, but the link to the external site did work (same as BB). Exporting the content as a Common Cartridge Package included the links to the external sites, but did not include attached files on text items. Kind of a pick your poison scenario. I guess the work-around could be to import both, and then delete duplicate info and merge content from both imports.
3. Tests with formula questions appeared to import, but the formula to calculate the answer doesn't display in the edit window, nor does the tolerance or table of values for the variables.
4. Hierarchy of folders in BB does not consistently carry through to Canvas.
5. None of the adaptive release settings transferred from BB.

[Applied Technology & Business Instructor]

- Migration: The migrated course site is a mess. There are duplicates of many items and they are not in the correct areas. Wondering if it is just faster to rebuild from scratch, which is a ridiculous solution.
- Some items are in triplicate since it places them in multiple areas - so confusing for students.
- No links copied over.

- Something that takes 1 or 2 clicks in Blackboard, takes 5 or 6 clicks in Canvas.

- Looks ugly

- Have to publish/unpublish everything - even though dates are entered.

- Content items within content areas (such as modules) don't show a lot of text. So can't put due dates, descriptions.

- It seems like Canvas is trying to make it seem like its more content rich than it actually is.

- Everything is collapsed, no option to expand.

- Have to load image in files before putting them into the site

- If I had a choice, I would not move to Canvas at all. Why change to something that is inferior to the system we currently use?

[Language Arts Instructor]

DB –

- Only one thread, so students can't start their own threads under assigned discussion board
- DB's only have a close date, the DB will be open until it closes. Example, if you have a DB due towards the end of the semester, the DB will be open all semester

Assignments –

- Assignments show up when a module opens, which is how you can keep future assignments closed to students. You can't change open close dates in the Assignment folder

Quizzes –

- Uploaded multiple versions of same exam and quizzes (three of each quiz or exam).
- Have to edit each one or points will not show, even if you launch it.
- Easy to launch, but due time has to be manually entered, "11:59". No clock or scroll down menu

Pages –

- While the folders from Blackboard did transfer to "Pages" only the PowerPoint slide links work. None of the PDF or Word files transferred, but are listed in the "Files"

Uploading from a Blackboard site –

- Folders didn't upload, but all files did, but no longer organized. Would have to create new files and drag and drop documents into each one.
- Lost a few files, but only around 10%

General –

- Can't personalize the color or style, very dull

Setting up a New Class –

- Easy, but I'd use modules so assignments will open a week before each due date and close after due date
- Why both Module and Assignments?
- Couldn't alter menu (is it because trial version?)

[Applied Technology & Business Instructor]

I am already aware of the pitfalls of Canvas and my preference is still for Blackboard. But I will work with almost anything.

[Math & Science Instructor]

- Updating contact methods is confusing, couldn't add "registered services." So confusing just to add methods for students to contact you. Is email only internal (with notification-type alerts sent)?
- Why does it look so cheap? Design is not clear, busy interface. Resembles Moodle a lot. Uses outdated elements of web design.
- Could not change the menu items.

- Announcements and discussions in a bulleted list. They not display with the text expanded automatically – students have to click on the bulleted item to view the announcement or discussion forum description. And it appears that students cannot start their own thread and must “reply” to a starter post - not the best method for a discussion board.
- No journals area - only seems to have minimal functions.
- Import completely changes course design – not recognizable. Some content just didn’t migrate, though didn’t appear on the list of errors.

[Language Arts Instructor]

Canvas Trial Review

By a Chabot College Instructor

Background

I have been teaching online classes of various levels for sixteen years and have worked extensively with Blackboard, eCollege, Web CT, Course Compass and Etudes and have gone through faculty training for WebCT and Etudes. I have taught fully online classes using all five platforms. Canvas is the sixth Course Management System I have looked at. I also hold a Certification in Online Teaching and Learning from Cal State East Bay and have spent considerable time doing online curriculum development.

For this trial and review I worked with three different development course sites within the Canvas Sandbox. For the first course development site I built online curriculum from scratch, for the second course development site I migrated content from an existing Blackboard site, and for the third course development site I utilized a course template offered in the Commons area.

First Impressions

At first glance Canvas does not look as visually interesting as most of the other Course Management Systems I’ve worked with. There seem to be ample text editing opportunities but not any obvious ways to embed graphics, photographs, and other visual elements, as these must be uploaded into a file folder on the course web site, then selected to insert into any content. This is a potentially time consuming way to provide visual interest to a course web site. After working with the system for a while I was able to create pages with graphics but it took considerably more time to do this than it would have in Blackboard. There is the option of uploading a file directly into a content area, but it then appears as an attachment and not as text.

In addition, there is a section of External Apps which at first glance looks like a great resource, but since Instructor must contact the publisher or content owners and obtain a code, these are not readily available resources to click and add to the courses in Canvas. This makes Canvas appear more content rich than it may actually be. I did not have the time or resources during this trial, however, to fully assess the potential.

The items offered in the Commons area, such as backgrounds, templates, and lesson plans, potentially a great resource for Instructors, were disappointing and not as useful as I had anticipated. I would need more time to fully assess these potential resources, however, as I only employed one template during this trial.

Specifics

The biggest difference that I see between Canvas and Blackboard is that in Canvas, there are more steps for the Instructor to create and deploy content and there are also more steps for the student to access course materials and assignments. For example, in Blackboard, there is the option to have an expanded (rather than a collapsed) view of content areas such as Discussions and Announcements for both the Instructor and student. From what I see in Canvas, there is no option for the expanded view for students; it appears that they see only the first few sentences of an announcement, for example. This could make students less aware of important information such as that contained in the announcements since they actively have to click through to access the entire announcement. It has been my experience from teaching online for the past sixteen years that the more steps there are to get to a content area or assignment, the more likely students may miss essential information because they don't click through.

In addition, it appears that there is no option to upload content such as files or images directly from the desktop to Canvas during course development. It looks like the Instructor must upload files or graphics to a file folder on the Canvas course web site, then select items from the expanded file folder view in the correct content area in order to add them to the course web site. In this respect, Canvas seems to be much more web based than Blackboard, which allows course developers to upload more content directly from the desktop without the additional steps of having to upload items to an online folder then navigate a way to add them to specific content areas as needed. This would mean a greater time commitment for online course development. There is, however, the option for students to upload files directly from the desktop when submitting assignments, so this is a useful feature.

General Comments

Working in Canvas is definitely not as intuitive for the instructor as most of the other Course Management Systems I have worked with. There is a steeper learning curve right from the start, and there seem to be more steps involved in creating course content such as assignments and modules than I have seen on most of the other Course Management Systems I've worked with. This would mean a greater time commitment for online Instructors. There are also more click-through steps required for students to access course content areas and assignments, as compared to Blackboard, which seems to have a much more streamlined navigation system than Canvas. The concern here is that this will necessitate a greater time commitment for online students, as they will need to spend more time and click through more steps to access content and complete assignments. This could be a potential issue in terms of both time commitment and attention span. It might take students a while to get used to the Canvas system if they are used to using Blackboard, and they would probably benefit from some kind of online training to help them acclimate to Canvas.

Migrating content into Canvas from Blackboard was problematic; some content carried over and some did not. For example, quizzes and tests carried over the test banks but not the answers, meaning that the Instructor would need to manually re-enter each correct answer into the test bank to create a usable quiz or test before being able to deploy it. Other course content areas did not transfer into the correct content areas, there were

some duplicate items, and a thorough readjustment and careful editing of any migrated materials would likely be essential if a course is migrated from Blackboard into Canvas.

In addition, editing or reordering items such as content area items or the main navigation menu must be done from a separate menu in settings under the area specific tab (such as Navigation, for example). This means additional steps for the Instructor when designing or adjusting curriculum in Canvas. Blackboard allows for editing or reordering directly from the specific content areas without having to navigate additional click through steps and tabbed menus.

In terms of migrating content from Blackboard to Canvas, the content areas that did copy over were not always in the correct area, necessitating the need for the Instructor to completely reorganize the content before being able to deploy it. In addition, none of the links or annotations for the links carried over and most of the attachments did not carry over. Given all of these issues it might be almost the same level of time commitment to fix the issues in the migrated course content as it would be to build the courses from scratch using the same content.

Conclusion

Working in Canvas does not seem to be as intuitive for the instructor as most of the other Course Management Systems I have worked with. There is a steeper learning curve right from the start, and there seem to be more steps involved in creating content such as assignments and modules than I have seen on most of the other Course Management Systems I've worked with. I have fairly extensive experience with teaching online using various Course Management systems and I found Canvas hard to navigate at first. After spending more time working with it I grew more accustomed to the system, but there was definitely less of an initial comfort level with course development that I saw when I first worked with Blackboard.

In addition, from what I saw in my limited trial and review, I would anticipate that students would not be as comfortable with Canvas as they seem to be with Blackboard, due to the fact that there are more steps required to access every area of the course, including crucial ones like the Announcements area; usually a source of important information. Of course I can't fully predict what the student response will be, based on this limited trial, but my experience as an online teacher tells me that this is likely.

Both the apps and the resources offered in the Commons were not as useful as they could be, making Canvas appear more content rich than it may actually be. Again, however, I did not have time during this limited trial to fully assess this potential resource. In addition, there seems to be a lot of branded applications suggested, such as Google Docs, for example, which doesn't come across as unbiased in the online experience.

While I understand and respect the desire for a uniform Course Management System to be used for California Community Colleges, if this is the only motivation to switch from Blackboard to Canvas I did not see a compelling reason to do so during my trial and review of the system. If Canvas were to be implemented I believe that it would be very important to have sufficient lead time for the migration and training for Instructors and students in order to have a better chance at success.
