

MINUTES
STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF FLORIDA
BOARD OF GOVERNORS
INNOVATION AND ONLINE COMMITTEE
JUNE 19, 2014

1. Call to Order

Chair Ned Lautenbach convened the meeting at 8:36 a.m. on June 19, 2014, with the following members present: Ed Morton, Vice Chair; Dr. Manoj Chopra; Dean Colson; Tom Kuntz; Wendy Link; Pam Stewart; and Norman Tripp. A quorum was established.

2. Minutes

Mr. Colson moved that the Committee approve the minutes of the meeting held on March 19, 2014, as presented. Dr. Chopra seconded the motion, and the members concurred.

3. Learning Management Systems

Chair Lautenbach explained that today's presentations were following up on a recommendation of the Task Force for Postsecondary Online Education in Florida – to have a common Learning Management System used by institutions in both the State University System and the Florida College System. He said the University System of Georgia has a common LMS and that system's Chief Information Officer, Curt Carver, would be sharing that system's experiences in selecting and implementing a common LMS. After that, two university CIOs and a CIO from the Florida College System would be giving their assessments of the advantages and challenges of Florida taking a similar approach to Georgia's.

Chair Lautenbach recognized Dr. Joel Hartman, Vice Provost and CIO of the University of Central Florida, to first explain the purpose and use of learning management systems.

Dr. Hartman defined an LMS as a Web-based software application that supports the development, delivery, assessment, and administration of online learning experiences. He said that an LMS can be used to facilitate teaching and learning in face-to-face, blended, and fully online environments. He said that an LMS has more than 250 features and functions, including course rosters and student authentication; course materials and learning objects; communications tools (email, chat, video); progress tracking, testing, gradebook; ePortfolios; mobile applications for students and teachers; and learning analytics.

He said that LMSs frequently integrate with other campus systems, such as student and human resource systems, so they can exchange data. Additional integrations include non-LMS instructional tools and resources, such as publisher materials, and other learning systems and tools. The trend is for greater integrations with other systems.

Chair Lautenbach recognized Dr. Curt Carver from the University System of Georgia. Dr. Carver indicated that his office at the Georgia Board of Regents provides several system services. He said the system has its own private cloud, so institutions have access to endless bandwidth. The LMS is centrally hosted, as is the common library management system. Some institutions host their own student information systems and others are hosted by his office, but they all use a common system.

Student advising is the same way. Dr. Carver's office also centrally hosts the financial system for 28 of the 31 institutions.

Dr. Carver said that the Georgia system had had a common LMS and the vendor terminated it, which triggered the creation of a 20-member system task force to select a new common LMS. The task force consisted of representatives of universities, including faculty and students. The system office and Information Technology professionals participated in the discussions, but could not vote.

He stated that the selection process took a year. Seventy-seven LMSs were evaluated and the field was narrowed to five finalists. The vendors of the five final LMSs made them available for a 90-day period so that all faculty and students in the system had an opportunity to use them. Approximately 30,000 surveys were then evaluated by the Task Force, which resulted in a unanimous recommendation for one LMS.

Two years after the process started, deployment of the selected LMS began being phased in. Although the LMS is centrally hosted, each institution can tailor it to its specific needs.

Dr. Carver indicated that, because the Georgia system is centrally hosting the LMS on its own private cloud, there is a savings of about 25% compared to what public cloud hosting fees are; this has resulted in approximately \$7.5 million in savings over a five-year period.

His office negotiates third-party add-ons centrally. Most of those have an eight-fold decrease in cost associated with the add-ons, and campuses are allowed to opt-in to those services. There are no annual escalators in the five-year contract, and the contract must be renegotiated at the end of the five-year period.

Dr. Carver said the Georgia system has implemented a fairly substantial faculty training effort in the use of the new LMS.

Public K-12 will be moving onto its private cloud in the upcoming year, so that the LMS can be used to offer courses in the K-12 system. Advance Placement and dual enrollment classes can be offered statewide.

Dr. Carver said that, although the LMS is hosted by his office, each institution brands it for its own use. The institutions are realizing savings that come from centrally hosting the LMS, which is still structured the way institutions want at their respective institutions.

He advised that, if the Board moves forward with a common LMS, a task force that is very inclusive should be created; both the students' voice and the faculty's voice are very important. He suggested being clear about the decisions that should be made by the business owner (the "what") vs. the information technology staff (the "how").

By including students on the Georgia system's task force, it was clear they were very focused on having just one LMS for each institution. The task force found that it is disruptive to students when departments or individual faculty ran different LMSs.

Chair Lautenbach recognized Mr. Elias Eldayrie, Vice President and Chief Information Officer at the University of Florida, to share his perceptions of advantages and challenges of implementing a common LMS.

Mr. Eldayrie said that the first question he usually asks when changes are being discussed is “What problem are we trying to solve?” He said it is not about the technology, but rather, how faculty teach and do research. He said that the LMS market is extremely dynamic and institutions need the flexibility to change as needed, rather than being trapped with one LMS for the long haul. Changing to a new LMS is not technically difficult. But converting content and re-training faculty and students is difficult. That difficulty is why institutions usually change LMSs once every five years or so. He said that advantages in having a common LMS would include reducing cost and making it easier for students as they transfer among institutions. Universities could learn from the experiences and best practices that have evolved at other campuses in their efforts to implement the common LMS. He also said there are a number of ways to reduce costs, if that is the intent.

Chair Lautenbach recognized Mr. Lance Taylor, Associate Vice President and CIO of the University of North Florida. Mr. Taylor said the advantages of having a common LMS would include the convenience extended to students, the potential for cost savings, the opportunity to have built-in system redundancy for disaster recovery, the opportunity for content sharing among faculty at various institutions, and the sharing across the system of additional add-ons as they are developed.

Mr. Taylor said challenges would include faculty acceptance of moving to a different LMS than they are currently using, development of add-ons, potential loss of institution-specific support, status of current contracts with LMSs at the various institutions, and integration of current other systems with a new, common LMS. He said that none of these challenges are ones that could not be overcome, but they are challenges nonetheless.

Chair Lautenbach recognized Mr. Paul O’Brien, Associate Vice President of Instructional Technology and CIO at Indian River State College. Mr. O’Brien said that all the challenges to having a common LMS in the university system are also present in the Florida College System. He mentioned that 35% of enrollment in the college system – over 300,000 students – is in online courses.

He noted that, when he chaired the college system’s council of CIOs last year, he asked if anyone would object to having a common LMS and no one did. He did not anticipate that he would get a similar answer as quickly if he were to ask the same question on the academic side.

Mr. O’Brien suggested using Complete Florida, now that the Florida Virtual Campus has been rolled into it, as a vehicle to think about the merits of having a common LMS. He said that learning analytics will require us to think about a common student information system to go along with a common LMS. Other states that have a common LMS, such as Wisconsin and Georgia, also have a common student information system. The Task Force on Postsecondary Online Education in Florida considered making such a recommendation, but realized it would cost hundreds of millions of dollars. He said that perhaps a common LMS would head us in the right direction. The implementation of performance-based funding in both the college system and the university system has made it even more critical to get our students to successfully complete their courses and graduate.

Chair Lautenbach said that a common LMS was a recommendation of the online education task force. He said that he felt that a common LMS would allow a student to take courses anywhere in the state, essentially creating an online university with the same interface at any institution the student attended. The challenges mentioned, such as getting faculty re-trained, would be difficult, but if the focus is on the student, then a common LMS becomes pretty fundamental. The Board would

not be solving an information technology problem or a cost problem; it would be solving an education problem. He thinks it is worth having staff come back in the fall with a recommendation.

Mr. Tripp said the Board is about the system and if the system cares about students, a common LMS should be considered. Mr. Morton said there was a similar conversation the previous day about a common problem the universities were addressing individually. He said that, in his opinion, having a common backbone would enhance student learning and the transfer of knowledge and be an asset to educators and a benefit to taxpayers, who would no longer have to pay for the experimentation of various LMSs at each institution. He said that a study was worth undertaking, because a common LMS had the potential for profound ramifications for our system.

Mr. Colson asked if there were cost estimates, and Chair Lautenbach said no. Mr. Colson asked if there were any reasons to suspect universities would not welcome having a common LMS. Chair Lautenbach said he had talked to two or three people in the middle of this issue at universities and they said a common LMS would be a great idea – if their LMS were selected.

Mr. Colson moved that staff come back in September with an analysis of the pros and cons, advantages and challenges of a common learning management system. Mr. Kuntz seconded the motion and the members concurred.

4. Priority Issues

Chair Lautenbach said that the Committee had had several discussions since the May 8 meeting and came up with a list of seven priorities. He said that after additional work with the Chancellor and staff, he would like to narrow the list to five. None of the other issues would be taken off the list, but, because there are so many, there is a need to prioritize them. The five priority issues he proposed for the Committee to consider over the next year were: Learning Management Systems, Faculty Training, Strategic Planning, Quality Metrics, and Program and Course Offerings. Mr. Colson moved acceptance of Governor Lautenbach's proposal. Dr. Chopra seconded the motion and the members concurred.

5. Adjournment

Chair Lautenbach adjourned the meeting at 9:36 a.m.

Ned Lautenbach, Chair

Nancy C. McKee, Ph.D.
Associate Vice Chancellor