

LMS TRANSITION PROCESS CHADRON STATE COLLEGE



OUR LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM EXPERIENCE:

In 2006 we made the decision to change our Learning Management System. Our original system, referred to in this document as System 1, was an internally hosted, non-enterprise version of a well-known LMS that relied too heavily on our ability to provide sustainable reliability, and did not permit the scalability and updates of an enterprise system.

Following a significant downtime event during a critical point in the academic calendar we made a decision to move to a new system, called System 2 in this document.

System 2 was extremely robust and very well-supported by our hosting partner. It met our goals in providing both service to students and peace of mind to our administrators. It was also very expensive.

When our budgets tightened, we were forced to evaluate every option to reduce spending with a goal of minimizing staffing and program reductions. To this end, we sought to identify a new model for our learning management system that could meet our functionality and reliability goals at a more manageable cost.

In February 2009 we made a decision to implement Sakai using rSmart's Sakai CLE. rSmart would also serve as our implementation, hosting and support partner.

TRANSITION RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Open source was new to us. It quickly became obvious that we had to find a partner who really knows the system and the community to help with the implementation and support. rSmart was our choice.
2. Creating a clear case for change increased support for both of our transitions.
3. A short transition is preferable. A longer transition only lengthens the pain and does not seem to eliminate concerns among those who are reluctant to change.
4. Allowing faculty to participate actively in the transition provided benefit. Offering this level of engagement to our campus has allowed our Sakai users to feel that they own their destiny in Sakai. As a result, the transition generally has created positive experiences across campus.

THE TRANSITION PROCESS

System 1 to System 2	System 2 to rSmart Sakai	Findings
Gaining Support		
The driver for change – lack of system reliability was visible and painful to faculty members. This created understanding of the case for change.	Faculty knew that lower system costs would reduce staff reductions. Given this, they supported the decision despite the transition that it created.	We believe that we were able to undergo this scope of change because our faculty understood and supported the objectives of the projects.
Selecting the System		
Our senior leadership brought experience with System 2 and vendor relationships from a previous job. This created comfort and confidence.	A faculty member and our instructional designer investigated Sakai, attending the Sakai conference and meeting other institutions using Sakai. After selecting Sakai we issued an RFP for Sakai services and support. Three vendors responded and we selected rSmart.	Having a faculty member participate in the evaluation was very helpful. We also invited a Sakai user/administrator from a different institution to speak to our faculty, which created additional support.
Timeframe		
The transition of courses and content spanned 12 months.	During the 3 summer months, we migrated about 60% of the courses we needed for the fall semester. During the fall semester we migrated almost all of the courses needed for the spring semester. Then during the spring semester we migrated the remaining fall courses that were not migrated in the first cycle.	The faster transition was definitely an advantage. The transition period is stressful and there is not an advantage to dragging that out.
Transitioning Content		
The System 2 vendor completed most of the transition for faculty members, which did not prove to be very satisfactory.	We completed the content transition ourselves. Faculty could choose to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do it themselves • Do it with assistance from staff • Have staff do it for them Many faculty chose to migrate their own courses	We found it more effective to transition the content ourselves. Faculty and administrators do not like to lose autonomy. In this implementation, our method of rolling out Sakai supported their autonomy.
Training		
Training was spread over an extended timeframe. Faculty did not feel a sense of immediacy in learning the system.	rSmart provided several training sessions for the faculty that were very well-received. Two-thirds of our faculty members attended training.	The training that rSmart provided was very effective.