

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Jeffrey Thomas  
Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs

**FROM:** Paul Cuddy  
Chairman –Course Management/Distance Learning committee  
ITC Faculty representative

**RE:** Description of Decision to Select Blackboard for Course Management and Distance Learning at UMKC SOM

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I serve as one of the faculty representatives appointed to the ITC and was asked to serve as Chairman of a faculty committee charged with recommending a single platform for course management/distance learning at UMKC. I represented the ITC in serving as committee chairman. Here, I describe how the decision to adopt Blackboard was reached.

On November 3, 2003 Mary Lou Hines authorized the creation of a faculty committee and requested that this group select a single platform to support course management/distance learning at UMKC. Deans across campus were contacted and asked to appoint faculty who were knowledgeable about the use of this software within their school to serve on the committee. Representatives to the committee appear at the end of this correspondence. The committee membership included experienced Blackboard and WebCT users.

The committee met for the first time on 12/9/03 to agree on the plan to address the charge to the committee: recommend one platform for course management/distance learning to the Information Technology Council on or before Spring break 2004. Two meetings were held on 1/20/04 and 1/27/04 for presentations by each of the committee faculty members. Student input was also sought at this point and student representation was added to the committee.

The presentations took this format: using a standardized template agreed to by the committee, faculty surveyed the use of both platforms within their school and identified those features most commonly used and viewed as essential to their success. The faculty also identified any critical features which they would need to investigate further at vendor presentations anticipating that they may be required to adopt an alternative platform. This information was provided to the committee in written form and also by oral presentation (copies were maintained in a public folder with access restricted to committee members - DLC). Participation at these sessions was open, constructive and informative. Minutes were kept for each committee meeting and were distributed promptly to all committee members. During these sessions the committee obtained and discussed information

pertaining to the costs for site licenses, utilization data, and published comparisons of Blackboard and WebCT Campus Edition (available within the public folder).

The committee agreed to schedule sessions with both vendors where committee members could direct questions to WebCT and Blackboard representatives about availability of specific features in both platforms. These took place on February 17th (WebCT) and on February 19th (Blackboard) and were scheduled by campus personnel. Sheryl Coleman and David Antonacci were present at both vendor presentations and assisted vendors with their presentations. The vendors were specifically asked to address technical questions submitted by the committee within their presentations. Both presentations were well-attended and took place in the instructional computer lab at the Administrative Center.

On March 2, 2004 the committee met again to discuss the vendor presentations and to identify precisely what type of technical support faculty should be entitled to receive in converting to an alternative platform. The faculty also engaged in discussions about the need and quality of support that should be available on an ongoing basis to support course management/distance learning at UMKC. Tom Brenneman took an active role in these discussions and outlined the commitment that IS would make in supporting the conversion process and in providing subsequent ongoing support regardless of the platform adopted. After much discussion the committee achieved consensus on the following points:

- There was strong committee support for both platforms but no committee consensus that one platform was superior and clearly preferable. The products appear to be of equal technical performance.
- It is essential that adequate personnel be available to support the conversion process and there must be sufficient ongoing support
- There should be centralized support for this software
- IS should purchase "add-ons" to supplement the software to offset any shortcomings regardless of the platform selected.
- Campus administration should announce the decision to adopt a single platform quickly and support it fully.

Although committee members differed in which platform was preferable; however they were united in their willingness to support a platform which had the full support of campus administration. At the final meeting committee members indicated that they were adequately informed to advance the discussion to the logistics of voting. I indicated that the chairman would only participate in the decision in the event the committee was unable to arrive at a majority decision. (10 designated faculty members on the committee participated in this vote). Over the next several days committee members submitted their votes and when tallied there were as many faculty voting in favor of Blackboard as there were voting in favor of WebCT. At this point the chairman, acting on behalf of the ITC, forwarded the decision to the ITC for discussion.

On March 23, 2004 the ITC met to hear the results of the vote and the committee recommendations concerning the conversion process and ongoing support. Committee documents collected during the review process were available for review. Both the ITC and the committee understood that since we were limited to a single platform, inevitably

faculty would be upset regardless of the decision. Knowing this the ITC and the committee felt that every effort should be made to secure the necessary support to undertaken the platform conversion and provide ongoing quality support. Further, campus should make this decision promptly and make a full commitment to supporting the platform and the faculty and students who use it. The ITC believed it was essential that campus maintain a single platform for an extended period of time, certainly no less than 3-5 years and longer if feasible.

After much discussion the ITC voted to adopt Blackboard. Specifically the ITC agreed to the following:

- UMKC will adopt Blackboard for sole use on campus effective July 1, 2005 and thereafter UMKC will support only this platform for the next 3-5 years.
- All course management/distance learning applications developed after March 30, 2004 must be implemented on the Blackboard platform. Existing WebCT applications may continue to be used until June 30, 2005 and this use includes full campus support.
- UMKC will identify sufficient centralized support to facilitate the timely conversion of WebCT applications to Blackboard on a priority basis. In addition to staff support, this will include:
  - Purchase of vendor-based tools to assist in the conversion
  - Purchase of "add-ons" to supplement Blackboard, e.g., Blackboard Building Blocks.
  - Responsibility for support of course management/distance learning will immediately become centralized in a single unit which satisfies two support functions: a support team which addresses technical issues and a team equipped to engage faculty in issues of pedagogy

#### **Committee Membership:**

- **Arts & Sciences:** Todor Gounev\* Patrick Peebles\* Daniella Mallinick\*
- **Biological Sciences:** Michael Ferrari\*
- **Bloch School of Business & PA:** Julie Warm\*
- **Conservatory:** Joseph Parisi\*
- **Dentistry:** Cynthia Amyot\*
- **Education:** Judi Carlson\* and Molly Mead
- **Law:** Pat Harris O'Connor
- **Medicine:** Paul Cuddy\* (Chairman – ITC faculty representative)
- **Nursing:** Lynn Rasmussen\* Thad Wilson
- **Pharmacy:** Mary Euler\*
- **Student Representative:** Joshua Charles
- **Information Services:** Tom Brenneman, Tim Saxton, and Chandra DeRemer

\* voting members