Louisiana State University

By utilizing Moodle, LSU was able to dramatically increase CMS usage, increase training and support options, and significantly reduce reaction time

The LSU Moodle Experience:
In 2005, the students and faculty of Louisiana State University (LSU) were using two separate course management systems — our legacy LMS and an internally developed product called Semester Book. Later that year, LSU faculty, staff and students began developing a com prehensive strategic IT plan, which in part called for a sustainable, single course management system solution.

According to LSU, sustainability for a course management system incorporates concepts such as:

- The software development cycle
- The resources necessary to finance and maintain the CMS during this life-cycle
- The ability to evolve the CMS to meet ever changing demands
- The ease of feature development during this life-cycle

Semester Book, developed in the early 1990s, was not a sustainable option. Going forward, LSU faced the option of making additional investments in our legacy LMS or selecting an alternative platform.

Led by a committee of students, faculty and staff, LSU began a year-long evaluation of available proprietary and open-source solutions. In October 2007, the LSU evaluation committee recommended the adoption of Moodle as the single, campus-wide course management platform.

Moodle was selected for its sustainability, its flexibility to be easily customized to meet the University's changing needs, and its interoperability that allowed LSU's programmers to tie the application directly into legacy systems.

Additionally, LSU was freed from having to pay increasingly onerous licensing fees associated with a vended product. As an open-source platform, Moodle never requires such fees.

"Our community wants a system that can be easily fine-tuned to meet the changing needs of the University. With Moodle we will be able to quickly utilize new tools and features and make them work in our environment,"

- Robin Ethridge
Director of Portal Technologies and Academic Analytics, LSU

As part of the year-long study, the LSU committee performed a cost-benefit analysis of hosting Moodle internally on the LSU campus or having a vendor, such as Moodlerooms, host LSU's Moodle installation.

Moodlerooms' expertise in supporting Moodle code, along with its state-of-the-industry clustered hosting environment, provided LSU with a robust hosting solution that was more cost-effective than self-hosting.

Migrating from a CMS platform — no matter how imperfect — requires a thoughtful, comprehensive approach that includes bringing faculty concerns and questions into the forefront. Like many other universities, even LSU faculty members who were not completely happy with our legacy LMS or Semester Book were not keen to change. Semester Book users were comfortable with the way Semester Book worked. Our legacy LMS users were comfortable with the way the LMS worked. The prospect of learning a new environment was not appealing.

To build familiarity and acceptance with Moodle, LSU's Chief Information Officer, Brian Voss, held a series of informational forums prior to the implementation of Moodle. Faculty were encouraged to attend, ask questions and voice concerns. The forums provided an opportunity to assuage concerns and ameliorate frustration as well as provide critical feedback that allowed LSU to fine tune the LSU transition plan to better meet the needs of the faculty.

As a result of these faculty forums, LSU developed an aggressive, service-focused transition plan. From the end of February 2008 through the end of July 2008, all 5,000 of our legacy LMS and Semester Book courses were converted to Moodle. Busy with ongoing classes and research, many LSU faculty lacked the time and wherewithal to convert their courses. ITS support personnel were each assigned a particular college. They met with faculty members currently using a CMS, converted their courses and supported them as they learned the new environment. A formal Faculty Technology Center was opened in LSU's Middleton Library and provided a venue for additional one-on-one support.

Futhermore, one of the key benefits of using an open-source CMS like Moodle is that institutions have open access to the code. With commercial solutions, clients must wait for the manufacturer to find the time and will to fix bugs and features that do not work. By choosing Moodle, LSU has direct input on the quality and capabilities of the software. LSU is not a helpless bystander when it comes to improving its LMS system and has been able to quickly add functionality requested by faculty.

The flexibility to make university-specific adjustments has given faculty a greater involvement in the vision for Moodle at LSU.

By utilizing Moodle, LSU was able to dramatically increase CMS usage, increase training and support options, and significantly reduce reaction time — all within the financial footprint of its previous commercial CMS.

Only one year after it was deployed, LSU's learning management system saw:

- Concurrent usage as high as 24,000 users
- Average of 12,000 users during peak usage times
- 140% increase in user adoption
- 40% increase in instructor participation