

# Learning Management Systems at the University of Guelph

June 2008

Serge Desmarais, AVP Academic & Michael Ridley, Chief Information Officer

## Summary

The University of Guelph has decided to consolidate all its online course offerings on a single Learning Management System (LMS) in order to reduce costs, maximize resources, and establish a common platform for future developments. Following an analysis requested by the Provost, the University has selected Desire2Learn (D2L) as its sole LMS. This document outlines the rationale for the decision and the next stages in the migration process.

This decision was taken after review and approval by President's Executive Council and the Information Technology Steering Committee ([ITSC](#)). It was reviewed by both Vice President's Academic Council (VPAC) and the Information Services Council ([ISC](#)).

## Why Select One System?

Currently the University supports two Learning Management Systems: Desire2Learn and Blackboard (formerly WebCT). The former supports CE, DE, Guelph-Humber, and a number of hybrid courses (and is managed by the Office of Open Learning). The latter supports On-campus, training and hybrid courses at the Guelph campus and some courses on the regional campuses (and is managed by Teaching Support Services).

Supporting two LMS has significant cost implications (e.g. software maintenance, hardware support, courseware design staff and expertise, supporting interfaces to other systems). Further compounding this situation is the need to upgrade to the new version of the Blackboard environment in order to respond to performance challenges. This will require a full system upgrade (hardware and software) estimated at nearly \$2M.

Given the University's current fiscal constraints and the downstream sustainability requirements, it is prudent that the most cost effective solutions are enabled.

## Why Desire2Learn?

D2L has been very successfully used at Guelph for many years. In fact, the University partnered with D2L in the initial design of the system. However, faculty, students and staff at the University have been successful users of both LMS. At the request of the Provost, in the summer of 2007 a Task Group comprised of representatives from OOL, TSS, CCS and the Office of the CIO reviewed the state of both LMS and to determine if D2L could become the sole platform. Since both system were successfully supporting advanced online courses, the key criteria for selection were D2L capabilities in the following areas:

1. course development capabilities and system functionality
2. migration, support and integration
3. client services
4. compliance issues
5. costs
6. improved accessibility

Using this criteria as a foundation, the task group reviewed D2L and Blackboard usage at Guelph and Guelph-Humber, hosted a demonstration and visit from D2L, analyzed systems configuration and support, and explored six key questions that identified the major issues in the possible adoption of D2L:

1. Are there any technical barriers preventing us from using D2L for on-campus courses?
2. Could 1500+ courses be migrated and 850+ faculty be trained, successfully?
3. Are there significant benefits in moving from two systems to one?
4. Would D2L be a cost-effective solution for the whole campus?
5. What other factors should be considered?
6. Would the benefits of this change outweigh the costs, risks, and transition issues?

While a number of significant issues were raised in response to these questions, D2L was assessed to be a viable and sustainable option for the University.

The University did not investigate LMS beyond the two systems currently in use. This was not considered because of the need to leverage current staff expertise, build upon existing courses (some quite sophisticated), sustain a key vendor relationship, and minimize migration time (selecting an entirely new LMS would have required a substantially longer implementation period).

It is well understood that moving from one LMS to another will be disruptive and challenging. We anticipate concern about this decision. However, to not act would have been irresponsible, resulting in unnecessary expense being borne by the University.

### **Agreement with D2L**

Discussions with D2L have identified opportunities to create a more seamless e-learning environment on campus that is well supported and cost effective. Additionally, D2L is interested in partnering with Guelph, as it has in the past, to enhance the pedagogical strengths of the system and to extend its reach into Web 2.0 technologies (e.g. blogs, wikis, social networking applications, etc.). This progressive vision of an open e-learning environment will provide Guelph with the best aspects of a commercial LMS along with the experimentation and flexibility available in the community source environment.

### **Next Steps**

OOL, TSS and CCS have formed an integrated project team to manage this initiative. Richard Gorrie (Manager, Learning Technologies and Courseware Innovation, TSS) has assumed the role of Project Leader with the AVPA and the CIO acting as Project Sponsors. D2L, through its implementation teams, will provide project support, implementation services and professional services (for key interfaces and conversions).

The D2L Migration Project anticipates an 18 month transition plan. It will run alongside our current Blackboard implementation which will remain in full operation through the Fall 2008 and Winter 2009 semesters. There will be a D2L pilot program involving a small number of on-campus courses in the Winter 2009 semester, with all other courses running in D2L on the new system for the Fall 2009 semester.

Some course conversion and migration will begin in Fall 2008, with the majority of courses being migrated during the Winter and Summer 2009 semesters. Course migration and conversion, as

well as user orientation will be fully supported. In many cases courses will be converted relatively easily to the new system; in other cases extensive support will be required and provided.

A key aspect of the project plan is to ensure that adequate support is provided to Colleges, Departments and individual faculty during the course migration period. A variety of workshops, consultations, printed and online materials will be available.