

SUNY Selects D2L's Brightspace as its New Learning Management System

Introduction

Welcome! This is the first in a series of monthly bulletins from my office about the upcoming changes to SUNY's Digital Learning Environment.

**** Please note that because we are still in a "restricted contract period," this bulletin and any related information are considered confidential, for SUNY employees only. ****

As many of you know, SUNY's system-wide contract for its Learning Management System expires on December 21, 2022, following execution of a full three-year contract term and two available one-year extensions with our current vendor, Blackboard. Given the size of this contract, SUNY was required to develop and broadly circulate a request for proposals (RFP), and was charged with selecting the "best value" vendor from proposals submitted. This means that cost was not the only consideration, that usability, tools, analytics, solutions to existing challenges and anticipated future needs, the impact on our digital learning environment—essentially the real value-adds to faculty, staff, and students—were carefully considered.

The RFP development and review process was intentionally consultative and collaborative, beginning in earnest in November of 2018. My sincere thanks to the 69 distance learning professionals and 838 faculty from across 57 campuses who participated in the initial survey and interviews, and the more than 40 faculty and staff from 15 different campuses who participated in the RFP review process which included day-long presentations from the most highly rated vendors.

I am pleased to announce that at the conclusion of this extensive review, we selected **Desire2Learn's (D2L) Brightspace Learning Management System** to serve as the hub of SUNY's Digital Learning Environment. We are in the process of finalizing the detailed contract now to be sent for review and approval by the Office of the NYS Comptroller and the NYS Attorney General.

What's Next?

This is an exciting transition that we recognize comes at a challenging time as we continue our pandemic response. The good news is that we have time to do this and to do it well. Over the next month as work continues to have our contract approved, I will be charging three teams to help develop a comprehensive implementation, transition, and training program:

- The SUNY Digital Learning Environment (DLE) Steering Committee will identify and address strategic and policy questions around implementation—from resources to logistics to implementation approach as part of SUNY's digital transformation.
- The SUNY Online Core Strategy Team will make decisions about implementation and transition planning based on parameters set by the Steering Committee, and with input from the SUNY Digital Learning Environment Advisory Team.
- The SUNY Digital Learning Environment (DLE) Advisory Team is a campus/System advisory body that will provide input and feedback on the strategy for implementation to the Core Strategy Team. Those members representing SUNY-wide organizations will share information with, and solicit feedback from, their constituent members to the broader team.

Know that our priority is to make sure that individuals have access to the information and resources they need to yield all of the benefits of the new LMS, and that campuses have a clear window into the value that comes from all SUNY campuses coming together to utilize the same LMS.

How Will I Be Informed About the Progress of the Planning Groups?

We have identified communication as a clear priority and are designing multiple channels, in addition to this monthly bulletin, to provide information, answer questions, and address challenges. Look for a new transition website to be up and running by the end of July. We will include details on the website in our next bulletin.

In addition to the website, a project status dashboard is in development. We will announce a series of informational webinars and information will be shared on listservs and Workplace groups and updates. Information will also be included in presentations at SUNY university-wide meetings—we participated in the SUNYRA (registrars) meeting and the SUNY Chief Academic Officers virtual gathering and the SUNY Technology Conference.

What if I Have Questions Now?

Please do not hesitate to contact provost@suny.edu with any questions or concerns. In addition, if you are contacted by a vendor anyone outside of SUNY about this transition (which would be prohibited given that we are in a restricted contract period), please let us know and refer the individual to the e-mail address above.

Can I See a Preview of D2L's Brightspace?

Absolutely! You will receive information about webinars to help you get to know Brightspace soon, focusing on the specific elements in our contract. A Brightspace environment will also be set-up for preview. In the interim, please visit D2L online at: <https://www.d2l.com/higher-education/> and take a look at a few key program highlights below:

- Course level tools/features that address existing challenges/issues identified by faculty;
- Ease of use for content creation and building courses;
- Multiple and easy to access channels for faculty-student interaction;
- Strong/proactive mechanisms for Universal Design and accessibility compliance;
- Functionality to support non-credit continuing education, and training;
- Bulk course migration support; and
- Strong data analytics tools.

Thank you for reading and for your engagement in this important process.

The Power of All SUNY Campuses on the Same LMS and a common Digital Learning Environment:

Environment: Our accomplishments over the past year and a half as we worked together to respond to a national pandemic have made clear that we exceed expectations when we work together. Sharing an LMS in a common digital learning environment means we can better leverage System-wide resources like ITEC and the SUNY Online HelpDesk, more easily launch new supports for faculty development and student support, help one another in meeting shared goals around electronic accessibility, and can better share best practices and lessons learned. Importantly, if there is a problem, we can leverage our collective power as a System, to have it addressed. A common LMS system also benefits student transfer and faculty working across campuses. Share your thoughts at provost@suny.edu.