



Date: August 21, 2014

From: Academic Technology Council

To: Jim Bottum, CIO; DeWitt Salley, Director of Clemson Online

Subject: Canvas LMS Pilot Report

## Summary and Recommendation

In 2013, after surveying the Clemson Faculty on their experiences with Blackboard (see appendix A), the ATC adopted a resolution to undertake a further investigation of LMS alternatives. In the summer of 2014, therefore, a limited pilot of Canvas funded by CCIT through the ATC was conducted. A total of 11 faculty members from various departments at the University participated in this pilot. A non-scientific online survey of 115 students and faculty participants was conducted, and reports from the faculty members who developed and taught their online courses in Canvas were collected.

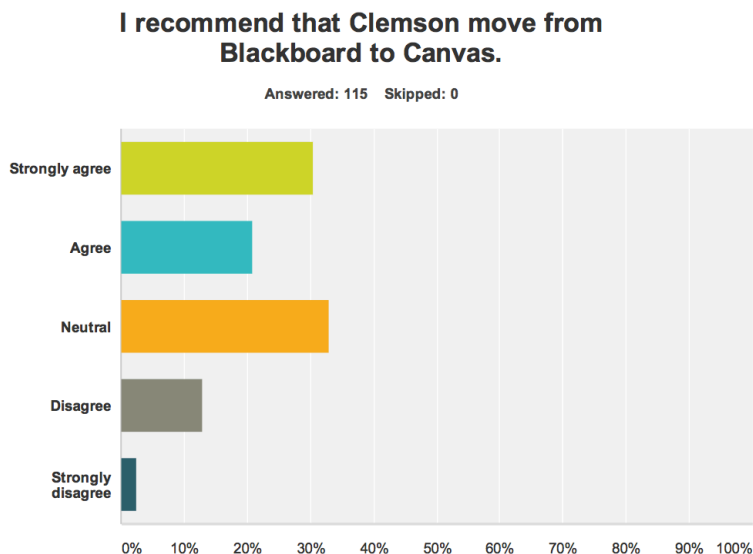


Figure 1: Survey data

The results of the survey show that 58.06% of respondents recommend that Clemson move from Blackboard to Canvas, 33.04% remain neutral on the question, and 15.63% oppose such a move. Qualitative comments from faculty echo this

sentiment (see appendix B and C for data).

## Background

In the Fall of 2012 the ATC (at the request of CCIT) conducted a survey among Clemson Faculty on experiences with the University's Blackboard learning management system (LMS). A total of 345 faculty members participated in this survey, of which 93.9% reported to use Blackboard in their classes. While the majority of respondents at the time, 57.8%, reported that they were satisfied with Clemson's Blackboard system, 65.1% also reported that they would support investigating alternatives to Blackboard (See Appendix B). At the EDUCAUSE conference that year, a group of Clemson representatives from CCIT, the ATC, and the IT Student Advisory Board (ITSAB) were introduced to a new learning management system called Canvas by Instructure. After attending a conference demonstration of the system, we decided to look into Canvas more closely. In subsequent discussions between CCIT, ATC and the ITSAB we then decided to set up a small pilot at Clemson so that we might gain a better understanding of its capabilities. To this end we purchased a Canvas cloud pilot for up to 400 students for an original term of 10/1/2013-5/8/2014. This term was extended at no cost to cover the Summer Semesters of 2014. We also purchased additional onsite training. The order was executed on 9/26/13 and paid for by the ATC. The total cost was invoiced at \$10,500 (\$7,500 for the pilot instance and \$3,000 for the additional onsite training). Note: The pilot included webinar training and documentation. Barbara Weaver of CCIT coordinated the training sessions for pilot faculty. We invited faculty from all the Colleges to participate in the pilot. In the end we got 10 volunteers. They were;

Janice Lanham — nursing; HEHD

Marilyn Reba — math; E&S

Dan Warner — math; E&S

Brian Bolt — animal vet science; AFLS

Jan Holmevik — English; AAH

Elizabeth Stansell — English; AAH

Larry Murdoch — Environmental Engineering and Earth Science; E&S

Tom Zagenczyk — management; BBS

April Pelt — English; AAH

Kathleen Nalley — English; AAH

I wish to thank them all for participating with their students in this pilot program. Individual statements from these faculty members can be found in Appendix D.

A big thanks is also due to Barbara Weaver of CCIT who coordinated the pilot on the behalf of ATC, and who worked as a liaison with Instructure and helped provide onsite training and support for the faculty participants.

## Hands-on Experience

In order to gain first hand experience with Canvas I decided to participate in the pilot myself, and I used the system to teach a section of English 3140 Technical Writing in the second summer session of 2014. I have never used Blackboard, or any other course management system in my teaching before, so the Canvas experience was a first for me.

The initial online training that was provided by Instructure was completely inadequate. Barbara Weaver reassures me that the follow up training that was provided after we complained was much better. However, having wasted two hours attending the first session, and since first impression is often last impression, I did not attend any other Instructure-led training sessions. If Clemson is going forward with Canvas I would caution against purchasing their online training services. With minimal to no training at all, therefore, I set about to design a Canvas Course for my class. I must mention that Barbara Weaver organized at least two face-to-face sessions where pilot participants could come in and get help with the setup. In the pilot the setup process was complicated by the fact that students had to be added to the course manually by each instructor.

I found the Canvas interface to be simple and easy to navigate. Once the course shell was created a checklist appeared which told me which steps to take in building the course. An afternoon's worth of work was all it took to get the basic course created and students added. Due to time-constraints I elected to add content throughout the course instead of setting everything up at once. This turned out to be quite advantageous as I was able to improve on the utility of the system the more experienced I became. In the first iteration of the course (which is the one that was taught) I used a simple announcement timeline to inform students about upcoming activities and events. In a subsequent revision, this was replaced with a more navigation friendly graphical interface.

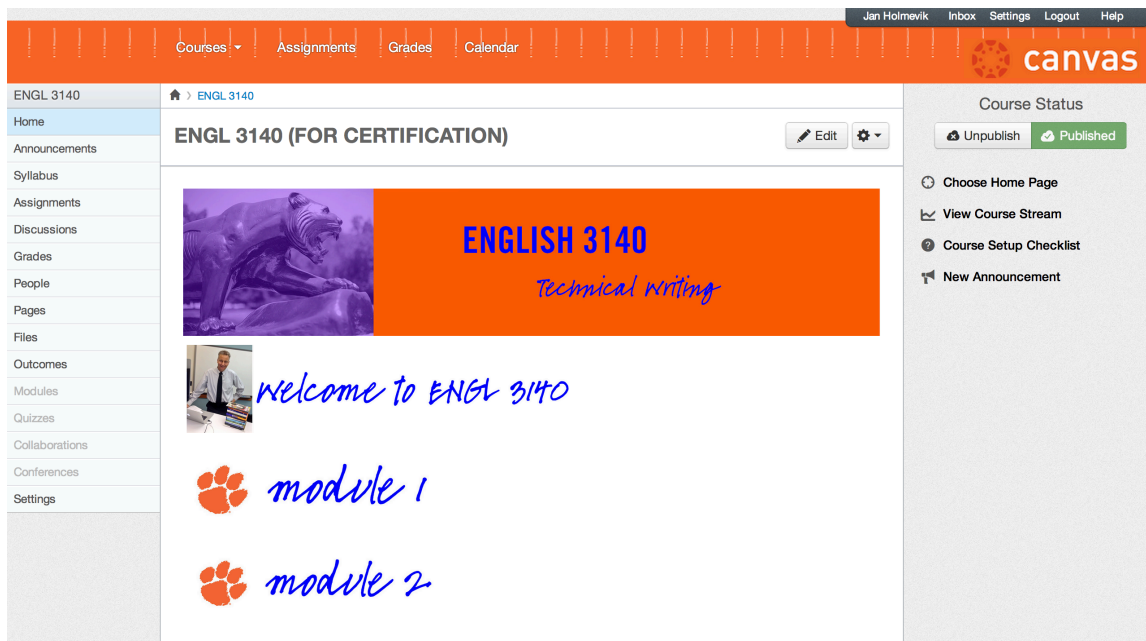


Figure 2: Canvas Course Interface

Unlike Dr. Zagenczyk (see faculty responses below) I did not experience any problems with students not being able to register. In fact once I published the course the system automatically sent an email to the registered students asking them to click a link in order to log in and complete the registration. In teaching this course I especially appreciated how the system would keep students informed of upcoming events in a media of their own choosing. Close integration with a number of web applications such as Google Docs, Twitter, Tumblr, and Skype made for a productive learning experience using real-world tools rather than LSM provided equivalents.

Another feature I really liked was the ability to give students media feedback via voice or video. Especially in an online class I find it very important for the students to be able to experience that there is an instructor present, and media capability of Canvas was very helpful in this regard. I understand that Blackboard has a similar feature available, but that is it not enabled here at Clemson.

The speed grader was easy to use and integrated submitted course work from Tumblr and GoogleDoc into a simple and effective interface. I was particularly pleased with the iOS app that has been developed for Canvas. I found it to be robust enough that I could run the whole course on my iPad if I wanted to.

Overall I came away rather impressed with the usability of Canvas. Not being a supporter of LMS's in general, I can say that I did not mind using the system at all, and that in some respects it did allow me to do things in my teaching that I haven't

been able to do previously.

## The Survey

A non-scientific survey was conducted during the summer pilot in order to gather decision-making data for the this report. A total of 115 students and faculty responded to our survey and the results can be found online at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-ZH6WGGH8/>

A summary of the results are also included here as Appendix C.

What follows is a brief overview of the main findings from the survey.

1) Of the total number of survey participants, 91.30% were students, 6.96% were instructors, and 1.74% identified as staff.

2) The vast majority of respondents, 93.37%, reported prior experience with Blackboard. 11.40% reported experience with WebCT, and 8.77% said they had experience with Moodle.

3) In response to the question "Canvas was easier to use than other learning management systems I have used previously," 25.22% strongly agreed, 33.04% agreed, 31.91% were neutral, 6.96% disagreed, and 0.87% strongly disagreed.

4) In response to the question "My peers would have an easy time learning to use Canvas," 28.70% strongly agreed, 53.91% agreed, 14.78% were neutral, 1.74% disagreed, and 0.87% strongly disagreed.

5) When asked "I recommend that Clemson move from Blackboard to Canvas," 30.43% strongly agreed, 20.87% agreed. 33.04% were neutral, 13.04% disagreed, and 2.61% strongly disagreed.

6) When asked "Canvas has the features I need," 22.61% strongly agreed, 53.04% agreed, 21.74% were neutral, 0.87% disagreed, and 1.74% strongly disagreed.

7) Control question to question 5, "I recommend that Clemson continue using Blackboard as the university-wide learning management system," revealed that 13.04% strongly agreed, 18.26% agreed, 35.65% remained neutral, 21.74% disagreed, and 11.30% strongly disagreed.

8) Reflecting on usability "Pages and tools in Canvas load quickly and smoothly" 26.96% strongly agreed, 48.70% agreed, 15.65% were neutral, 6.09% disagreed, and 2.61% strongly disagreed.

9) If given the choice between Blackboard and Canvas 28.57% reported a

preference for Blackboard, 71.43% said they would choose Canvas.

Faculty responses to the pilot .

The following are excerpts from the faculty pilot reports.

"Canvas has fundamentally changed the way I think about delivering educational content, both online and in person. I've always been resistant to integrating technology into a discussion-based literature course, but Canvas's attractive, user-friendly interface and integrated collaborative tools have shown me how a LMS can act as a natural extension of my virtual or physical classroom." (April Pelt)

"The Canvas product exceeded my expectations and was a pleasure to use. I utilized several of the tools in the system and found them not only to work better than BlackBoard but also to allow additional flexibility that afforded better learning outcomes. [...] In my opinion Canvas is a flexible, intuitive learning management system that offers many advantages over our current system." (Brian Bolt)

"While I found the situation (overall) to be extremely frustrating, there were some positive features of Canvas. For one, I did not have to upload all of the course files individually. I uploaded them as one Zip file, which was very nice. In addition, Canvas seemed to rely on up-to-date technology, unlike Blackboard. Overall, Canvas made my life more difficult while teaching this course. The course management system needs to make my life easier in some way, or I won't use it. I will not try Canvas again unless all of the issues outlined above are resolved, regardless of the potential that it has." (Tom Zagencyk)

"As someone who is fairly knowledgeable about web design, I found the UI for designing and organizing the web site far more intuitive than blackboard's and more efficient as well. [...] For an online course, one feature that I found very helpful was the ability to have Canvas send a text message alert to my cell phone any time a student sent me a message through the Canvas system. This enabled me to respond more quickly to the students' problems and questions." (Dan Warner)

"I spent a lot of time with Canvas over the past month and I am pleased at what it allowed me to do—you might check out the Hydrogeology Field Camp course. I have gotten pretty good feedback from the students about it, although they probably are not so tuned into the operation of the content management system because they are more focused on the content and what they need to do for the course." (Lawrence Murdoch)

"Within Blackboard, a grader would have to download and save each of the completed assignments that a student had already uploaded to Blackboard. Then

the grader would have to open each of these downloaded versions separately inside some pdf annotator software in order to grade it with digital ink. Then he would save it again, and re-upload each graded assignment back into the BB gradebook. It would also take a few more keystrokes to enter the grade on a different screen. So, this BB procedure is extremely time-consuming, while Canvas is not. For this reason alone, I would not want to teach another online math course on BB."  
(Marilyn Reba)

"I really enjoyed getting to try out the Canvas interface. I found it much more enjoyable to use than Blackboard. I felt it was incredibly easy to navigate and was a lot more user-friendly. I am not looking forward to going back to using Blackboard after getting to use Canvas for this class!" (Cathleen Nalley)

"My students seemed impressed by Canvas as well. I administered a short survey to them (not the "official" one completed by later summer classes, as my Minimester A class concluded before that one was made readily available), and I received 14 responses out of 17 students. Out of those respondents, 100% of them said they preferred Canvas to Blackboard, and 100% recommended that Clemson switch to Canvas. According to the surveys, what they like about Canvas is its ease of navigability; its aesthetic appeal; its capacity for videoconferencing and hyperlinking; and the "what-if" feature that allows them to calculate their potential grades (the latter of which I didn't even know about until they told me!).

I would be happy to provide full results of that survey, as well as access to my English 3040 Canvas course if either would be helpful to the powers that be. I appreciate having been given a chance to test Canvas and hope that it will indeed be implemented at our institution." (Elizabeth Stansell)

## Conclusion

In conclusion the results from this pilot strongly suggest that the participants enjoyed the experience and the tools and features that Canvas has to offer. Almost everyone reported that they had prior experience with Blackboard which tells us that they have a good background for making meaningful comparisons. A vast majority of respondents said that Canvas was easier to use than previous LMS systems they had experienced. A similar percentage of respondents also said they believed Canvas to be easy to learn and fast and efficient in use.

An interesting discrepancy was revealed in questions 5 and 7 where respondents reported seemingly contradictory points of view. If we look closer at the numbers for question 7, however, we see that if we hold the neutral category aside, 33.04% still favor a move to Canvas vs. 31.3% preferring to keep Blackboard.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Jan Rune Holmevik". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

Dr. Jan Rune Holmevik  
Chair, ATC



## A Resolution

### Expressing Support to Explore Blackboard Alternatives

**Purpose:** To express support by the Faculty Academic Technology Council for exploring alternatives to the Blackboard Learning Management System.

**Whereas,** the Blackboard faculty survey conducted in Fall 2012 (subsequently supported by the Blackboard student survey, conducted Fall 2012) instructed the Faculty ATC to conduct further research on alternative Learning Management Systems (LMS), and

**Whereas,** currently the Blackboard system costs Clemson University in excess of \$550,000 plus cost of hardware and infrastructure which university constituents do not believe is justifiable, and

**Whereas,** the current functionality of Blackboard is limited to services that can otherwise be provided by open source software and services, and

**Whereas,** faculty do not believe that Blackboard provides “value added” to their students’ academic experience, and

**Whereas,** future trends and forecasts in pedagogy, coupled with the changing paradigm of technology in the classroom, make necessary the continued evolution of classroom technologies and enterprise wide learning systems, and

**Whereas,** Clemson can leverage its human capital to develop new, innovative systems for the future that exploit Clemson’s ability to develop a world-class LMS concept, and

**Whereas,** Clemson must investigate alternative LMS systems in order to fully understand the educational landscape as it relates to organization-wide learning management systems and their technological offerings.  
Therefore,

**Be it resolved** by the Faculty Academic Technology Council assembled in regular session the following:

**That** the Faculty Academic Technology Council formally endorses the investigation of LMS alternatives, and strongly urges CCIT to provide the necessary resources and support to initiate such activities.

Dr. Jan R. Holmevik,  
Chair ATC

**ACADEMIC  
TECHNOLOGY  
COUNCIL**

Clemson University

Jan R. Holmevik, Chair  
jholmev@clemson.edu

Dustin Atkins, CCIT Liaison  
datkin2@clemson.edu

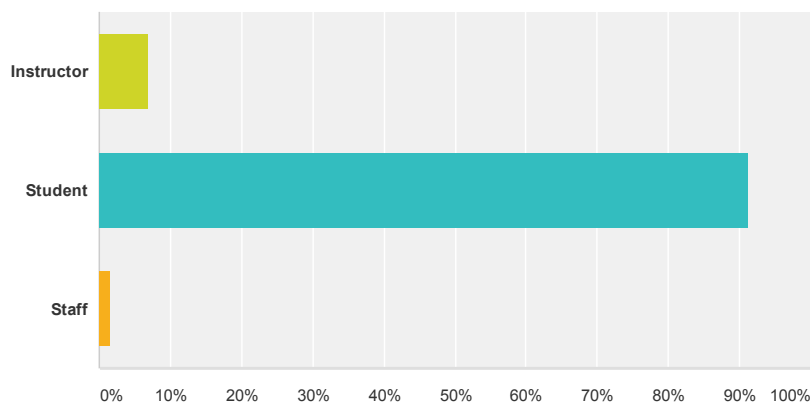
# Canvas Survey

[Question Summaries](#)[Data Trends](#)[Individual Responses](#)**115** responses**82** days (May 29, 2014 - now)**3** views

Q1

**What is your role? \*choose the option that best matches who you are and what you do**

Answered: 115 Skipped: 0



## Need insights?

SurveyMonkey has dozens of expertly-designed survey templates.

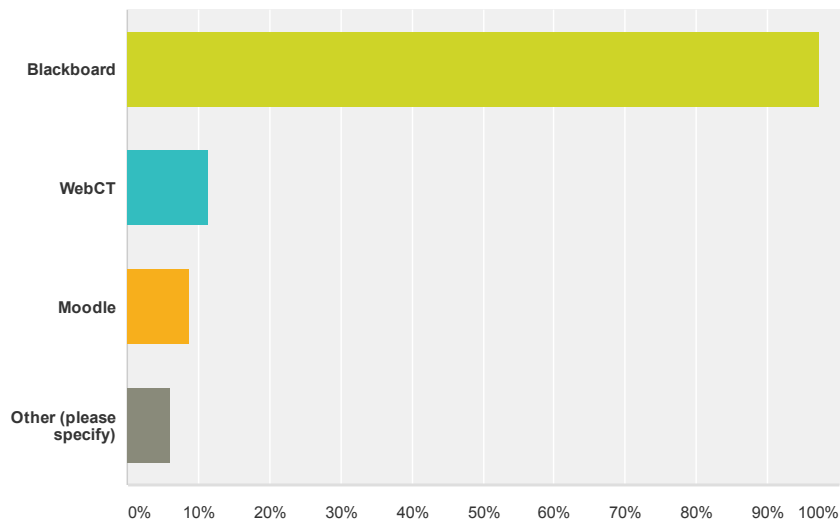
[Sign up FREE](#)[or Learn more](#)

Answer Choices	Responses	
Instructor	6.96%	8
Student	91.30%	105
Staff	1.74%	2
Total		115

Q2

**What learning management systems have you used in addition to Canvas?**

Answered: 114 Skipped: 1

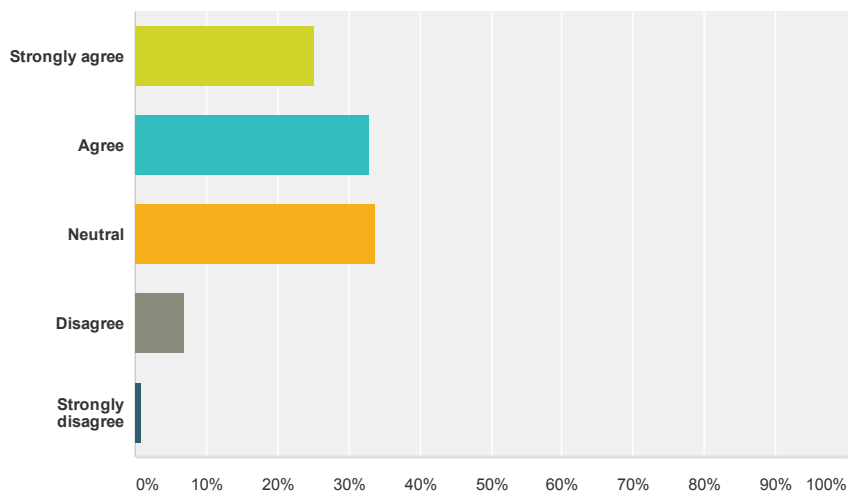


Answer Choices	Responses
Blackboard	97.37% 111
WebCT	11.40% 13
Moodle	8.77% 10
Other (please specify)	6.14% 7
Total Respondents: 114	

## Q3

### Canvas was easier to use than other learning management systems I have used previously.

Answered: 115 Skipped: 0

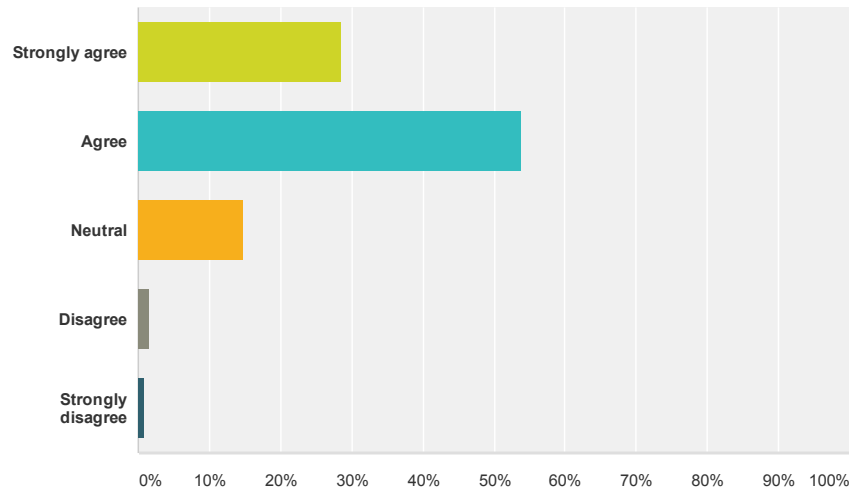


Answer Choices	Responses
Strongly agree	25.22% 29
Agree	33.04% 38
Neutral	33.91% 39
Disagree	6.96% 8
Strongly disagree	0.87% 1
Total	115

Q4

My peers would have an easy time learning to use Canvas.

Answered: 115 Skipped: 0

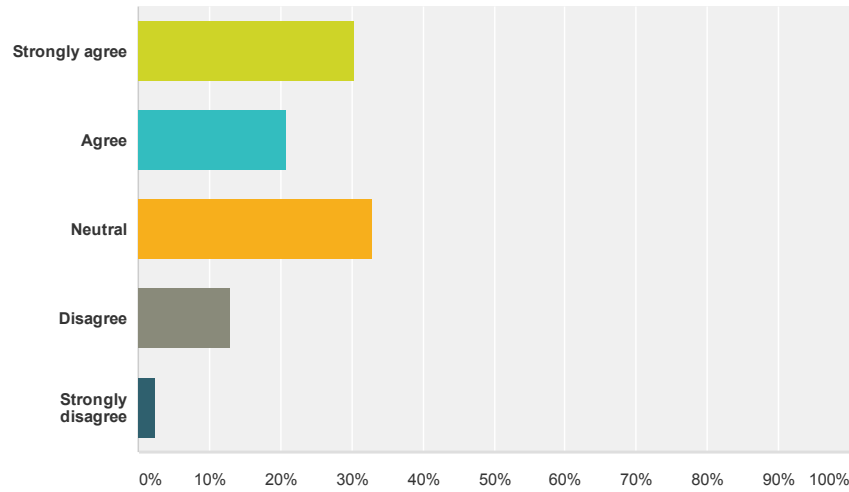


Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly agree	28.70%	33
Agree	53.91%	62
Neutral	14.78%	17
Disagree	1.74%	2
Strongly disagree	0.87%	1
Total		115

Q5

I recommend that Clemson move from Blackboard to Canvas.

Answered: 115 Skipped: 0



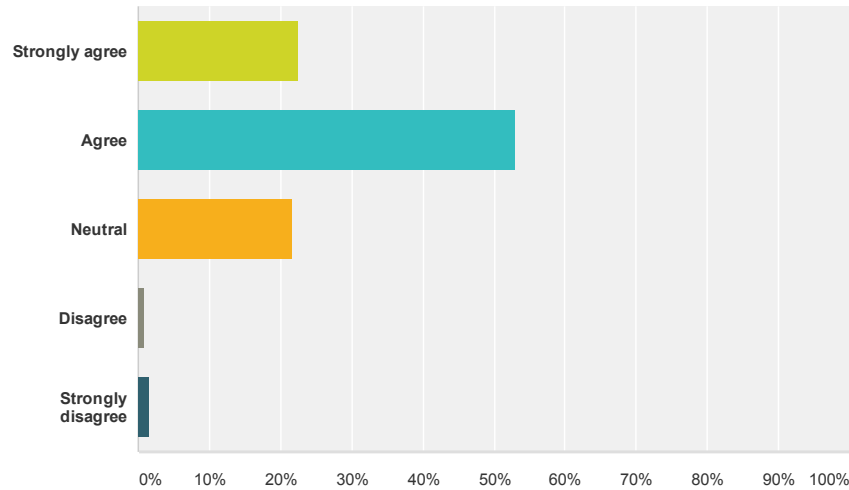
Answer Choices	Responses	
----------------	-----------	--

Strongly agree	30.43%	35
Agree	20.87%	24
Neutral	33.04%	38
Disagree	13.04%	15
Strongly disagree	2.61%	3
Total		115

Q6

Canvas has the features I need.

Answered: 115 Skipped: 0

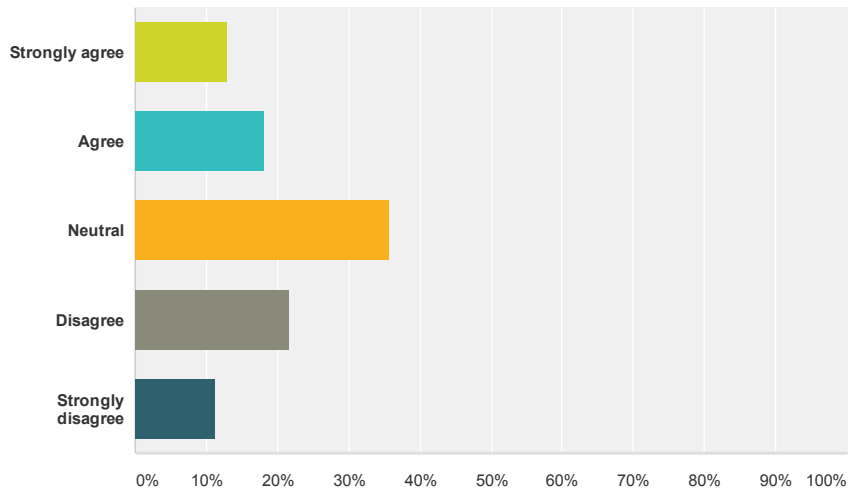


Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly agree	22.61%	26
Agree	53.04%	61
Neutral	21.74%	25
Disagree	0.87%	1
Strongly disagree	1.74%	2
Total		115

Q7

I recommend that Clemson continue using Blackboard as the university-wide learning management system.

Answered: 115 Skipped: 0

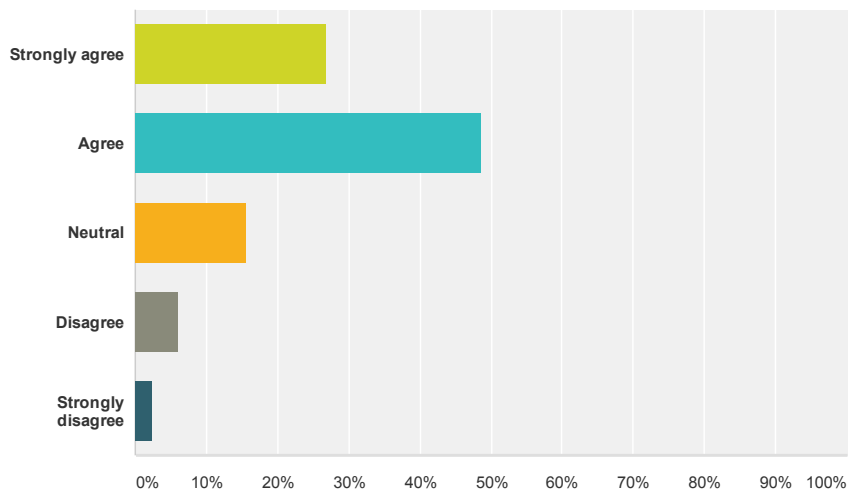


Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly agree	13.04%	15
Agree	18.26%	21
Neutral	35.65%	41
Disagree	21.74%	25
Strongly disagree	11.30%	13
Total		115

Q8

### Pages and tools in Canvas load quickly and smoothly.

Answered: 115 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly agree	26.96%	31
Agree	48.70%	56
Neutral	15.65%	18
Disagree	6.09%	7
Strongly disagree	2.61%	3
Total		115

Q9

What feature or functionality in Canvas do you like best?

Answered: 89 Skipped: 26

Calendar drop-n-drag feature  
8/12/2014 2:10 PM

Quizzes  
8/4/2014 10:27 PM

Quizzes  
8/4/2014 10:27 PM

I worked with two faculty members this summer in preparing this courses for certification. The instructor who used Canvas was able to create a more robust course full of multimedia. The Canvas course is also more appealing to students and looks more like what they're used to seeing online in terms of design.  
8/4/2014 3:07 PM

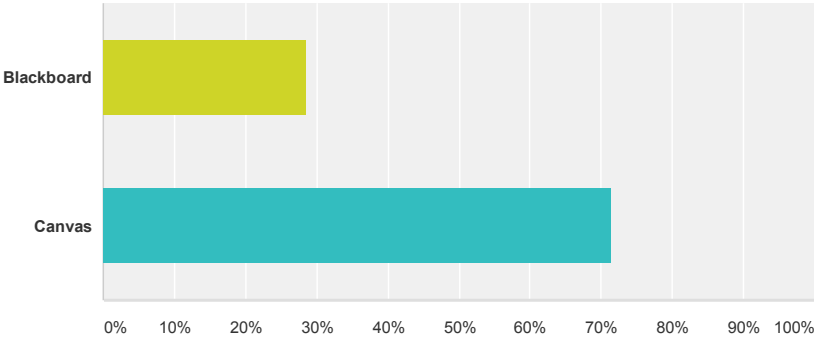
Yo mama  
8/4/2014 10:27 AM

Compared to Blackboard, Canvas seems to have fewer features. This makes it easier to navigate than Blackboard.  
8/4/2014 9:37 AM

Q10

If you could choose to use Blackboard or Canvas for your learning management system, which would you choose?

Answered: 112 Skipped: 3



Answer Choices	Responses	
Blackboard	28.57%	32
Canvas	71.43%	80
Total		112

---

Powered by  **SurveyMonkey**

Check out our [sample surveys](#) and [create your own now!](#)