CASE STUDY | PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

Pepperdine University, an independent university in Southern California, initiated a 13-month study on the university’s learning management system, Blackboard Learn. Gerard Flynn, Senior Director of IT Administration and Client Services, found that Blackboard was not meeting the needs of Pepperdine faculty or students. The LMS was lacking in options for accessing teaching materials and they wanted tools that supported more diverse teaching methods while providing the ability to communicate and collaborate more broadly.

Flynn said “Many faculty members sought a learning management system that was less instructor-centric. They wanted students to collaborate among themselves. Sakai seemed like an attractive alternative.”

CHALLENGE

Blackboard Learn had been Pepperdine University’s LMS for several years but they wanted to explore additional opportunities that were better suited for their needs. Pepperdine had researched several LMS options in the market and wanted to explore new opportunities with Sakai. During this process they contacted Longsight to host and fully support a pilot instance of Sakai CLE.

Supplemented with in-depth surveys, focus groups and Q&A sessions, the Sakai pilot included training, integration with campus services and comprehensive support from Longsight. Soon, Pepperdine's interest in Sakai and Longsight exceeded expectations. More than 25% of their faculty participated in the year-long, side-by-side comparison of Sakai vs. Blackboard. Following the pilot, 91% of faculty and 75% of students preferred Sakai CLE. Faculty favored Sakai tools over corresponding Blackboard tools by more than four times. And more than eight times as many faculty and students found Sakai easier to learn and use.

According to Gerard Flynn, "The decision to adopt Sakai was faculty-driven and informed at every step of the way by faculty and students. This transparency and data analysis made everyone confident that transitioning to Sakai was the right thing to do."

SOLUTION

Pepperdine’s primary concern with transitioning to a new LMS was with the support and time that would be needed to migrate to and learn the new system. Longsight worked closely with Pepperdine staff to upgrade the Sakai CLE pilot into full production status. Longsight trained local IT staff prior to going live ensuring they were well prepared to support faculty as the new system rolled out. Once Sakai went live, Longsight was there to provide timely support so IT staff were confident they could find help if a complex support request was received. During the transition process, Blackboard courses were migrated and Blackboard Learn was decommissioned, saving the university substantial expense. In Spring 2010, Sakai became Pepperdine’s official learning and collaboration environment, hosted and supported by Longsight.

Jonathan See, CIO of Pepperdine University, said "Our relationship with Longsight has been a true partnership from day one. It’s great to work with a service provider that is vested and interested in Pepperdine’s success. Longsight personnel are deeply knowledgeable, quick to respond and genuinely care about our institution."

RESULTS

At Pepperdine, Sakai CLE is fully integrated into their information ecosystem. Integration with PeopleSoft automatically creates course sites and maintains enrollments. Official student photos populate course rosters that
only faculty can see to comply with FERPA regulations. Access to Sakai and other campus services are based on the open source Central Authentication Service or CAS as a unifying technology for single sign-ons. Pepperdine's instances of Sakai, known locally as "Courses," also serve as a scaffold for external educational services such as TurnItIn for plagiarism detection, Collaborate for online events and local library resources.

University faculty continue to innovate with Sakai, often with cutting-edge features from upcoming releases that Longsight installs in the Pepperdine's dedicated test instance for evaluation. Pepperdine and Sakai are at the cutting edge of best practices for learning management.

Today, Pepperdine University is not only using Sakai CLE but is an active contributor to Sakai and an Apereo Foundation Member.