

## **Executive Summary: USC Learning Management System (LMS) Assessment Report – July 2025**

The University of South Carolina (USC) LMS Assessment Committee conducted an 18-month comprehensive evaluation of three LMS platforms—Blackboard Ultra (current system) by Anthology, Brightspace by D2L, and Canvas by Instructure—with the goal of identifying the best-fit system to enhance student experience, pedagogical flexibility, and operational excellence across the USC system.

### **Key Recommendation**

The committee recommends continuing with **Blackboard Learn Ultra** as the USC system's enterprise LMS. This decision is based on its superior performance in critical categories such as content management, user support, accessibility, academic integrity tools, and AI-powered course design support. The LMS stability that remaining with Blackboard Ultra creates further enables us to make significant gains in operational excellence by allowing us to mature and strengthen our existing LMS infrastructure and processes without devoting resources and effort toward course conversions and migration. The committee also recommends integrating H5P into USC's teaching and learning ecosystem to enhance course design. This tool will enable faculty to create interactive, media-rich content, boosting student engagement and expanding instructional innovation across courses.

By selecting Blackboard Ultra and augmenting it with H5P, USC positions itself for a more unified, accessible, and technologically advanced digital learning environment that aligns with its strategic priorities of enhancing the student experience and advancing operational efficiency.

### **Key Findings**

- **Blackboard Ultra Strengths:**
  - Rated highest in 14 of 18 sandbox testing criteria.
  - Offers a modernized, streamlined look and feel, built-in AI tools, SafeAssign (plagiarism checker), and Ally (accessibility tool).
  - Excels in interface intuitiveness, gradebook features, and course migration.
  - Strong vendor support and system reliability.
  - Integrates well with USC systems and aligns closely with strategic priorities.
- **Brightspace with H5P:**

- Strong in student progress tracking, assessment capabilities, and group management.
- Adequate in interface intuitiveness.
- Would require costly third-party contracts for academic integrity tools and others.
- **Canvas:**
  - Performs well in messaging and templates but lags in academic integrity, student tracking, and AI tools.
  - Faces content migration issues and lacks robust administrative features.
  - Would require costly third-party contracts for academic integrity tools and others.
- **Spring 2024 LMS Survey Results:**
  - 780 responses across students, faculty, and staff.
  - Blackboard Ultra was the most familiar platform.
  - Respondents emphasized the need for consistent navigation, ease of grading, and reliable communication tools.
- **Peer Review:**
  - Blackboard remains widely used in South Carolina's public institutions and is still in use at SEC institutions.
- **Implementation Support:**
  - USC has already invested significantly in transitioning to Blackboard Ultra.
  - Continuing with Ultra avoids duplicative costs for transition, training, and platform integration.

## **Recommendations for Next Steps**

### **1. Finalize Commitment to Blackboard Ultra:**

- Formalize multi-year contracts with Anthology to ensure continued feature development and support.

### **2. Invest in H5P Integration:**

- Purchase H5P to expand interactive content capabilities and support engaging, media-rich learning environments. (3 year H5P quote available)

**3. Expand Faculty Development:**

- System-wide training through workshops with the Center for Teaching Excellence and eLearning Services.
- Encourage use of AI-powered design tools and accessibility features.

**4. Enhance Institutional Templates & Standards:**

- Promote consistency by developing shared course templates and navigation standards aligned with institutional goals.

**5. Monitor and Report Progress:**

- Use dashboards and analytics to track usage, student outcomes, and instructional improvement across campuses.

**6. Ensure Ongoing Accessibility and Academic Integrity Compliance:**

- Maintain internal infrastructure and licensing to support WCAG 2.1AA compliance and built-in academic integrity tools.

**7. Communicate System-wide:**

- Widely disseminate the decision and rationale to all stakeholders and provide clarity on the roadmap and benefits.

**Next Steps:**

Schedule onsite visits with all 3 vendors with a focus on AI Tools