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Canvas

Update (11 December 2015): In response to the college choosing to move forward with a transition to Canvas, the Distance Education Committee has endorsed [a set of guidelines for managing that transition](#). These guidelines have not yet been endorsed by the full Academic Senate and should thus be considered a draft subject to further revision.

In February 2015, the California Community Colleges Online Education Initiative (OEI) selected Instructure's Canvas as its common course management system (CMS). A few months later, our Distance Education Committee unanimously approved the following recommendation at its June 6 meeting:

"In recognition and support of the selection of Canvas as the statewide Online Education Initiative's common course management system, **the Distance Education Committee recommends the adoption of Canvas as Santa Monica College's course management system**, and further recommends that the District begin the process of transitioning to Canvas with all interested parties, including but not limited to the Academic Senate and Faculty Association."

At its [20 October 2015 meeting](#), the full Academic Senate similarly endorsed, unanimously, the adoption of Canvas.

This page is provided to briefly explain the committee's thinking, and to direct SMC faculty and staff to some additional resources for learning about Canvas.

Background

As part of its perennial business, the Distance Education Committee reviews and assesses our CMS needs in order to stay current with new and emerging CMS options. While Pearson's eCollege / Learning Studio has been meeting our needs more or less well for more than a decade, the committee had found no alternative that was clearly superior in capability and/or price. That sentiment began to change a few years ago, when Canvas was launched in 2011. One of our local peers, [Pasadena City College](#), switched to Canvas in 2012, yielding what seemed to be overwhelmingly favorable reviews. [Sierra College](#) was another early adopter, as was [San Jose State University](#) and [UC-Berkeley](#).

The Distance Ed Committee invited representatives from Instructure to make a presentation on campus in Fall 2013. Committee members were very impressed by what they saw but chose not to make a recommendation to switch to Canvas at the time. There were concerns about the costs and effort that would be involved in moving from the "old family car" that was

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still getting the job done. Moreover, there were early indications that the OEI promised to change the landscape of distance education in California significantly. Thus, the committee chose to wait and see what came of the OEI and its selection of a common CMS, all the while eyeing that shiny new Canvas model in the showroom.

The OEI began its [process for selecting a common CMS](#) in early 2014. By the end of the year, three finalist vendors were selected, and in February 2015, they presented their product demonstrations to a statewide committee of California Community College faculty, staff, and students. After these demonstrations and subsequent deliberation, this committee selected Canvas by a nearly unanimous vote, citing the flexible and intuitive user experience it offers, as well as the overwhelming favorable reviews from existing Canvas users, backed by a record of improved rates of both faculty adoption and student success.

Why switch to Canvas?

The Distance Education Committee recommends that SMC adopt Canvas for two primary sets of reasons.

Reason #1: Canvas is a more capable, easier-to-use CMS.

Many reviewers of Canvas highlight that it presents a clean, simple design with an easy-to-learn, intuitive interface, while it still retains a comprehensive set of online learning tools. Experienced users of Canvas describe the experience as one in which teaching and learning of course material is the primary focus, with little attention and effort diverted by the task of figuring out how to use the technology.

Among Canvas's specific features that caught the attention of the Distance Ed Committee are:

- the [Dashboard](#)--the initial "home page" view that displays on one screen a master list of a faculty or student user's upcoming tasks, deadlines, and messages, as well as an easy-to-navigate portal into each online course
- a robust [Calendar](#) featuring drag-and-drop event creation and editing, as well as the ability to view one or multiple courses at the same time
- a powerful [SpeedGrader](#) tool integrated with [Turnitin](#) and the Canvas gradebook
- an Open API system architecture, which facilitates Canvas's nimble integration with the ever-evolving universe of online tools and resources. For example, Canvas integrates with [Google Docs](#) to support collaborative projects. Likewise, Canvas can be linked to [other web services](#), such as Twitter and Skype, to facilitate a range of faculty and student interaction.
- highly-rated [Apps](#) for a variety of iOS and Android mobile devices
- an [interactive online support community](#) of Canvas users and staff

Reason #2: The OEI lowers the costs of switching and opens up new opportunities.

For many years, the main concern that the Distance Ed Committee had about recommending a move toward Canvas or any other new CMS was the cost and inconvenience of moving. While the OEI doesn't eliminate all such costs and inconvenience, it presents an opportunity to move with unprecedented support. [The OEI has produced its own list of reasons for colleges to adopt Canvas now](#), as part of the state's move toward a common CMS. Reasons to trust the conclusions of the OEI include the following:

- The thorough review process employed by the OEI in selecting Canvas was led by faculty from throughout the state and focused on the goal of student success.
- Adopting Canvas will facilitate SMC's further participation in the OEI, including its online tutoring services and @ONE online faculty professional development. It also will give us the option to participate in the integrated, multi-college Exchange of online courses.
- With not only CCCs [now widely adopting Canvas](#), but also a growing list of UCs, CSUs, and other colleges and universities across the country, an increasing number of our new faculty and students will be coming to SMC already with experience working in a Canvas environment.
- As a statewide initiative funded by the Chancellor's Office, the OEI is able to make substantial cost savings available to colleges using the common CMS. Indeed, [OEI plans to make Canvas available for free](#) to California community colleges through at least the 2018-19 academic year. Beyond that timeframe, it is expected that colleges will continue to enjoy significant cost savings through additional support from the OEI as well as the bargaining power that comes with the size of the user group.

- Per the terms of the OEI's contract with Instructure, Canvas is making available its basic webinar package of instructor training, which will be supplemented by additional resources now being developed by @ONE.

Learning about Canvas

The Distance Ed Committee recommends that anyone seeking an introduction to Canvas, and its selection as the OEI's common CMS, start with the following:

- [OEI's online introduction to Canvas](#). In addition to being the OEI's central hub for sharing information about the new common CMS, this website was built in a Canvas shell.
- [The official website of Instructure's Canvas](#). Curious faculty may be especially interested in [signing up for a trial Canvas account](#). Another place to learn about Canvas's capabilities is its centralized collection of student and faculty support documents: [Canvas guides](#).
- To get a quick taste of basic look and feel of Canvas, watch the [five-minute video introduction to Canvas's new user interface](#).
- For people familiar with eCollege, a Canvas user has posted a [very helpful comparison chart](#) that maps out the equivalent features between Canvas and eCollege and provides links to the help documents and brief tutorial videos that explain how these features work in Canvas.

The resources linked below represent just a fraction of the large and growing number of additional websites, videos, and other resources available for learning about Canvas. If members of the SMC community find other helpful resources that they think should be added to our list, they are invited to send suggestions directly to the Distance Ed Committee's chair, Pete Morris (morris_pete@smc.edu).

OEI resources

- [official website of the Online Education Initiative](#)
- [OEI FAQs](#) (last updated 24 March 2015)
- [FAQs on OEI selection of Canvas as its common CMS](#) (13 March 2015)

Sample Canvas courses

- [canvas.net](#)
- [UC Denver](#)
- [Pasadena City College](#)

Case studies and FAQs from other schools that have switched, or are in the process of switching, to Canvas

- [Foothill College](#)
- [UC-Berkeley](#)
- [UC-Irvine](#)
- [Washington State Board for Community & Technical Colleges](#)
- [The Chicago School of Professional Psychology](#) (former eCollege user)
- [The University of Colorado Denver](#) (former eCollege user)
- [The University of Wyoming](#) (former eCollege user)
- [Eastern Michigan University](#) (former eCollege user)

Videos

- ["California Online Education Initiative and Canvas"](#)
- ["The Cool Things You Can Do With Canvas"](#)

- ["Canvas Introduction"](#)
- ["Webinar - Introducing Canvas"](#)

Additional Resources

- ["Configuring Respondus for use with a Free Canvas Instructor Account,"](#) an illustrated how-to handout by Simon Balm (17 October 2015)