

Elon looks into Moodle as alternative to Blackboard

Rebecca Iannucci
Reporter

As Elon University expands its use of technology across campus, the school has begun to consider using course management system Moodle as an alternative to Blackboard Academic Suite because the current system is too expensive, according to Chris Fulkerson, assistant vice president for technology.

Blackboard, which has been in use at Elon for several years, is one of many learning management systems in the nation that both students and faculty can utilize. Fulkerson said the school also considered ANGEL Learning and Desire2Learn before deciding on Moodle as a possible alternative to Blackboard.

Ultimately, each learning management system provides comparable features for students and faculty. Both Blackboard and Moodle offer users unlimited access to their courses, while also providing outlets for communication, announcements and documents that have previously only been available during time spent in the classroom. But despite the similarities between each website, Fulkerson said the switch is mainly because of cost.


"Blackboard has gotten very expensive. It's costing us well over \$125,000 a year just to maintain the learning management side," Fulkerson said. "If we looked at Moodle, we could have it hosted off campus. It's less than \$5 per student. Blackboard is a lot more than that."

And it's not just Elon that will be making the change to Moodle. The school's potential switch to the course management system will be part of a statewide agreement to look into the site as a resource for schools across North Carolina, which Fulkerson said could bring the cost down to 50 cents per student.

Freshman Jason Puckett, who became familiar with Moodle during his time in high school, said he believes Blackboard is more user-friendly, despite its similarities with Moodle.

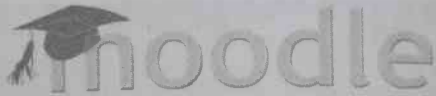
"It seems that Blackboard is more logically put together, and it is the easiest to navigate," Puckett said. "It doesn't seem to lack any features compared to Moodle, and it seems to be much more intuitive."

This intuition is something that Moodle has begun to emulate. Operations Manager for the website Michael Blake said the website will soon be introducing Moodle 2, which



- Includes a combination of tools and resources
- Upgraded material that is more personal and supportive
- Free learning facility for faculty to learn about new changes in Blackboard, which includes video tutorials and guides
- New social learning and teaching tools

source: http://talktoblack.com/the_overview.html



- Virtual learning environment
- Software is provided for free
- Moodle works on any computer than can run PHP
- Moodle is an acronym for **Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment**
- According to the website, "anyone who uses Moodle is a Moodle!"

source: http://docs.moodle.org/en/About_Moodle

SARAH COSTELLO | Graphics Editor

will allow the system to reach new heights.

"Moodle 2 is colossal," Blake said. "It contains a huge number of core changes to the platform," he said.

Among these changes are upgrades that will allow easier access to blogging, communication and customization of the website itself.

Still, Elon may not see these changes on campus for quite some time. According to Fulkerson, the school will need to go through an extensive transition period

after making a final decision.

"You have to teach the faculty the differences and help them migrate over to the new site," Fulkerson said. "We would have a year or two of both sites working and then pull the plug on Blackboard. It's not going to be overnight."

Both Fulkerson and Blake said they believe learning management systems like Blackboard and Moodle provide a richness not previously available to students in the days before the Internet. But Fulkerson said it is the

faculty's knowledge of these learning management systems that makes a difference.

According to a statistical study performed by the North Carolina Community College System, students' experiences with both Blackboard and Moodle only differed when faculty members were not trained with the respective websites.

"There was no statistical difference between the two unless there wasn't training on the faculty's part," Fulkerson said. "We have to focus on that."

Elon aims to use more social media

Measure looks to reach prospective students as well

Sam Parker
Senior Reporter

Elon University is taking steps to keep up its delivery of online content by developing a stronger presence on Facebook and Twitter, along with other social media websites, according to Dan Anderson, the assistant vice president and director of University Relations.

Facebook, Twitter and WordPress are features of the university's social media presence that students and alumni alike are using in order to gain a better understanding of what is happening on campus.

Dan Anderson, the assistant vice president and director of University Relations, said Elon is incorporating social media into its routine in order to reach people who depend on obtaining information through the Internet.

"The social media revolution is changing how people interact online," Anderson said. "And all of us are integrating Facebook, and in some cases Twitter, into our daily lives

so that we are really following the audiences."

University admissions, for example, is using multiple sources, such as Facebook, Twitter and WordPress.

"Our social networking efforts are meant to supplement our more traditional means of recruiting," said Cindy Barr, assistant dean of Admissions. "Students are still referring to official websites, literature and using their campus visit as their primary means of seeking information."

Barr said it took an initial push to get the momentum going in regards to recruiting members, but with the implementation of logos on Elon's homepage, admissions has seen a steady increase in both their fans on Facebook and the followers on Twitter. There were 616 Facebook fans and 212 Twitter followers supporting Elon, as of Monday.

This trend is allowing students to access information regarding campus events occurring at Elon more easily. As a trade-off, Barr said admissions is

obtaining more information, such as age and gender, on the demographics that are using these social media outlets.

"Facebook provides broad information about our fans," Barr said. "But we are not able to drill down to see individual behavior on the page, which protects the students' privacy. And unfortunately, Twitter does not provide as much user information about our followers as Facebook, so that activity is much more difficult to track."

Twitter has proven effective in cases of live events, though, Anderson said. Elon used Twitter this past May during commencement to update both students and alumni about the events on campus. Anderson said the university received a good response from followers and decided to continue the trend of engaging individuals through the use of Twitter for coverage of live events.

Admissions is using Twitter to update prospective students about what is happening on campus,

tweeting on special recognitions of faculty and deadlines for applications. Barr said she enjoys different aspects of the office's content on Twitter.

"My favorite feature on our Twitter feed is 'Picture Wednesday,' though, where a different shot of campus or a picture from an Elon event is shared each week," Barr said.

Elon is also experimenting with the addition of videos onto its blogs and websites as a means to offer visuals to prospective students as well as showcase the current Elon students' talents who edit them, Barr said.

In one case, Elon's International Admissions Blog: Destination Elon is incorporating videos to attract international students by providing specific answers based on prospective students' questions.

"By using social media, we can be with our prospective students, current students, alumni and parents," Anderson said. "That's where they all are, and so we want to share Elon communications through the media that people are using."

**WB
WC**

**WEST BURLINGTON
WINE COMPANY**
SELECTION SERVICE VALUE

FREE TASTINGS EVERY FRI./SAT./SUN.
(CHECK OUR WEB SITE FOR DETAILS)

BEST INTERNATIONAL SELECTION IN TOWN

FULL & HALF-CASE DISCOUNTS

OVER 100 WINES UNDER \$10

1148 ST. MARKS CHURCH RD • SAVANNAH WEST CENTER
JUST NORTH OF CROOK ST • NEXT TO PIEDMONT ALE HOUSE • AT 11:00 AM
11-7 TUES-FRI • 10-6 SAT • NOON-4 SUN
(336) 636-1716 • WWW.WESTBURLINGTONWINE.COM

**116
OAK**

ACCEPTING PHOENIX CASH

Open for lunch and dinner!

Tuesday through Saturday
11:30am-2:00pm, 5:00pm-9:00pm

116 WEST LEBANON AVE, ELON
116OAK.COM
336-584-5423

Buy 1 entree,
receive 1 entree
half off!
(dinner only)