

Senate Committee on Information Technologies (SCIT)

March 7, 2017

Minutes of the Meeting

These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate; none of the comments, conclusions, or actions reported in these minutes represents the views of, nor are they binding on, the senate, the administration, or the Board of Regents.

[**In these minutes:** Unizin, LMS Review, and the UMN System]

PRESENT: Geoffrey Ghose (chair), William Dana, Santiago Fernandez-Gimenez, Kate McCready, Carlos Soria, Timothy Nichols, Al Beitz, John Butler, Bernie Gulachek, Robert Rubinyi, Nancy Carpenter, Michelle Driessen, Kristin Janke, Yoichi Watanabe, Madeline Doak

REGRETS: Karen Monsen

ABSENT: Charles Miller, Diane Willow, Brandon Vanderbush, Rajkumar Vyas

GUESTS: Donalee Attardo, director of academic technology, Office of Information Technology (OIT); John Butler, associate librarian for data and technology, University Libraries; Linc Kallsen, director of institutional analysis, University Finance; Bernie Gulachek, interim vice president, OIT; Shane Nackerud, technology lead for libraries initiatives, University Libraries

OTHERS: None.

Chair Geoffrey Ghose welcomed the committee and the members introduced themselves.

1. Unizin, LMS Review, and the UMN System - Ghose introduced Donalee Attardo, director of academic technology, Office of Information Technology (OIT), John Butler, associate librarian for data and technology, University Libraries, Linc Kallsen, director of institutional analysis, University Finance, Bernie Gulachek, interim vice president, OIT, and Shane Nackerud, technology lead for libraries initiatives, University Libraries. Attardo began by providing an overview of the [Canvas Learning Management System \(LMS\) pilot, ULTA, and the Unizin Consortium](#), noting that the goal is to help direct the future of digital education, teaching technology, learning analytics, and advising; to keep control of the University's intellectual property and data; to create the learning ecosystem of the 21st century; and, to save money for the institution, and ultimately students.

University Learning Technology Advisors (ULTA), Attardo said, is a group formed based on the 2015-16 Academic Technology Formal Community of Practice (FCoP) recommendation, approved by Provost Karen Hanson and Interim Vice President and Chief Information Officer Bernard Gulachek. The group seeks to provide a strong faculty voice to advise in selecting, implementing, and configuring technology used for teaching. ULTA is composed of faculty, academic/administrative leadership, educational technology staff, student representatives, and other support staff, with a charge to "...[serve] the entire University community, receiving

proposals and formulating recommendations for large technology implementations that occur across colleges or across departments within colleges.”

Unizin, said Attardo, is a University-owned and directed consortium, which includes the University of Minnesota, the University of Michigan, Colorado State University, the University of Florida, Indiana University, Oregon State University, the University of Iowa, the Ohio State University, Penn State University, the University of Wisconsin, and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Unizin seeks to produce and collaborate on content, learning environment resources (including course material delivery and insights), and provide analytics (data integrations and data warehousing). The University’s membership in Unizin provides access to content discovery (via a collaborative system to easily find and share content); content creation (*Pressbooks* for easy digital textbook creation); course material delivery (Unizin *Engage* provides digital resources to students with tools to take and share notes); faculty/student dashboards (Unizin *Course Monitor* to view how students perform in Canvas); learning analytics (learning technology data to combine with other data to help students); and, multi-institutional data (consortial data warehouse of de-identified student performance data to be used in research). Membership in Unizin, Attardo said, allows the institution to share ideas and profit from the work of our peer institutions, and allows the University of Minnesota to help guide development of technologies. Butler noted that an added benefit of Unizin is the potential for cooperative content licensing and management at scale, which mitigates the issues of acquiring materials at higher costs and in duplication, and for opportunities to assist faculty with fair use of content where appropriate.

Piloting of Canvas is in its fourth semester at the University, and currently the “Course Development Suite” is being tested, reported Attardo. The tools will allow content to be gathered and shared with instructional designers, including a collections tool, a discovery tool, and a course libraries tool. Instructors and students participated in a detailed evaluation and comparison with Moodle LMS in FY16, noted Attardo. Overall, 50% of students preferred Canvas to Moodle, with 23% rating them the same, and 27% preferring Moodle. For instructors, 59% preferred Canvas to Moodle, with 29% rating them the same, and 12% preferring Moodle. When asked, “In your opinion, should the University switch Learning Management Systems?,” 60% of students and 79% of instructors participating in the pilot said yes.

OIT has several concerns with the sustainability of Moodle at the University, said Attardo, including Moodle’s position in the LMS market; the University’s position as an “outlier” among higher-ed Moodle implementation in terms of size and complexity; the use of Moodle by few peer institutions; technical challenges due to Moodle design issues and resulting expense, and, the consequences and risk incurred by the University. The University is currently the only member of the Big Ten Academic Alliance (formerly the CIC) to use Moodle, noted Attardo, and only 6% of R1 peers use Moodle; 37% use Canvas. ULTA will make their final recommendation in mid-April , 2017, and the LMS direction will be determined in spring of 2017.

Attardo noted that if the decision is made to move to a new learning management system, OIT will be guided by consultations with colleges and system campuses as to the speed of the

transition. OIT would provide a vast amount of assistance to faculty and college IT staff, in accordance with their need (including online resources, drop-in work sessions, individual consultations, extra staff resources, etc.). In addition, Attardo said, Canvas has a migration tool that quickly and efficiently moved courses from Moodle to Canvas; the Canvas pilot provided OIT with experience in the minimal “clean up” needed after a course is migrated. Finally, Moodle servers, with course content will still be available through the end of the Moodle Lifecycle instance model (five years); they do not need to be turned off at a specific time, said Attardo.

OIT is sponsoring several evaluation and public events, including vendor demos, and faculty forums. More information is available on the [ULTA website](#).

Santiago Fernandez-Gimenez asked what the institution’s responsibilities/ownership was of Unizin. Gulachek responded that as a consortium, Unizin is able to acquire “off-the-shelf” technologies, creating a complete learning ecosystem by “bolting” those technologies together. With Unizin, institutions can come together as a whole to decide on the best path for all institutions; the University is not dependent on a vendor, and there are no sourcing issues. This reduces cost, said Gulachek, because the cost to be part of Unizin is much cheaper than licensing these tools separately through a vendor, and when more institutions join, the cost of participation will be further reduced. Though the University has a lot of data about “out-of-course” analytics, he added, it is important to invest in “in-course analytics,” which help to measure student need and performance; this is an opportunity to get that data in a self-sufficient way, and then the University will own that data (not a third-party vendor).

Al Beitz asked if during the Canvas trial, OIT had looked at the same courses when using Moodle vs. Canvas to see if it impacted student performance. Attardo replied that there are too many variables in this type of analysis, and that this type of data would not be reliable.

Yoichi Watanabe asked if bundling different technologies together and creating plug-ins was cost-effective. Attardo responded that this may seem deceptively complex, but that the same standards are used to create these applications, and plugins can be small.

Robert Rubinyi asked how Unizin made the decision on whether to build or buy a technology. Butler replied that the University is integrating technologies, not building them from scratch; being a member of Unizin gives the University the power to influence those who are building these technologies. Attardo added that the University saved two years of work by a team and considerable cost by joining Unizin rather than building and developing an institutional data warehouse independently.

Kallsen noted that learning analytics is an immature field; in order to do this work, the University will need partners. Attardo added that there is a Learning Analytics CoP in Unizin, where all products will be built and maintained by Unizin. Gulachek said that institutions need this type of data; using vendors is very costly, and Unizin members save by using the consortium.

Fernandez-Gimenez said that in Moodle, administrative integration works very well, and he asked how this was evaluated for Canvas. Attardo responded that LTI integrations will help the University with this functionality, as all institutions do their own individual integrations.

Rubinyi asked how faculty were involved and trained in Canvas. Attardo responded that developing training for faculty is in process. Kallsen added that help will be available for faculty to design courses for better learning analytics. Fernandez-Gimenez noted that getting faculty excited about the possibilities of Canvas is different than other types of training, and these may need to be resourced differently.

Michelle Driessen said that she took part in the Canvas pilot, and that she preferred Canvas and liked the features, including the grade book, and speed-grader. Madeline Doak said that she felt it was easier to track student progress in Canvas, and easier to communicate with instructors within the system, rather than using email. Gulachek agreed, saying that Canvas has a simpler interface. Kallsen added that this simple interface enhances data quality and learning analytics downstream.

Fernandez-Gimenez asked if self-paced courses were evaluated in the Canvas pilot. Kallsen responded that the University pulled every course, and looked at how it was being used in Moodle. Driessen replied that a colleague of hers that taught a self-paced course participated in the pilot, and had a good experience with Canvas.

Gulachek said that a lot of work and analysis had gone into evaluating Canvas; ULTA will give their opinion on whether or not to change LMS systems, but their recommendation is not the final word. There will be town hall meetings, for example, with Gulacheck and Provost Karen Hanson, where faculty and students can ask questions and voice concerns.

Hearing no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Barbara Irish
University Senate Office