

OAK Faculty Advisory Committee

Minutes of Friday, September 26, 2014

1. Nursing's migration to a hosted Blackboard instance: Overview

- Last week (9/15/14) the School of Nursing experienced a serious disruption to service during an exam –one that affected the more than a third of the students. After consultation across numerous areas, the University made the decision to halt all work in Nursing classes on the existing local Blackboard platform (“OAK”) -- including submission of exams, homework and assignments, and discussion boards – while we moved to a more stable environment. (Students continued to be able to access content during the transition week.)
- After working through a zero-dollar fully rescindable contract for an off-site, hosted Blackboard instance, we bundled the 70 active distance learning courses from nursing and moved them to a clean “managed hosting” Blackboard environment.
 - This version is a clean instance of Blackboard, but it is the same version as main campus, although without branding or VU configurations. The only integration is that users can log in with VUNet ID and password.
- The transition went smoothly, and content was moved over on Friday (9/19) so that nursing faculty could validate course content over the weekend.
- The new instance went live on Monday (9/22), and student's tests started again on Tuesday (9/23).
- Performance has been improved and now meets at least the minimal standards needed to function. (Although a few students have had to be “reset” during exams, that number is fewer than we've experienced at any point during the last several semesters. This is deemed a “win” by the Nursing IT department.)
- Older Nursing classes remain accessible in the legacy OAK system, but current-semester courses have been turned off so that students aren't confused over which instance to use.

A. The School of Nursing thanks everyone for the support in getting this mission accomplished. Many hands went into making this transition a success. Some observations:

- Once legal signed everything, the transition could happen quickly because the staff was prepared – courses had been cleaned up and some courses were drastically reduced in size.
- Nursing was willing to take a lot of risks to move the courses over; this wouldn't have been a success without everyone working together.
- It took 12 hours of processing time to upload 70 courses, then additional time to upload all data to Blackboard, have the content installed, and the courses validated. That information will inform our migration in December, but that December shift will involve physical transfer of the data files rather than an upload process.

B. Going forward: **through the remainder Fall 2014, the rest of the institution will remain on the legacy OAK system until our migration in December** (over the winter holidays).

Nursing was moved because it was vulnerable: their distance learning programs had no other fall-back plan. Given both the preparation necessary prior to the installation (some courses had to be rebuilt from the ground up) and the risk involved, we do not have the capacity to migrate other University programs in this mid-semester environment.

2. VU PETSAs, our module for students on power-based personal violence, is migrating from OAK to Learning Exchange. (We made an exception for students in Law and in the Undergraduate schools where we are down to a double-handful of students who need to complete the program. They have already been directed to finish out in OAK.)

- As of 4:00 p.m. on Friday 9/26, VU PETSAs has been migrated to Learning Exchange, and both the videos and quiz were double-checked. We have just uploaded all students who have not completed the PETSAs module yet, and they will be e-mailed shortly.
- Why we needed to move the program: in addition to the Blackboard difficulties of this semester, we also discovered that the original listing of new students had been set on July 16th, whereas students in some professional and graduate programs continued to be admitted after that date. Rather than try to regularize the enrollments inside of OAK, it was simpler to pull the list of compliant students, compare it against the final list of admitted students from the Student Record System, and notify those who had yet to complete the program. This process also allows us to set automated reminders, so should be simpler for the staff to track and enforce compliance.
- We established a new two-week deadline to allow for the transition. If they still haven't completed it after that, then we will follow our standard clean-up process: students' names go out to Associate Deans who then remind individual students. (Undergraduates and Law are already following that process.)

3. Legacy OAK's Performance:

- Since we moved Nursing to manage hosting and moved PETSAs to Learning Exchange, performance has improved to less than a minute response time, even for outliers. That's slightly better overall, but obviously unsatisfactory.
- We did not receive any emails from upset users today, but Thursdays and Fridays are normally slow days. Do please send us feedback – good or bad – so we can gauge how the system is performing to actual users!
- As part of Blackboard's assessment, Blackboard hammered the servers in the middle of the night and then gave us a report. Blackboard reviewed this report and they stated OAK was consistently bad across the board. However, we don't see the servers getting busy, so neither they nor the VU team can really explain what the issue is.
 - Blackboard states that some customers have environments that have been modified so often that they can find themselves in non-diagnosable state.

A. Question: When we move to manage hosting, are we moving to a clean version of Blackboard?

- a. This analogy was provided: We want to try to move to a new house by cleaning up the garage and not bringing things with us and end up having the same problems in a new neighborhood.
- b. With Nursing, it was a completely new environment and we only took what content we needed.
- c. Blackboard's recommendation: We have a lot of material in OAK from long ago—one change would be to disable everything from over one year ago.
- d. When we looked at class sizes on OAK, 80% of the storage on OAK were from 2 courses (one of which was 1.8 TB)—they have been removed.

4. Ongoing review:

- One way to potentially fix the OAK issue is to limit the number of courses that are present when a user first logs on.
- We feel positive that if we limit some of the courses when users log in, this would increase OAK speeds.
- We have a target of next Friday (10/3): we plan to inactivate anything older than one academic year, therefore, anything prior to Fall 2013 will be inactivated.
- To be clear, these classes are not getting deleted, just simply moved. There will be a process to reactivate them.
 - This process for reactivating courses can be done in batches. Faculty or students will start by sending an email to OAK@vanderbilt.edu, but we are also working on creating a form that users can fill out to request information from an old course.

A. Question: Why one year? Some courses are on a longer cycle than one year. Would 2 years be an improvement?

- a. One of the reasons to go with 1 year is the extremely large population of tiny-enrollment classes that exist each and every semester. We think it would be better to bring the “every other year” courses across one-by-one than to have 3 semesters worth of mostly unused classes cluttering the system.

B. Question: Could you set it up so the classes on OAK are set up so the last 3 courses that a professor has TAUGHT comes up rather than just semesters?

- a. That’s a good suggestion, and will be reviewed by the technical team early this next week.
- b. Faculty have their own possible solution to this: Blackboard has the ability to archive course on your desktop.

C. Question: Some of the professional schools rely on OAK as part of their accreditation or assurance of learning materials. Will the scope be sufficient?

- a. Dr. Cyrus will query the schools, but if needed, we can always batch reactivate courses as such functions are identified.

D. Why inactivate now?

- a. Blackboard and VUIT feel strongly that this will make a difference.
- b. Also, this is later than VUIT first requested; we are giving at least some notice in order to try to minimize the impact of these inactivations. But afterwards, we need to focus on building a better future OAK and putting efforts into moving forward. We’ve tried numerous fixes to the legacy OAK system, but are nearing where there are fewer and fewer things that we can try to fix it. This is likely to be our last big intervention this semester.

- A FAQ sheet has been established (see handout).
 - We are working with Public Affairs so the FAQs will go out on Monday (9/28) through myVU.
 - This change is going into effect on Friday (10/3), so faculty will have some time to move/save their courses if they would like.
 - Graduate students may need to access old classes for comprehensive exams. They can also “batch request” courses to be returned into active status.

- Proposed additional FAQ: What if I need access to multiple courses? Answer: Please batch your request while appropriate.
5. Kaltura implementation will only occur in the hosted environment
- Nursing will start testing Kaltura so that we will have an understanding of how it works.
 - Kaltura will host multimedia files, which may address some concerns over course size
 - It won't be broadly available to campus until January 2015.
6. Class size: as we migrate to hosted Blackboard, we will have to set limit on the size of courses—this will have to happen before classes move.
- Manipulation of big data sets typically involves purchasing cloud computing power during the time that such work is assigned; but as a result that also does not impact class size.
 - Faculty will be able to post multi-media files on Kaltura, so that is also going to reduce class size.
- A. Question: How can faculty know how big their class is? VUIT will check on this.
- a. Faculty need a tool that tells them how big class their class is.
 - b. Faculty may get frustrated if their class had a lot of multimedia in it and the class goes over the limit, given that Kaltura won't be available until January. This too will need to be researched.
- B. Further discussion of this topic will be taken up at our next meeting with a review of existing course-size data.
7. OAK Work-arounds:
- Derek Bruff announced that the Center for Teaching has created a guide to OAK Alternatives (<http://cft.vanderbilt.edu/docs/oak-alternatives/>) and will be blogging about that this next week.
 - The focus of the guide is on the basic functions that normally reside within OAK: options for course communication, discussion boards, and other tools that faculty might use if they would like to switch now. Tools include Box, Word Press, Google, Piazza, etc.
 - We will put a link to this information in the OAK Tips Box.
 - Concern: If faculty choose something that Derek has suggested, they may never come back to Blackboard.
 - Answer: If professors find a program that is useful for their pedagogical mission, they are welcome to use it—faculty use a lot of other programs as well. Blackboard is not the only one and only tool, it is simply the Learning Management System that the university uses and supports.