

BLACKBOARD SHARED HOSTING PROJECT: PILOT PHASE

(Note that this document includes elements of a statement of work, which will be amended and revised over time with the participating campuses. This is a ‘living’ document.)

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

The fall 2006 PACE report identifies centrally-provided Blackboard course management systems as an important medium to long-term opportunity to explore. Ten campuses in the University of North Carolina system use Blackboard Learning System as their enterprise course management system, and each of these systems and support for them is completely independent. In addition, almost all NC community colleges use Blackboard, and NCCCS has expressed interest in exploring how to consolidate their implementations as well.

This situation means missed opportunities for cost savings, cost avoidance, and potentially better technical support regarding testing and troubleshooting through a jointly-implemented Blackboard architecture for several campuses.

Assumptions

To be successful in consolidating Blackboard to a remote, hosted environment with the benefits of long-term cost savings, cost avoidance, and excellent technical support, the following are assumed:

1. A high availability, redundant, high-speed and dedicated network—NCREN.
2. Standard hardware, software, and software versions, as well as standard conversion processes and procedures for migration and common interfaces where required.
3. Some up-front costs associated with transitioning to a centralized service.
4. Local campus authority and access to web-based administration for courses and users on their campus.
5. Local branding of individual institution’s interface will be available.
6. A commitment by participating campuses and UNC-GA to collaborate fully on formulating and making the governance and business processes work in the short-term and sustainable in the long-term as campuses join the central hosting model.
7. Participating institutions have backing from their academic and IT leadership.

SCOPE

Base Objectives.

1. To consolidate hardware, as much as possible, in a central location or at a hosting NC campus.
2. To consolidate Blackboard licenses, as much as possible, for this shared hosting.
3. To provide shared staff to administer the application, database, and servers for Blackboard. At a minimum, this staff will maintain operating systems, install and patch the Blackboard application, and provide high-end, tier-three technical support for local Blackboard administrators.

Note that Blackboard’s architecture related to directory services and plug-ins, as well as features related to licensing levels, will directly affect how objectives one and two are met.

Project Participants

At this time, five UNC campuses have expressed interest in being the first universities to join the shared services project. While we do not expect that all five campuses will be able to be implemented on the same timeline (some will be part of an initial pilot phase and others will be implemented in a second phase), all will be invited to participate at some level in designing the architecture, governance, and business processes that will make shared hosting work.

TENTATIVE TIMELINE: January 2007-June 2008

Planning: January-April 2007. Identify participants, investigate technical models, establish campus buy-in, and negotiate a statement of work with projected costs included.

Design: April-June 2007. With input from the Blackboard company and other higher education institutions offering shared hosting services, design a technical architecture, adopt initial business and governance processes, and identify technical staff for setup during summer.

Implement architecture: June-August 2007. Purchase and install hardware and software at the hosting site.

Analyze architecture and design pilot production services: September-December 2007. Port sample course and user data to shared architecture and do testing. Test integration with campus systems. Design plan for introducing production courses in Spring 2008 to the system.

Implement services: December 2007- May 2008. Port courses slated for production in Spring 2008 to shared system. System goes live with identified production courses in January, and throughout the semester, performance data is tracked, issues are troubleshot and documented, and feedback from pilot participants is gathered.

Analyze services: February-June 2008. Initial data on costs and technical issues for January start-date will be analyzed in February. Performance and feedback from participants will be analyzed periodically, and a summary report will be written in June 2008.

COSTS

A total cost of ownership study for their current CMS implementation will be undertaken with the campus participants in March and April 2007. As initial technical designs are completed in late March and April 2007, initial costs for hardware, software, and staff will be estimated. These costs will be included in the statement of work slated to be completed by April 30, 2008, and a business plan to take care of immediate costs for hardware and staffing—not already budgeted by institutions—will need to be completed.



March 2007