

“The Clear Favorite”: Why Bridgewater State University Chose Blackboard Learn Ultra to Enhance the Online Learning Experience

A collaborative effort and modern LMS boost efficiencies and possibilities for a world-leading university.



BRIDGEWATER
STATE UNIVERSITY

Located in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, Bridgewater State University (BSU) has been a higher education leader in the Northeast for the past two centuries. As a state institution supporting nearly 10,000 learners, BSU is passionate about providing innovative and affordable educational opportunities for their community; a central tenet of their **vision** is that *“all students, regardless of socioeconomic background, have full and equal access to the educational opportunities and social experiences that best prepare and inspire them to build purposeful lives of their choosing.”*

BSU has been a long-term partner with Blackboard® Learn. They recently reviewed the LMS market and found that Blackboard Learn Ultra is the best fit for their needs, with Learn Ultra’s growth trajectory since their decision confirming that to be the case. We sat down with Eric LePage, executive director at BSU’s Teaching and Technology Center, to discuss why they chose Learn Ultra above competitors and how their partnership with Anthology is accelerating innovation.

ABOUT BRIDGEWATER STATE UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTION TYPE:
4-YEAR PUBLIC

LOCATION:
BRIDGEWATER, MASSACHUSETTS

POPULATION: 10,000

ANTHOLOGY PRODUCTS:
 Blackboard LEARN

Q: BSU has formally reviewed the LMS market in recent years and ultimately opted for Blackboard Learn Ultra. What were the key reasons you preferred Learn Ultra to competitors?

We wanted to find the best LMS for our faculty and students, so we launched a comprehensive campus-wide search that involved demos and Q&As from three vendors: Blackboard Learn Ultra, D2L Brightspace, and Instructure Canvas. After gathering feedback from our faculty and students, we found that Blackboard Learn Ultra was the clear favorite.

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*Executive Director of the
Teaching and Technology Center
Bridgewater State University*

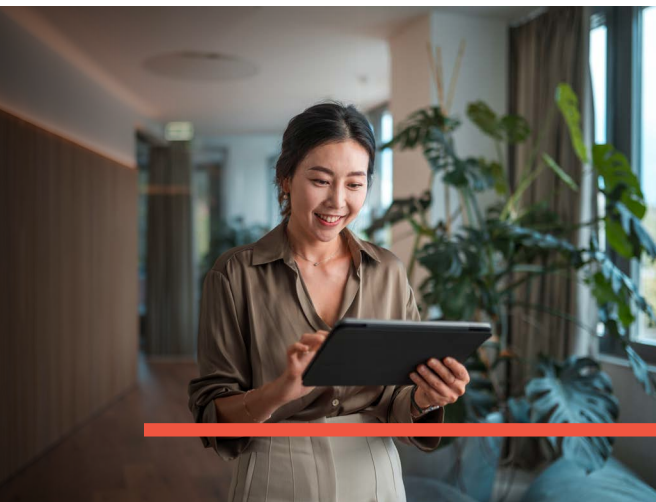
A: Three years ago, Bridgewater State University faced a decision: whether to renew our license agreement with Blackboard Learn or switch to a different learning management system. We had been using Blackboard Learn Original for years, but it was starting to feel outdated and inadequate for our needs. We wanted to find the best LMS for our faculty and students, so we launched a comprehensive campus-wide search that involved demos and Q&As from three vendors: Blackboard Learn Ultra, D2L Brightspace, and Instructure Canvas. **After gathering feedback from our faculty and students, we found that Blackboard Learn Ultra was the clear favorite.** The main reasons for choosing Learn Ultra were familiarity and making the move to a platform with a modern look and feel. Learn Ultra offered a sleeker, faster, and more user-friendly interface that enhanced the online learning experience. Our Cabinet and Board of Trustees agreed with the recommendation and approved the migration from Learn Original to full Learn Ultra for all Blackboard Learn courses by summer 2024.

Q: Following the pandemic, we know that there is a renewed focus on technology costs at many institutions. How did this feed into your decision?

A: As a state institution, we had a limited budget, and we did not want to burden our students with higher fees. Blackboard Learn Ultra offered a reasonable and competitive pricing model that matched our expectations and resources. We were not impressed by some of the inflated prices we saw from other vendors, especially when they did not offer any significant advantages over Learn Ultra. We believe that quality education should be affordable and accessible, and Anthology helped us achieve that goal.

Q: How was the process of moving your courses from Learn Original to Blackboard Learn Ultra?

A: The migration process was made easier by the fact that we were staying within the Blackboard Learn LMS platform. We could run both Learn Original and Learn Ultra courses simultaneously during the transition period, which gave our faculty more flexibility



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and control over their pace of change. My team at the Teaching & Technology Center encouraged faculty to try out Learn Ultra with one course so they could get used to the new features and functionalities without feeling overwhelmed. This “dip your toes into the water” approach helped ease the anxiety and resistance that often accompany major changes in technology.

Q: As detailed in our quarterly roadmap sessions, product development for Blackboard Learn Ultra continues to outpace the market. Which of the new features have been most popular among the BSU community?

A: One of the benefits of choosing Blackboard Learn Ultra is that it is constantly updated with new features and enhancements that improve the online learning experience. Among the many new features that have been added to Learn Ultra since we migrated, two have been particularly popular among our faculty: the ability to add images to modules and the **AI Design Assistant**.

The updated module feature allows faculty to add images to their course modules either by uploading their own files, by using the generative image AI tool, or by using images from the extensive Unsplash image database. This feature has been widely used by our faculty, as it adds visual appeal and creativity to their course sites. The generative image AI tool and the Unsplash image database make it easy for faculty to find and create images that match their course content and style.

The AI Design Assistant is another feature that has received positive feedback from our faculty. This feature helps faculty design their courses more efficiently and effectively by using artificial intelligence to generate rubrics, exam questions, discussion questions, and more. Faculty can use the AI Design Assistant to save time and effort on course design activities and focus more on teaching and engaging with their students.

Q: BSU has been a regular contributor to Learn Ultra product development via the Anthology Idea Exchange, with 13 ideas that your users have voted for already implemented in the solution. Describe your experience in working with our product team to develop solutions that are fit for purpose in higher education.

A: We absolutely love the Anthology Idea Exchange! The days of “black hole” email suggestion boxes are over. Our faculty now have a voice in the LMS development process. We can see the

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status and feedback of our suggestions. The Anthology Idea Exchange has made us feel valued and heard as customers.

Another way that we have been working with the Anthology product team is by attending the weekly Blackboard Learn Ultra virtual office hours. These sessions are designed for system administrators and support staff from institutions like ours, and they provide us with valuable information and assistance as we transition to full Learn Ultra. We can interact with key product developers, product managers, and support managers, and get updates, demos, and answers to our questions. The Blackboard Learn Ultra virtual office hours have been a great source of support and guidance for us.

We have also noticed that Anthology has increased the pace and quality of Learn Ultra development since the merger. We receive monthly product updates, which are communicated to all instructors via a brief pop-up message when they log into their Learn Ultra course sites. We love this notification feature, as it keeps my team and our faculty informed of the latest improvements and new features. And by attending quarterly Learn Ultra roadmap sessions, we can proactively address faculty concerns and highlight upcoming new features. The Blackboard Learn Ultra roadmap session has been a useful tool for planning and preparing for the next steps in our migration.

Q: If you were speaking with another institution that was considering a move to Blackboard Learn Ultra, what would you tell them?

A: I have a long history with Blackboard, dating back to 1999. It was not always a smooth relationship, as there were times when we felt frustrated and ignored by the company. We often wondered why they made certain decisions regarding LMS updates, and we did not see much progress or innovation. However, everything changed when Anthology merged with Blackboard three years ago. Anthology brought a fresh and dynamic perspective to the LMS market, and they transformed Blackboard Learn Ultra into a much-improved solution. Anthology brought in new faces from around the globe who operate as leaders, developers, project managers, and support staff. They also invested more resources into Learn Ultra product development, training, and support, and the results are evident. We now see Blackboard Learn as a true partner who cares about our needs and goals. We have a terrific client experience manager who is always available and helpful. She and Anthology are dedicated to our success with Learn Ultra.



One of the ways that Anthology has shown their commitment to us is by collaborating with us on several professional development events for our faculty. Last August, we hosted a full day of Blackboard Learn Ultra workshops on campus, with Anthology providing the trainers and lunch! The event was a huge success, as we had over 100 faculty members attending and learning about the new Learn Ultra platform. During the winter break, we partnered with Anthology again to offer a half-day of webinars, covering various topics and features of Learn Ultra. We have more events planned for this summer as we prepare for the final push to full Learn Ultra. Anthology has been very supportive in providing these opportunities for our faculty, and we appreciate their efforts to ensure that our faculty are comfortable and confident with Learn Ultra.

Our sincere thank you to Eric LePage for sharing his experience with us, and to the broader team at Bridgewater State University for contributing to the development of our innovative, modern LMS via the Anthology Idea Exchange.

Ready to try Learn Ultra for yourself? **Access a free 30-day trial today!**

Products highlighted in this campus conversation:

 **Blackboard LEARN**

Learn more at anthology.com.



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