

ULTA LMS Recommendation

Memo

To: Provost Karen Hanson and Interim Vice President and Chief Information Officer (VPCIO) Bernard Gulachek
From: Lee-Ann Breuch, Associate Professor of Writing Studies and Faculty Chair of University Learning Technology Advisors (ULTA)
Date: April 18, 2017
RE: ULTA Recommendation regarding Unizin and Canvas proposal

Enclosed is a recommendation report from University Learning Technology Advisors (ULTA) in response to the proposal from Office of Information Technology (OIT) to remain in Unizin and adopt Canvas as the UMN learning management system (LMS).

Throughout the 2016-2017 academic year, ULTA had many robust discussions about the OIT proposal, and many perspectives were shared and discussed. To generate our recommendation, we created a questionnaire that included a yes/no question regarding the OIT proposal, as well as several questions and opportunities for open feedback on related items such as Unizin consortium, Canvas, Moodlerooms, and Software as a Service (SaaS). The questionnaire was shared with both voting members (25) and consulting members (8), and results are reported accordingly. We felt it was important to gather all perspectives on the proposal.

The report compiles our responses to both the proposal and to related questions. An executive summary is included, followed by a detailed summary of responses. An appendix includes results of tally responses from both voting and consulting members.

The enclosed recommendation report was compiled by a subcommittee of ULTA including Lee-Ann Breuch, Soumya Sen, Michelle Driessen, Ilene Alexander, and Lana Peterson. Erik Epp from OIT assisted the subcommittee with data compilation. We have done our best to summarize the feedback we received and to capture faculty perspectives on the proposal. We hope this information is helpful to you as you make your decision.

If you have any questions about the report, please feel free to contact Lee-Ann Breuch at lbreuch@umn.edu. Thank you.

Executive Summary

A two-thirds majority (16/24) of ULTA voting members and over half (4/7) of consulting members supported the proposal to remain in Unizin and adopt Canvas. ULTA members articulated many considerations with their votes:

- Canvas was consistently preferred among students and faculty in pilot studies since 2015; however, pilot studies did not include all units and were not representative of all course needs.
- The combination of Unizin and Canvas seemed more compelling than the individual pieces alone (Unizin; Canvas). For example, in the ULTA member vote, a narrow majority voted “No” on whether a case has been made for Canvas to be the LMS choice for UMN.
- Our institution has developed a strong reputation for effectively using Moodle, and the migration to Canvas risks walking away from years of expertise in Moodle.
- MoodleRooms was introduced late in the process, yet it has potential as a viable LMS.
- Unizin has clear potential but members would like to see more evidence to demonstrate benefits.
- Any LMS transition needs to have a sufficient timeline, personnel resource commitment from OIT, and clear messaging; strong relationships between central OIT and unit directors would be beneficial; units with special needs such as online programs may require more resources.

ULTA members recognized that a change to SaaS means that a transition will occur either to MoodleRooms or Canvas. Several also acknowledged that change is hard, and that a clear change management process will be helpful to work through whichever transition occurs.

Introduction

This document provides a summary of responses from members of the University Learning Technology Advisors (ULTA) committee regarding the following proposal from the Office of Information Technology (OIT): ***Should UMN renew its contract in the Unizin consortium and select the consortium’s chosen platform, Instructure’s Canvas, as UMN’s centrally supported learning management system?*** Throughout AY 2016-17, ULTA members reviewed and discussed information about learning management systems (including Moodle, Canvas, and Moodlerooms), pilot studies of Canvas, estimates of transition needs, and Unizin consortium (see this [webpage](#) for more information.) Our response to the OIT proposal is one data point to be shared with VP-CIO Gulachek and Provost Hanson regarding the Unizin and Canvas decision.

A recommendation questionnaire was released on March 27, 2017, and was open until April 7, 2017. The recommendation questionnaire was sent to two groups: voting [members](#) of ULTA (25 persons) and consulting members of ULTA (8 persons). The questionnaire included a yes/no question regarding the OIT proposal, as well as several questions and opportunities for open feedback on related items such as Unizin consortium, Canvas, Moodlerooms, and Software as a Service (SaaS).

Response rate to the questionnaire was strong: 24/25 (96%) voting members and 7/8 (88%) consulting members completed the questionnaire. Most respondents reported attending meetings and/or staying informed by reading minutes and reports. All respondents had used Moodle previously. Among ULTA members, 15/24 voting members and 7/7 consulting members had used Canvas.

Proposal

A two-thirds majority (16/24) of voting members and over half (4/7) of consulting members responded “Yes” in response to the question “Should UMN renew its contract in the Unizin consortium and select the consortium’s chosen platform, Instructure’s Canvas, as UMN’s centrally supported learning management system?” All respondents had the opportunity to offer comments.

Supporting comments mentioned that student and instructor information from pilot studies consistently supported Canvas over Moodle, although respondents noted the pilots were voluntary, did not include all schools, and were not randomized. Support was expressed for the idea that Unizin membership would provide advantages such as working with peer institutions, learning analytics, and future-oriented LMS. Many Moodle challenges were mentioned such as slowness, downtime, robustness, clunky interface, scalability, data access, and the gradebook.

Dissenting comments expressed support for the strong expertise, creativity, and innovation regarding Moodle use at UMN. Moving to Moodlerooms would offer the opportunity to continue growing the UMN Moodle enterprise. Doubt was expressed regarding a need or urgency to change or leave Moodle behind; more time may be helpful to think through the decision. Dissenting comments also indicated that transition to Moodlerooms would be easier than Canvas and may ultimately cost less in terms of resources. Dissenting comments indicated there was not enough evidence regarding the benefits of Unizin, only ideas at this point.

Related to the proposal, all voting members (24/24) and nearly all consulting members (6/7) responded “Yes” to the question “Has the case effectively been made that we should move to Software as a Service (SaaS) or a cloud-based Learning Management System (LMS)?” Comments indicated strong agreement that our current infrastructure could benefit from additional resources and that SaaS would be in our best interest for the future.

Unizin

A narrow majority (13/24 of voting members and 3/7 consulting members) responded “Yes” to the question “Has the case effectively been made that Unizin membership will eventually lead to greater access to data, analysis, and reporting that will provide faculty and students with insights to improve teaching and learning?”

In support of Unizin, comments indicated that Unizin and Canvas are connected and may be more compelling when combined. Supporters see our membership in Unizin as a promising opportunity to lead with innovative uses of learning technology and university data. Yet many mentioned that a clearer case needs to be made for the usefulness of Unizin at a class level (rather than institutional level). Several also commented that it is important we have clear deliverables and accountability for membership investment. Against Unizin, several indicated that more information about Unizin is needed overall, particularly regarding questions about data ownership, data protection for students, and learning analytics. Some mentioned that benefits of Unizin have not yet been realized and that we should not feel pressured to remain in the group.

Canvas

A narrow majority (13/24 voting members and 4/7 consulting members) responded “No” to the question “Has the case effectively been made that Canvas should become the SaaS LMS for the University of Minnesota system?” In all, 15 of the 24 voting members had used Canvas, with 4 of that group voting “No” on this question.

Those responding “No” noted significant challenges that would accompany a transition away from Moodle as the system-wide LMS. Those challenges include significant resource investments alongside a simultaneously complex process to involve teachers in thinking through platform architecture, fit of pedagogy with available resources, and effective layout for individual courses and programs. Comments clustered around four concerns: (1) lack of 1:1 substitution of some Moodle tools for Canvas tools as some key Moodle features do not translate and/or are difficult to find/navigate; (2) time/cost to transition in general, and in context of specific programs/colleges; (3) deep pedagogical and economic investments in the existing ecosystem; and (4) morale costs related to all of these major concerns. In responding to this question and to the Unizin question, ULTA members are keenly aware that as Next Generation Digital Learning Environments (NGDLE) develop, Moodle and/or MoodleRooms will continue to change, and similar transitions in technology and pedagogy will be required in the near future.

Those responding “Yes” noted that the Canvas platform offered a more simple design that aided in the completion of key tasks – including (1) creating a course site and editing course pages/modules, (2) posting and reviewing course materials, (3) navigating resources linked to completion of course assignments (the calendar with due dates, integrated email, access to

off-site course readings, assignment uploading that welcomes multiple document types), and (4) grading/responding tools that promote timely teacher-student interaction. Several responses remark on the transition to Canvas as providing opportunities to rethink pedagogy in taking advantage of Canvas resources, to collaborate with other teachers through Canvas Commons, and to work with peer institutions as partners as part of broader educational and technological missions. Throughout the qualitative comments in support of Canvas, ULTA members refer to findings drawn from Canvas pilot surveys of teachers and students, with each group consistently stating a strong preference for Canvas for its navigational ease, calendar with integrated course assignment due dates, system speed/swift response time, ease of downloading and sharing files and resources, and overall appearance of the interface.

Moodlerooms

A strong majority (18/24 of voting members and 7/7 consulting members) responded “No” to the question “Has the case effectively been made that MoodleRooms should become the SaaS LMS for the University of Minnesota system?” That is, we found that an effective case had *not* yet been made to move to MoodleRooms as our SaaS solution. We believe this response was not necessarily an indication of dissatisfaction with MoodleRooms, but due to a lack of information.

Many committee members voiced concerns with the late introduction of MoodleRooms as an option. There was a lack of hands-on experience with MoodleRooms, which could be remedied in a future pilot. Some comments indicated that MoodleRooms is a good solution: it is familiar, versatile, has the same capabilities as Canvas, and would present a much easier transition for faculty. Some concerns were mentioned in regard to MoodleRooms: data access, poor integrations with other tools and systems, and a third-party vendor required for hosting. Some pointed out that a move to MoodleRooms may require a change of theme which would affect layout, although the theme change may not substantially affect functionality.

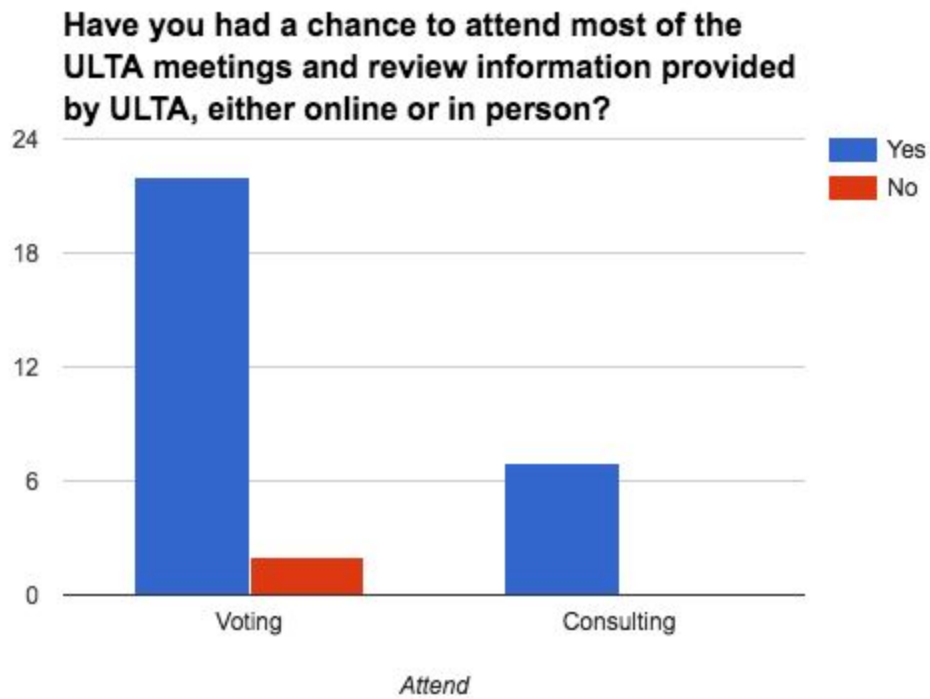
Migration

Several comments addressed concerns regarding transition to a new LMS, and three clear themes emerged. First, several ULTA members acknowledged that a transition will be needed no matter what because of the move to Software as a Service (SaaS). The transition will need a clear and sufficient timeline for either platform (MoodleRooms or Canvas). Second, several suggested that transition support and personnel commitment from OIT will be essential and that clear messaging will be needed about the migration process. Some described this need in terms of strong resource commitment and communication from OIT about the process. Others mentioned the need for clear communication between OIT central and specific colleges and units. Perhaps a transition coordinator is needed. Third, some mentioned the specific needs of certain colleges or units, such as professional schools, online courses and programs. Requests

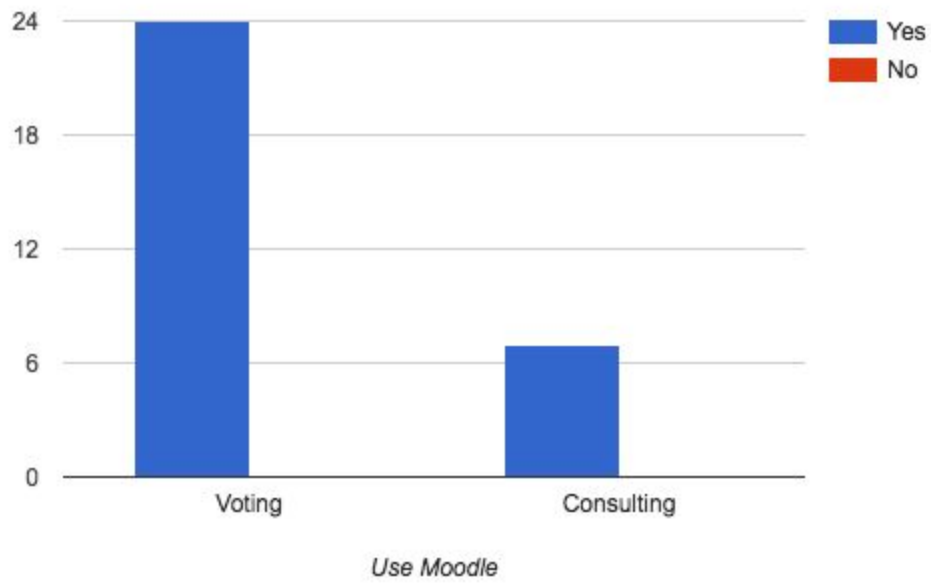
were made to closely review the needs of these units and to adjust transition resources accordingly.

Appendix

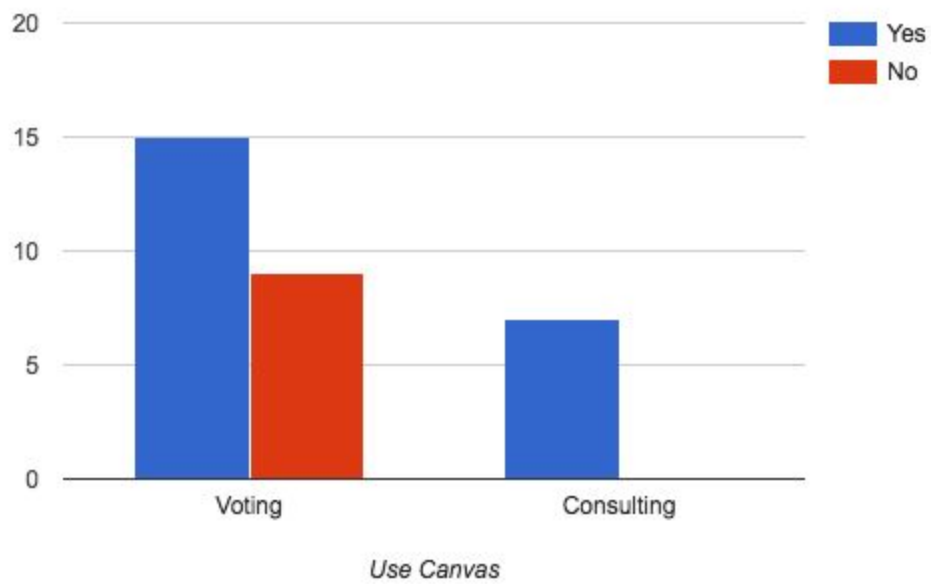
Questionnaire Data



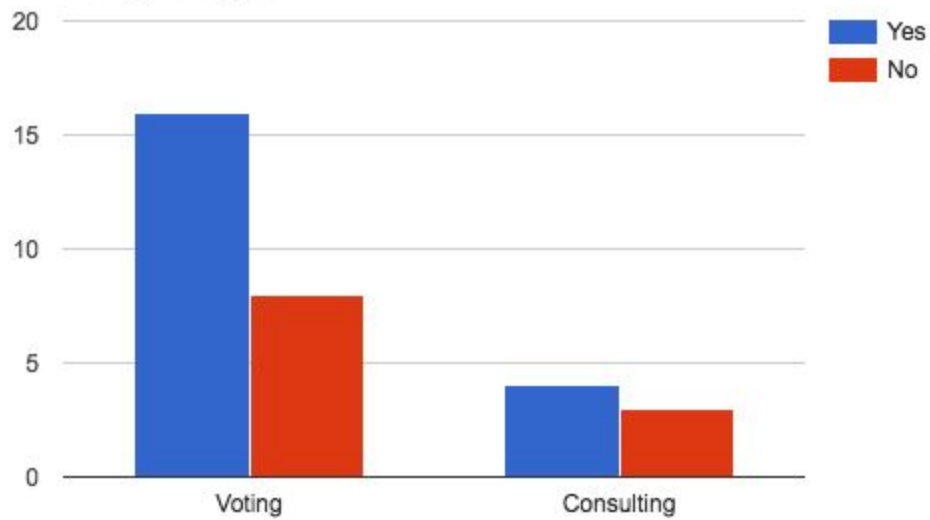
Have you used Moodle?



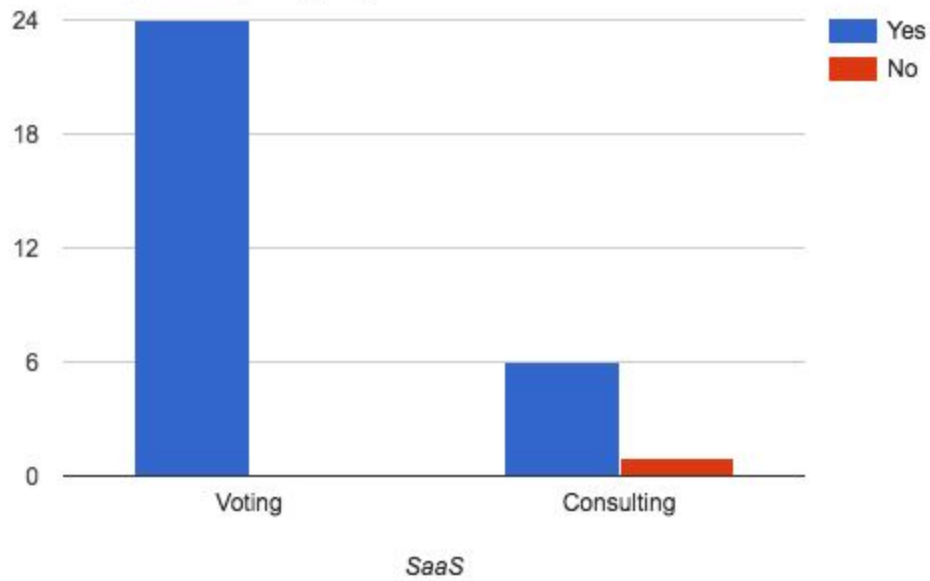
Have you used Canvas?



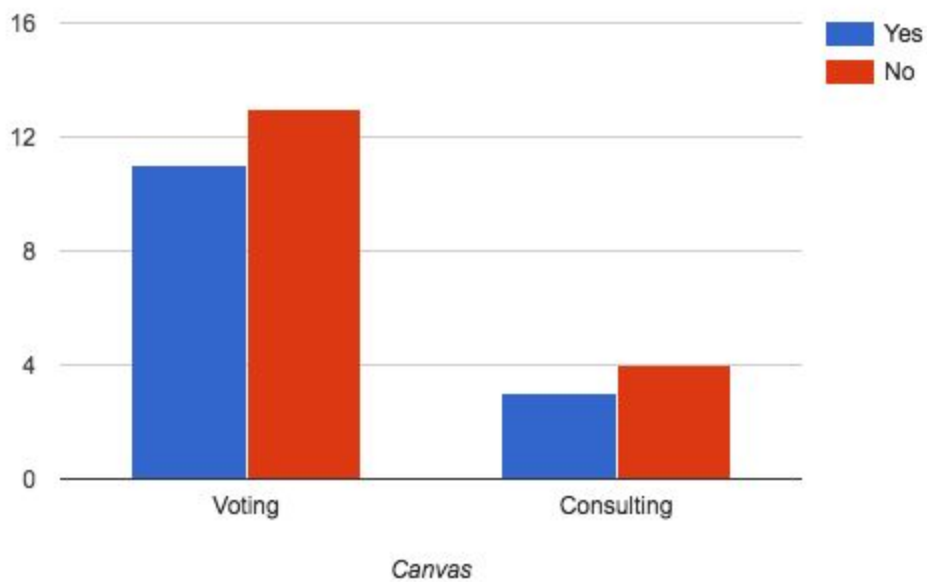
Should UMN continue its membership in Unizin and adopt its platform, Canvas, as UMN's centrally-supported learning management system?



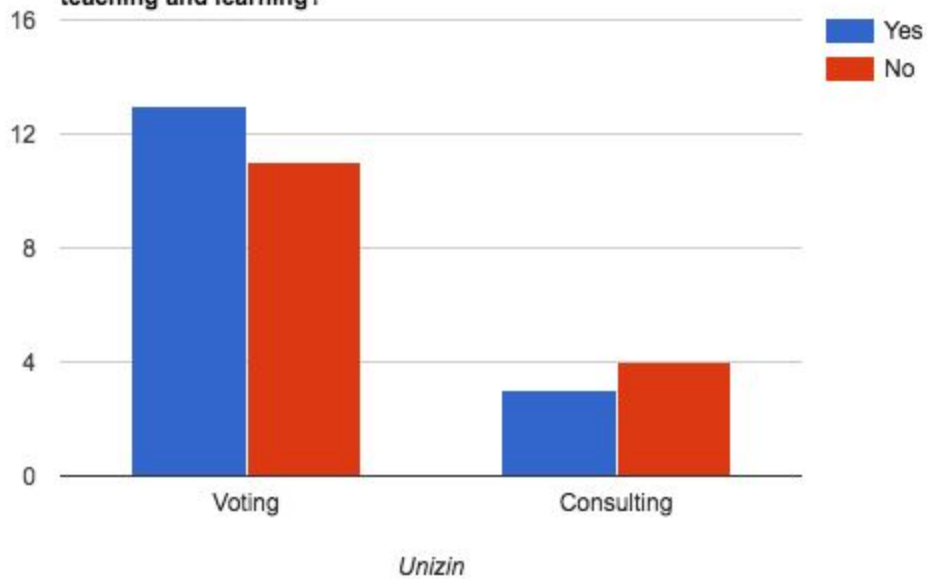
Has the case effectively been made that we should move to Software as a Service (SaaS) or a cloud-based Learning Management System (LMS)?

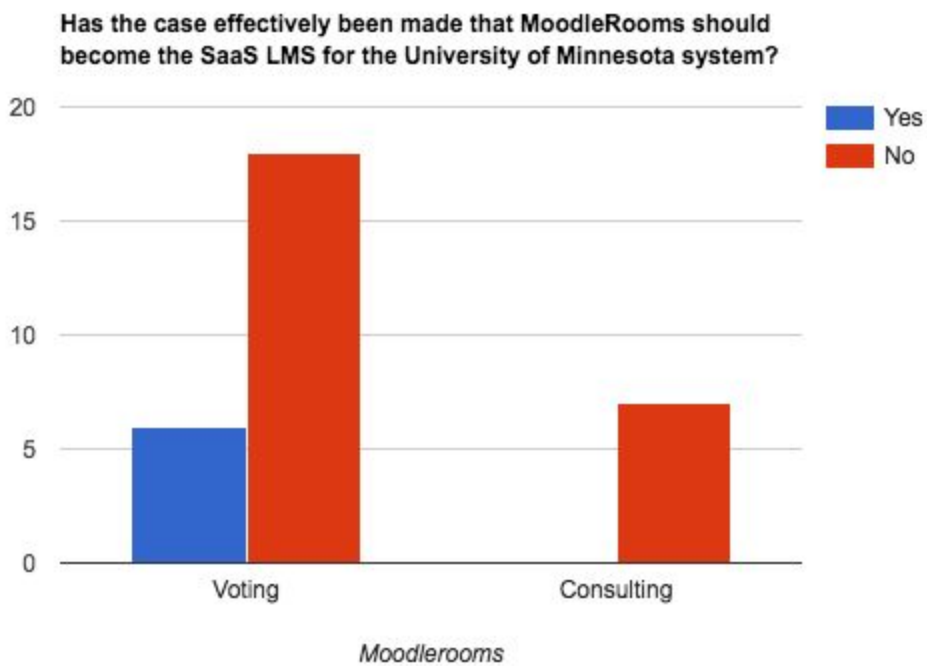


Has the case effectively been made that Canvas should become the SaaS LMS for the University of Minnesota system?



Has a case effectively been made that Unizin membership will eventually lead to greater access to data, analysis, and reporting that will provide faculty and students with insights to improve teaching and learning?

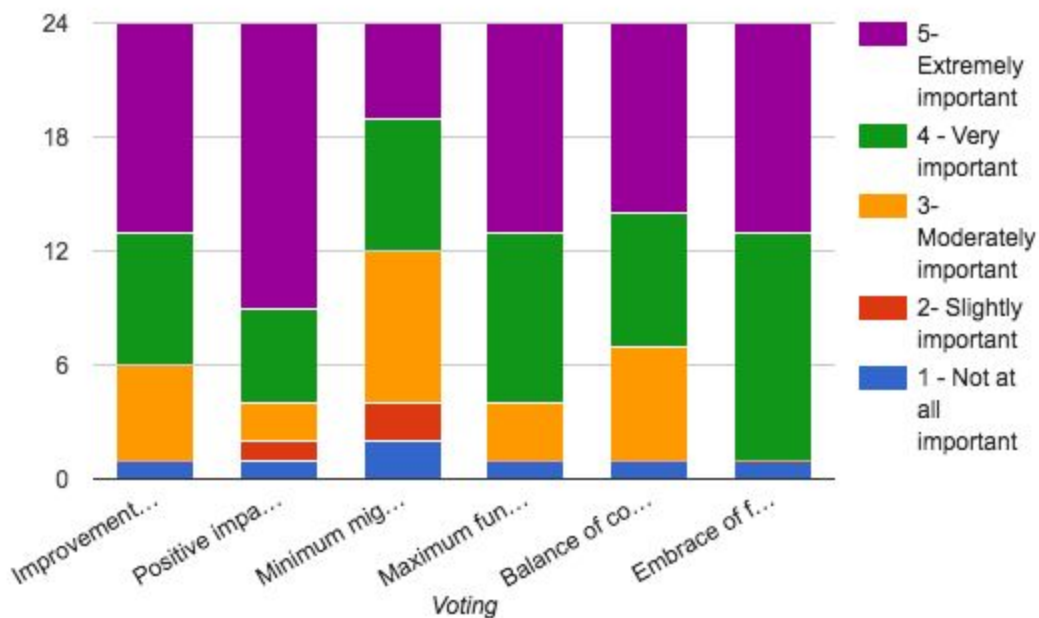




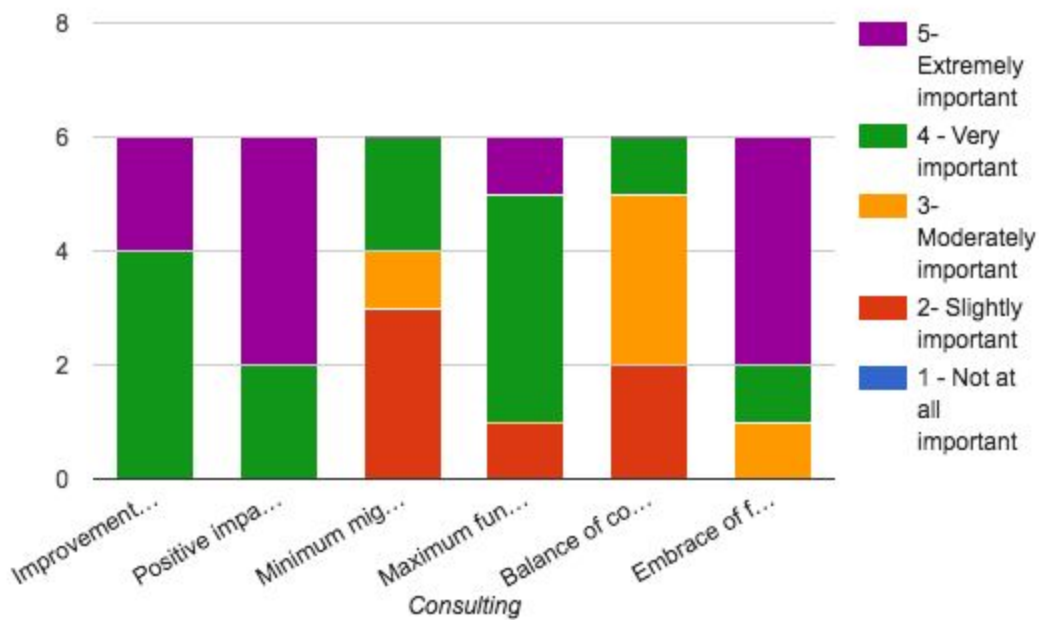
How important are each of the criteria to your decision? Likert scale 1-5 (1=not very important; 5 = very important)

- Improvement of student experience
- Positive impact on student learning
- Minimum migration impact
- Maximum functionality
- Balance of costs and benefits
- Embrace of future needs

Voting Members



Consulting Members



Crosstab analysis of Proposal, case for Canvas, case for Unizin questions (Voting members only):

Proposal: Unizin and Canvas	Canvas	Unizin	Count	Percentage
Yes	Yes	Yes	9	38%
Yes	Yes	No	2	8%
Yes	No	Yes	4	17%
Yes	No	No	1	4%
No	No	No	8	33%

ULTA Membership

Voting Members

Representative, College

Lee-Ann Breuch (Chair), CLA

Lisa Ahmann, Dentistry

Alyssa Bonnac, Continuing Education

Bruce Brorson, UMN Crookston

Michelle Driessen, CSE

Robert Dunbar, UMN Rochester

Robert Fecik, Pharmacy

Derek Frank, Undergraduate, Bio Science

Brian Gute, UMN Duluth

Kristi Jensen, Libraries

Kristin Lamberty, UM Morris

Peggy Martin, AHC

Krishona Martinson, UM Extension

William McGeveran, Law

Mark Decker, CBS

Rebecca Montgomery, CFANS

Lana Peterson, Graduate, CEHD

Austin Quam, Undergraduate, CLA

Margaret Root Kustritz, Vet Med

Dereck Salisbury, Nursing

Jodi Sandfort, Public Affairs

Daniela Sandler, Design

Soumya Sen, Carlson
Jill Trites, CEHD
Julian Wolfson, Public Health

Consulting Members

Name, Role, Department

Ilene Alexander, Provost's representative, Center for Education Innovation
Donalee Attardo, OIT representative, Academic Technology - OIT
John Bothe, Communications support, OIT Administration
Erik Epp, Business analyst, Academic Technology - OIT
Sara Hurley, Academic administrative leadership, SPH
Amanda Rondeau, Academic technology representative, CEHD
Peg Sherven, Academic technology representative, AHC
Emily Stull Richardson, Secretary, CLA