



# Canvas Implementation Project – Final Report

December 2025

# Executive Summary

The Canvas Implementation Project was launched to support George Mason University's strategic vision of enhancing teaching and learning through modern, scalable, and accessible technologies. The project **successfully transitioned the institution from Blackboard to Canvas**, completing migrations on schedule and preparing faculty, staff, and students for the **full retirement of Blackboard in July 2025**.

Key milestones included the **establishment of project governance, successful technical integrations, the migration of courses and organizations, extensive faculty training, and sustained communication efforts**.

Despite challenges related to resource constraints and change management, the **project achieved its primary goals and positioned George Mason for long-term success in digital learning**.

# Project Background

The decision to transition from Blackboard to Canvas was informed by an institutional review of learning management systems, stakeholder feedback, and the need for a platform that could support Mason's goals for digital transformation, accessibility, and integration with enterprise systems.

- **Strategic Alignment:** The project aligned with Mason's IT roadmap, including goals of enhancing digital learning and integrating AI-driven solutions.
- **Governance:** A Project Leadership Team and an Implementation Advisory Committee provided oversight, with strong collaboration across ITS, academic units, and vendor partners.
- **Timeline:** The project began in 2023, with phased migrations through 2024–2025, culminating in Blackboard retirement on July 15, 2025.

# Project Goals

The project was guided by four objectives:

1. **Enhance teaching and learning** with an intuitive, modern LMS.
2. **Improve faculty and student experience** through streamlined tools and integrations.
3. Provide **robust training and professional development** to support adoption.
4. Establish a **governance and support model** for sustainable operations.

# Level Up: Transforming Through Canvas

This project offered a rare opportunity to “level up” and:

- **Modernize instructional technology and pedagogy**
  - Used course migration to clean, streamline, and redesign content
- **Reimagine workflows and reshape cultural practices**
  - Addressed file storage and media management
  - Comply Library of Virginia retention and disposition guidelines
- **Build readiness for future teaching and learning innovation**
  - Reviewed hosted files for web use and ensured compliance with updated accessibility standards

# Branding Elements

The project team leveraged multiple graphics and branding images to reflect the "move" to Canvas.



# RFP Process

# RFP Process

- Between 2022-2023, the Selection Committee gathered feedback and requirements from the University community to write the RFP
- The Selection Committee invited 3 vendors (Blackboard, D2L, & Canvas) for campus visits in May 2023
- In December 2023, Canvas was awarded the contract and named the next LMS for the university



## Pre-RFP Stakeholder Engagement Recap

4 Surveys

932 Faculty  
Survey  
Responses

1,185 Student  
Survey  
Responses

9,956 Student  
Poll  
Responses

9 Focus  
Groups; 89  
Participants

Presentations  
at Faculty  
Meetings

## Post Vendor Demo Engagement Recap

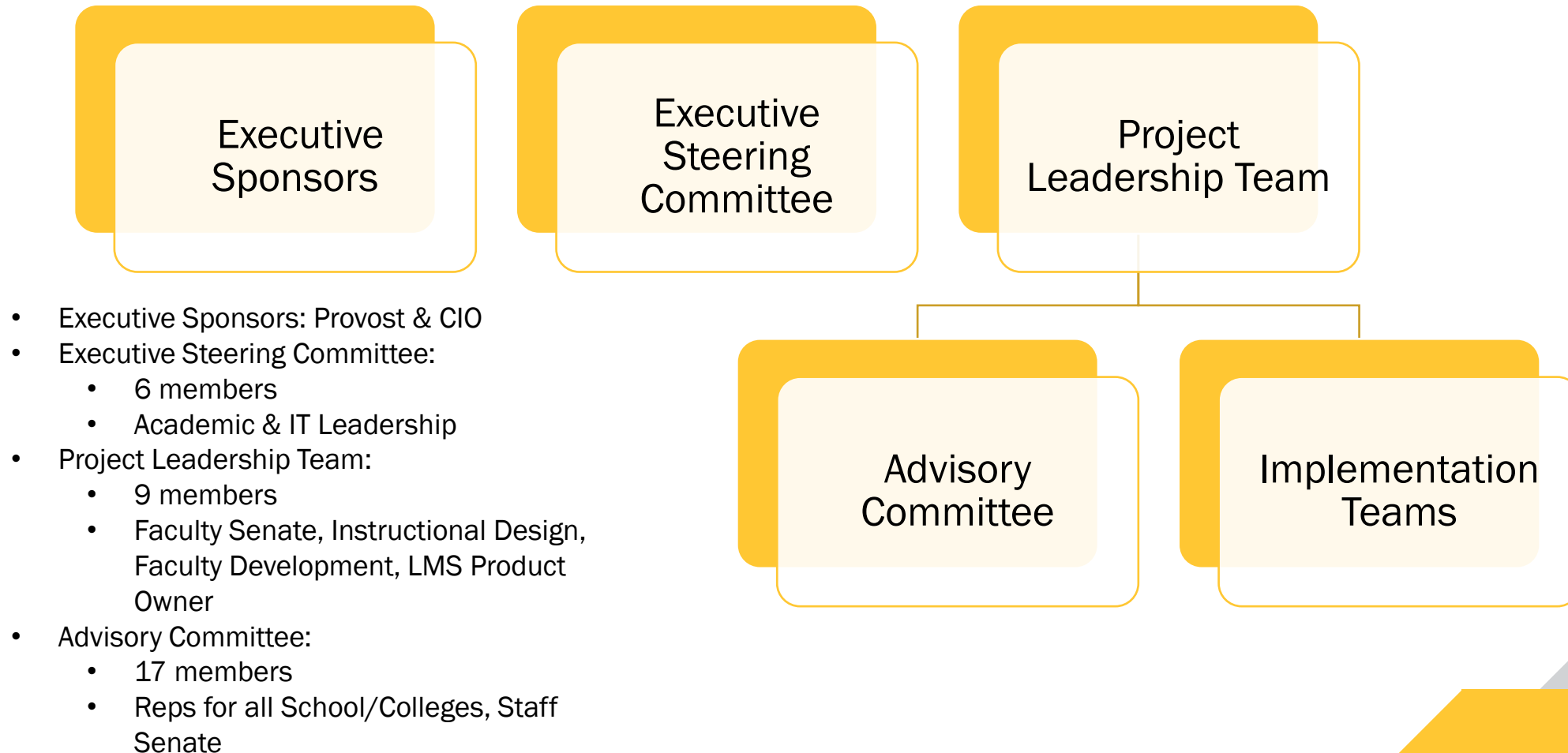
1071 Attended or  
Viewed Recorded  
Vendor Demos

965 Survey  
Responses  
Recorded

62 Provided  
Feedback from  
Sandboxes

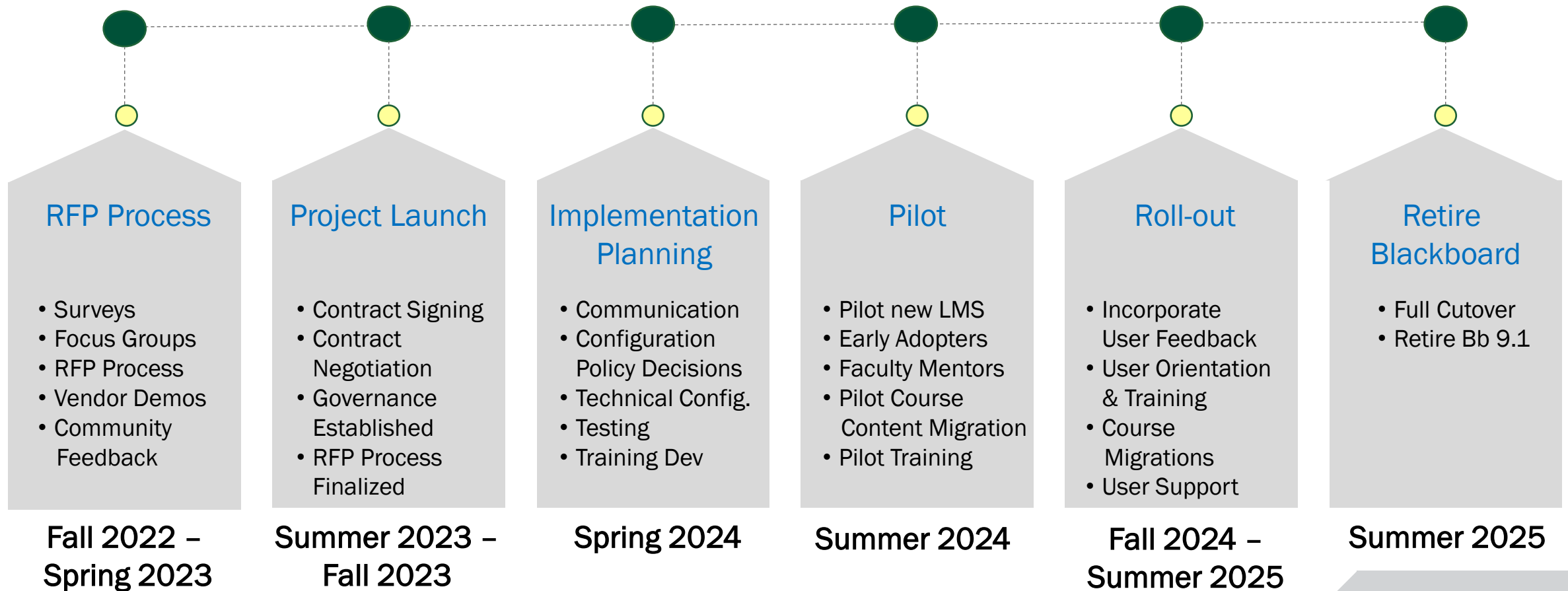
# Project Governance

# Implementation Phase Project Governance

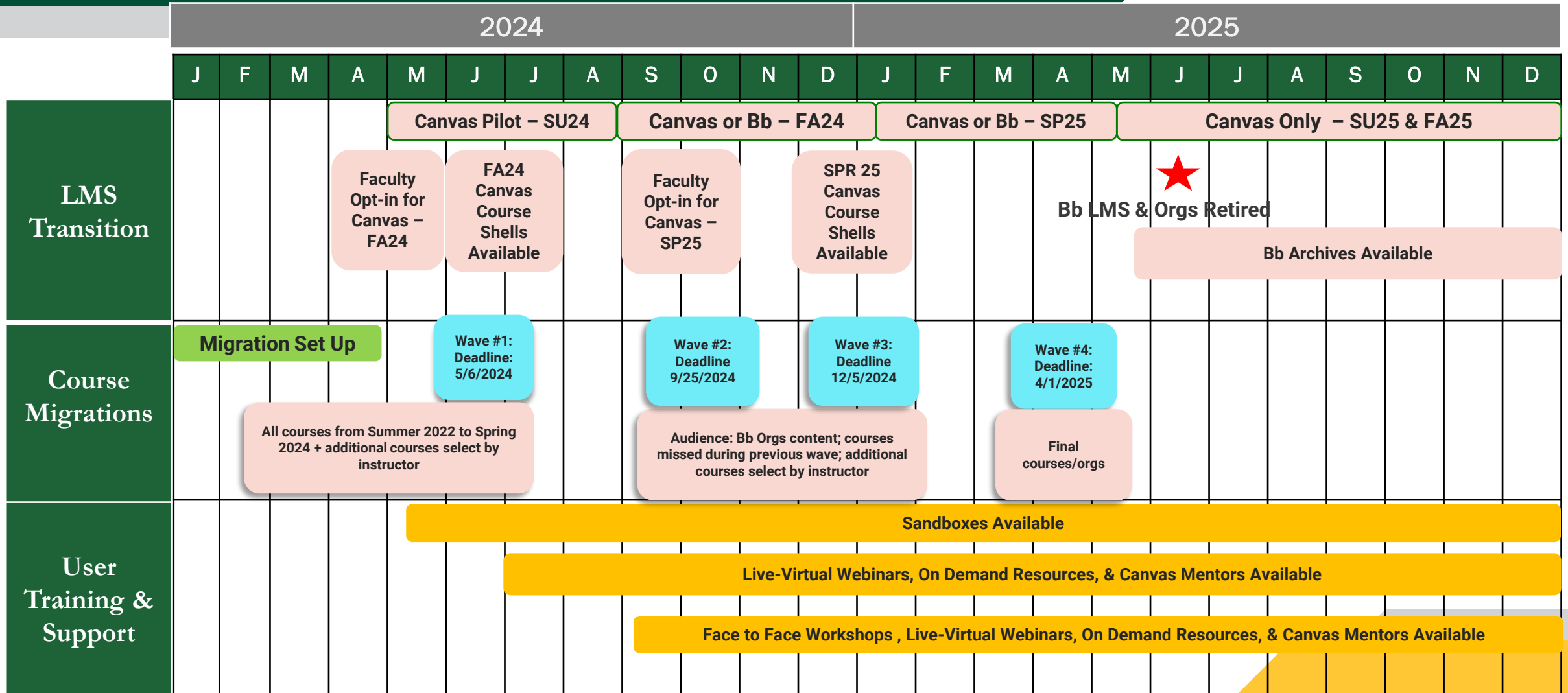


# Project Timeline

# Project Timeline



# Project Timeline (Detailed)



# Project Budget



# Project Budget & Spending

## Canvas Subscriptions:

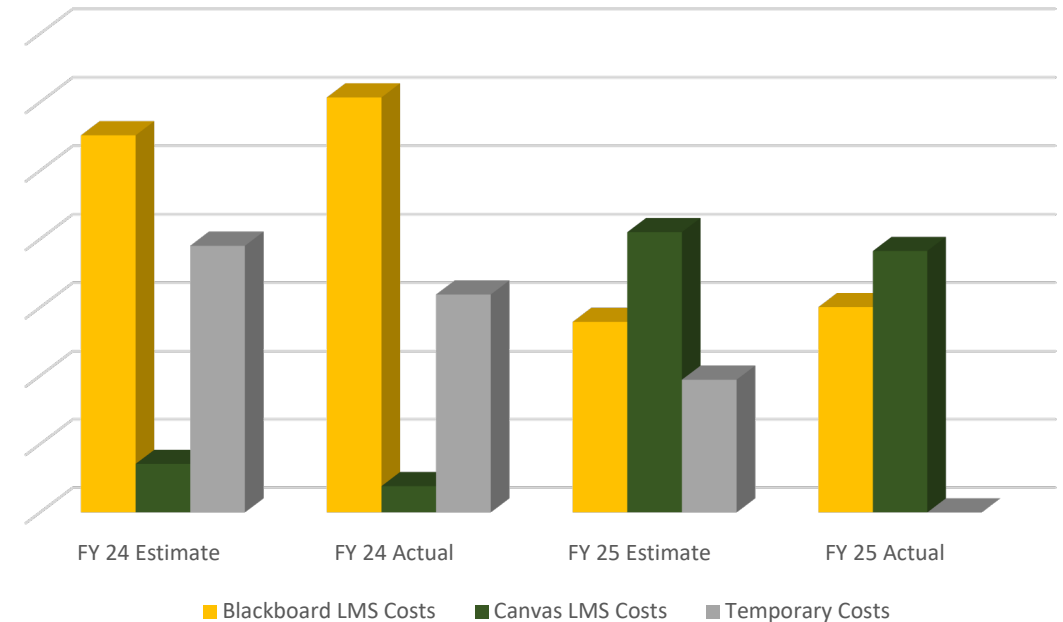
- LMS (33K FTE)
- Canvas Impact
- Canvas Credentials
- Canvas Catalog
- 24/7 Admin Support

## Temporary Costs:

- Premium Implementation
- 24/7 Tier 1 End User Support (2 years only)
- Bulk Course Conversions (K16)
- Faculty Training & Course Development Support
- Blackboard Archives
- Integration Services: Banner

## New Costs:

- 24/7 Tier 1 End User Support (2 years only)
- Bulk Course Conversions
- Faculty Training & Course Development Support
- Blackboard Archives
- New Software – replacements for Bb Ally and Safe Assign



# Communication Strategy

# Communication Strategy

Audience	Channel(s)	Frequency
Faculty	Email, Provost Newsletter, LMS project website	Monthly; project-based
Students	Bb Homepage, Social Media, LMS project website	2-3X per semester
Staff	Email, Bb Homepage, Social Media	Project Based
University Community	Email, LMS project website, Social Media, Other Communication Channels	2-3X per semester

# Blackboard Orgs Retirement

# Blackboard Organizations Transition

- Canvas LMS does not have a feature like Blackboard Organizations
- Bb Organizations Usage
  - 3,595 total organizations; 1,273 have been accessed in the last 12 months
  - File sizes are relatively small with some exceptions
  - New orgs requests have dropped significantly in past few years; 89 created in 2023
- Bb Organizations Uses
  - Project management, committee work, and/or other administrative purposes.
  - Repositories for or the distribution of non-academic/non-instructional content.
  - Communications unrelated to academics or instruction.
  - Training/content related to non-instructional technologies.
  - Training/content related to administrative purposes targeting only staff and/or faculty.

# Blackboard Organizations Transition

- Potential Alternative Solutions
  - Developed a matrix that users can use to determine where this content can be moved (i.e., Teams, SharePoint Document Libraries, etc.)
- Canvas Community Sites
  - Uses that meet the Canvas Use Guidelines that are not tied specifically to Registrar-scheduled courses are eligible to request a **Canvas Community Site**
  - Approved Community sites will have option to move content using same course migration process
- Content Stored for Website Content
  - Office of University Branding developed a solution, Web Docs, to support SiteMasonry users who needed a location for web files. Transition occurred on the same timeline.

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# Content Migration Strategy



# Course Migration Strategy

- The transition strategy was developed with guidance from the Advisory and Executive Committees as well as the Project Leadership team.
- Believed to provide a long enough runway for all types of instructional faculty to plan with the respective scheduling and training needs in mind.
- To provide faculty with time for training and course remodels, at a pace comfortable for themselves, transition would occur over 2 academic years
- After contract was signed, the first 6-8 months were dedicated to configuration and training of support staff

# Faculty Mentors: Empowering from Within

Organizations that have gone through a similar transition credited the use of a Faculty Mentor framework to assist with adoption and serve as a peer resource for faculty. Faculty Mentors from multiple academic units and modalities were leveraged for the Canvas Implementation:

- Focused on a train-the-trainer approach: mentors were provided with advance training in the Canvas LMS
- Collaborated with the Stearns Center to develop and curate course migration resources
- Piloted at least one course in the new LMS during Summer 2024 or Fall 2024
- Compensated with stipends for their work (\$2,000/semester)
- Evaluated the refresh gap from Blackboard to new LMS platform
- Led 'Brown-bag' and other drop-in sessions for faculty; consulted 1:1 live and asynchronously with faculty
- Presented updates at faculty meetings

# Canvas LMS Use Guidelines

- To ensure activities in Blackboard that were not instructional or support in nature were not automatically transitioned to Canvas, [Canvas Use Guidelines](#) were developed
- Developed by the Project Leadership Team, reviewed by Advisory Committee and approved by Executive Steering Committee
- Communicated and posted to the ITS website and lms.gmu.edu
- The following activities were permitted in Canvas; all other uses had to be transitioned to other enterprise solutions

Courses  
Scheduled Via  
Banner SIS

Student  
Training,  
Orientations,  
Cohorts

Instructional  
Technology &  
Faculty  
Training

# Course Migrations

- Wave #1 – Deadline: May 6, 2024 – 14,007 Courses
  - Pre-selected – some Summer 2022 - Spring 2024 Bb courses; up to 5 additional courses chosen by faculty
- Wave #2 – Deadline: September 26, 2024 – 359 Courses
  - Blackboard courses and organizations chosen by faculty/staff
- Wave #3 – Deadline: December 5, 2024 – 5,197 Courses
  - All Summer & Fall 2024 Bb courses; any Blackboard courses and organizations chosen by faculty/staff
- Wave #4 – Deadline: May 1, 2025 – 3,481 Courses
  - Spring 2025 courses; any Blackboard courses and organizations chosen by faculty/staff

# Bb Content Archive Strategy

Content Type	Bb term courses (2021-2025)	Bb non-term courses or orgs	Collaborate recordings
What is in the archive?	Snapshot course (with student info); could also be migrated to Canvas (without student info)	Zip files; would have to be removed from cold storage; can be migrated to Canvas (without user info)	All recordings
Who can request an archive?	Instructor Only	Instructor/Leader	Instructor/Leader
How long will this file be retained?	Dispose of December 2027	Dispose of December 2027	Dispose of December 2027

## Notes:

- This schedule is only related to content from transition.
- [Regular retention schedule](#) will apply to Canvas.
- Archive requests must be submitted to ITS.
- Requests could take 3-5 days to process.

# Canvas Campus Roll Out

# Canvas Implementation Strategy

- Blackboard was the default LMS for summer & fall 2024 and spring 2025. Faculty had the opportunity to opt-in to Canvas
- Summer 2025 – Canvas was the sole LMS available for instruction
- **Opt-In Strategy:**
  - A phased approach prevented overwhelming instructional designers, support staff, and help desks by distributing demand.
  - Each phase provided measurable insights (usage patterns, satisfaction, performance outcomes) that guided ongoing implementation decisions.
  - Early adopters served as champions who shared their experiences, best practices, and resources with colleagues transitioning later.
- Worked with faculty to provide students with support as they used 2 LMS for overlapping semesters (e.g., syllabus language, direct messages pre-semester, etc.)

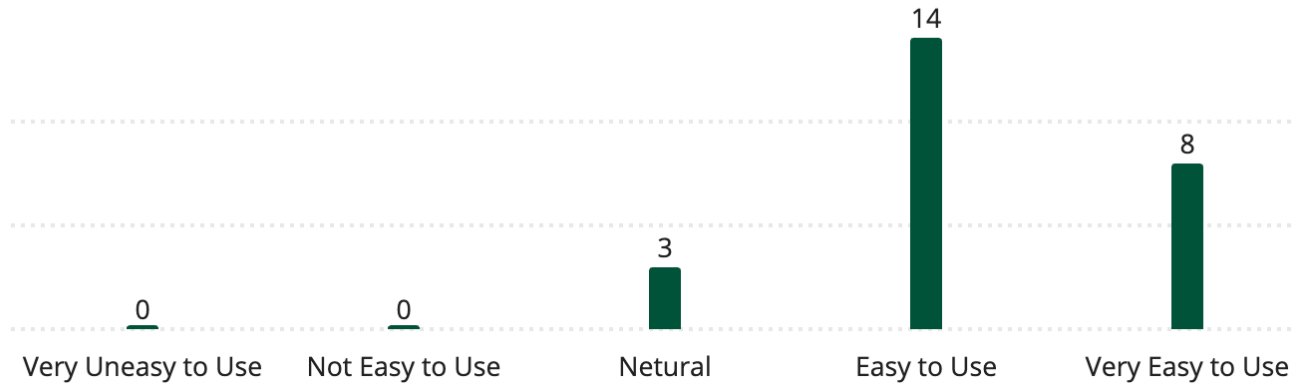
# Summer 2024 Pilot

- Call for pilot participants went out to all faculty
- Faculty Mentors were also enrolled as part of their stipend
- **36 Courses | 33 Faculty | 1068 Students**
  - Online, Asynchronous: 28
  - Online, Synchronous: 2
  - On-campus: 5
  - Hybrid: 1



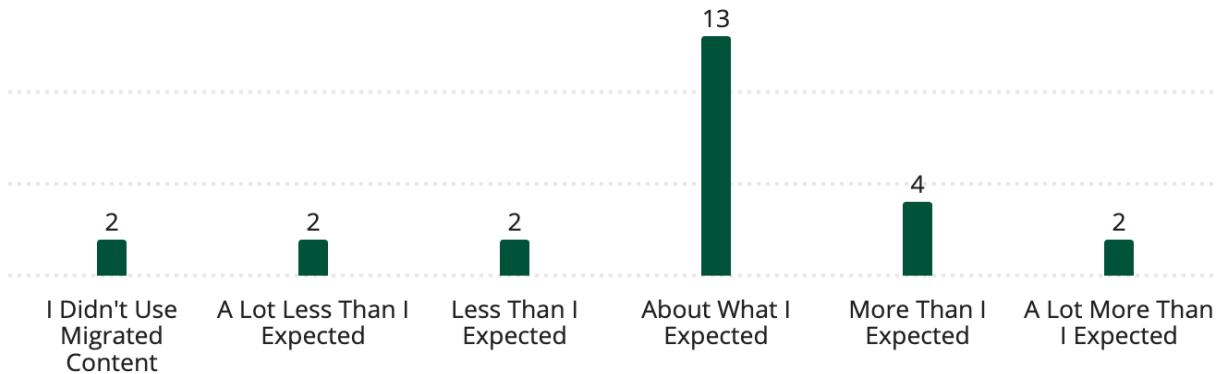
# Pilot Survey Results: Faculty

How easy to use is Canvas in meeting your teaching needs?



Sent to faculty piloting in Sessions A, B, C, D & 12 (n=33).

After revising your migrated course, about how much time did you need to prepare your summer course?

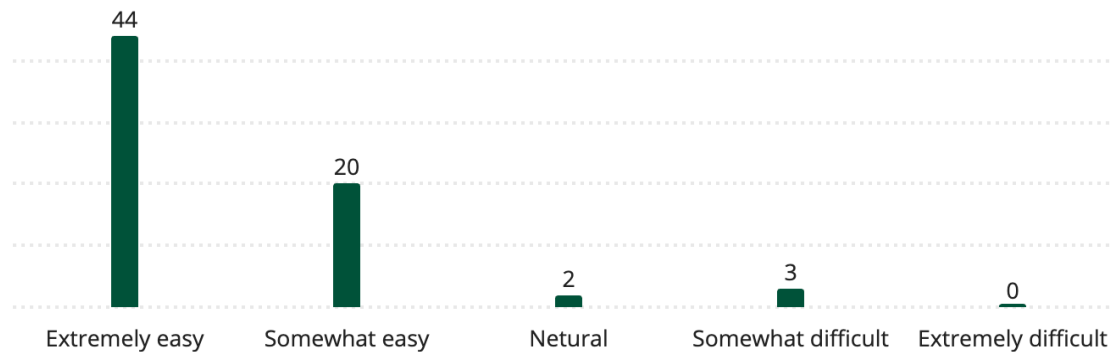


78% response rate (n=25).

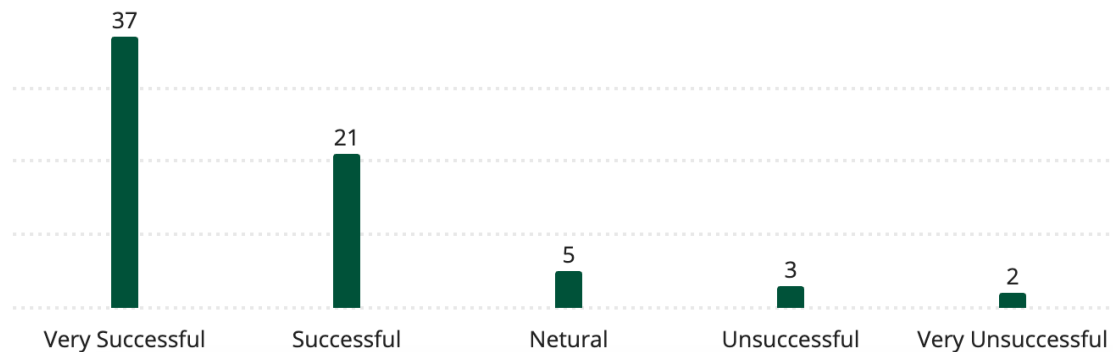
- 68% had no prior Canvas experience

# Pilot Survey Results: Students

How would you rate Canvas' overall ease of use?



How successful do you feel your course experience was?



Sent to students piloting in Sessions A, B, C, D & 12 (n=1068).

6% response rate (n=69).

- 90% UG
- 52% had prior Canvas experience

# Pilot Faculty Focus Group: Advantages

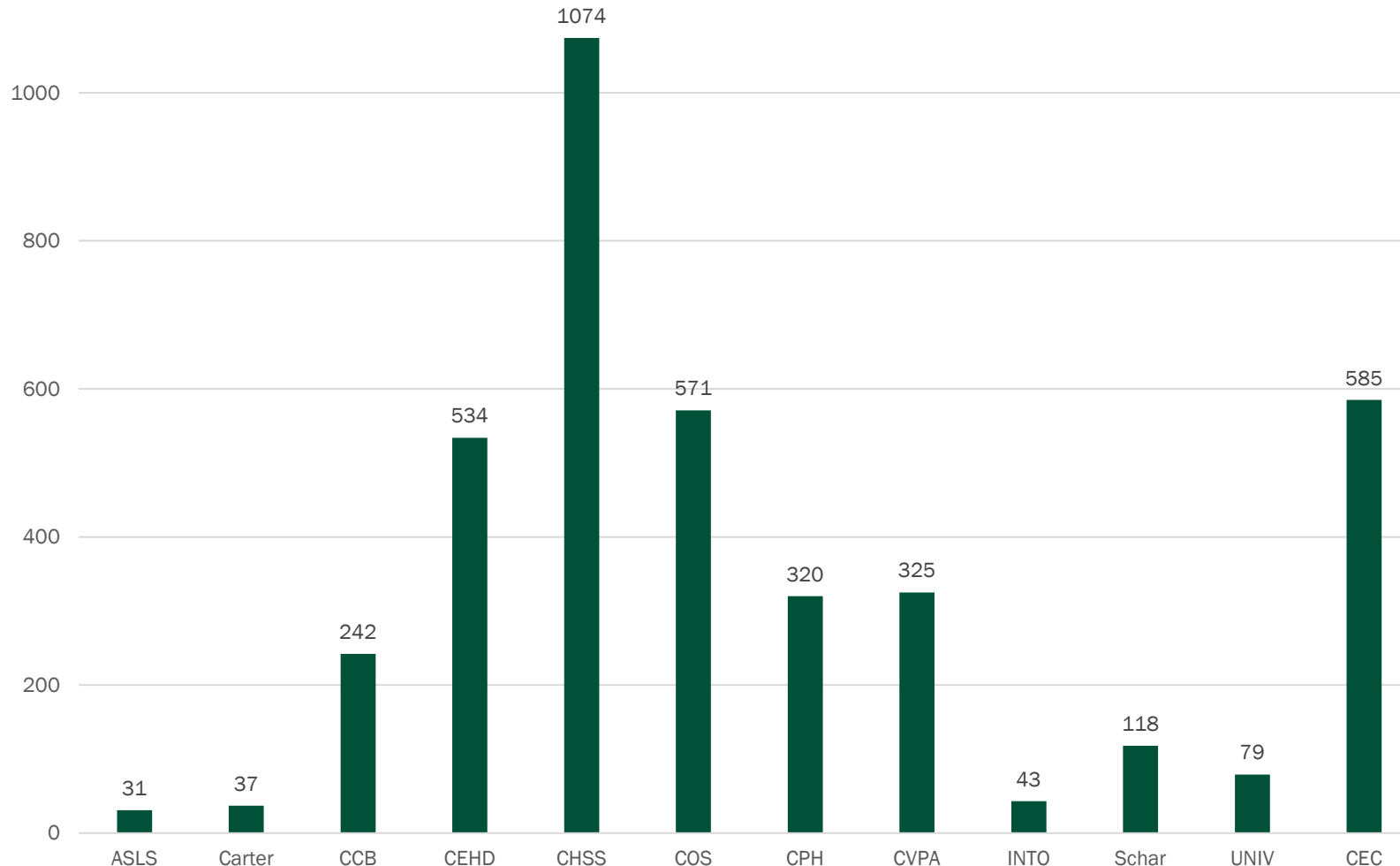
- **Ease of Use and Modern Interface**
  - Emphasized Canvas's clean design, intuitive navigation, and visual appeal as major improvements over Blackboard. Many described it as “aesthetic,” “organized,” and “less clunky.”
- **Mobile Accessibility**
  - Canvas's mobile app and device responsiveness were repeatedly cited as standout features. Faculty noted that students could seamlessly access materials on phones and tablets, a limitation in Blackboard.
- **Improved Student Experience**
  - Viewed the shift as student-centered, emphasizing that the LMS should “serve the learners.” Faculty believed Canvas offered a more cohesive, modern learning experience that aligned with how students already interact with technology.
- **Course Organization and Pedagogical Clarity**
  - The modular structure in Canvas encouraged intentional course design and reflection on pedagogy. One participant said Canvas “forced me to think about why I’m assigning these things,” leading to better organization and purpose-driven course layouts.

# Pilot Faculty Focus Group: Challenges

- **Time and Cognitive Load**
  - The most consistent challenge was the initial workload. Faculty had to rebuild courses from scratch, reconfigure assignments, and learn new workflows. Even experienced online instructors described the “cognitive load” of switching as exhausting.
- **Navigation and Student Orientation**
  - Early confusion about course navigation (i.e., the “Next” button, modules, and visibility settings) was a recurring issue. Some students clicked randomly or missed content until faculty made tutorial videos or added navigation instructions.
- **Loss of Familiar Blackboard Features**
  - While most preferred Canvas overall, a few noted the gradebook felt more limited and that some features required workarounds. Others found Canvas’s structure less flexible for idiosyncratic teaching styles, especially early in the transition
- **Inconsistent Departmental Readiness.**
  - Faculty pointed to uneven departmental capacity. Some colleagues were overwhelmed or unsure how to start. A few mentioned forming internal teams or hiring temporary staff to handle course conversions, indicating a need for centralized or scaled support beyond training alone.

# Fall 2024 Canvas Opt-in Summary

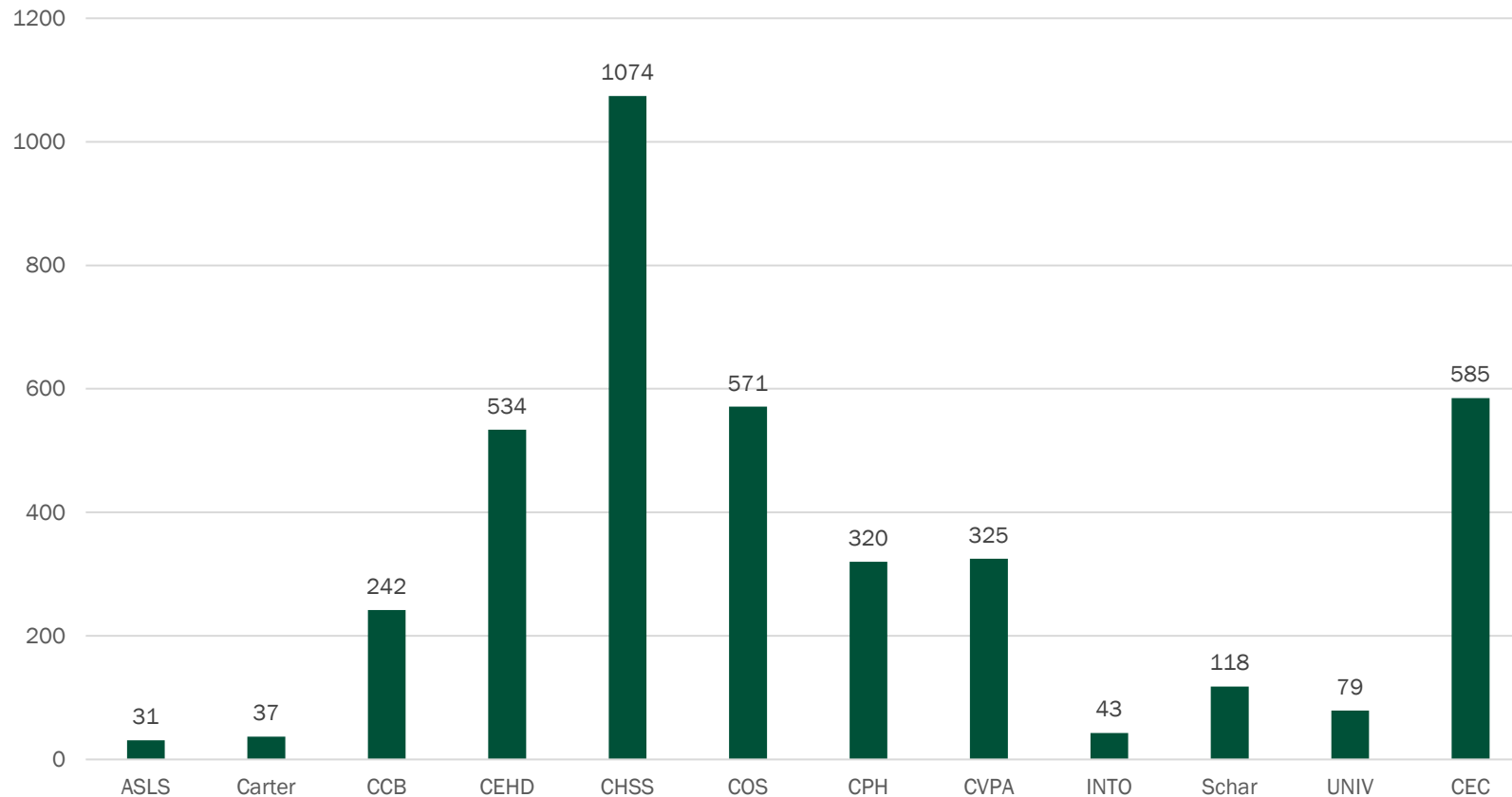
1200



## Highlights

- # of courses: 1944
- # of unique instructors: 892
- # of actual enrollees: 47.257
- 19% of sections scheduled

# Spring 2025 Canvas Opt-in Summary



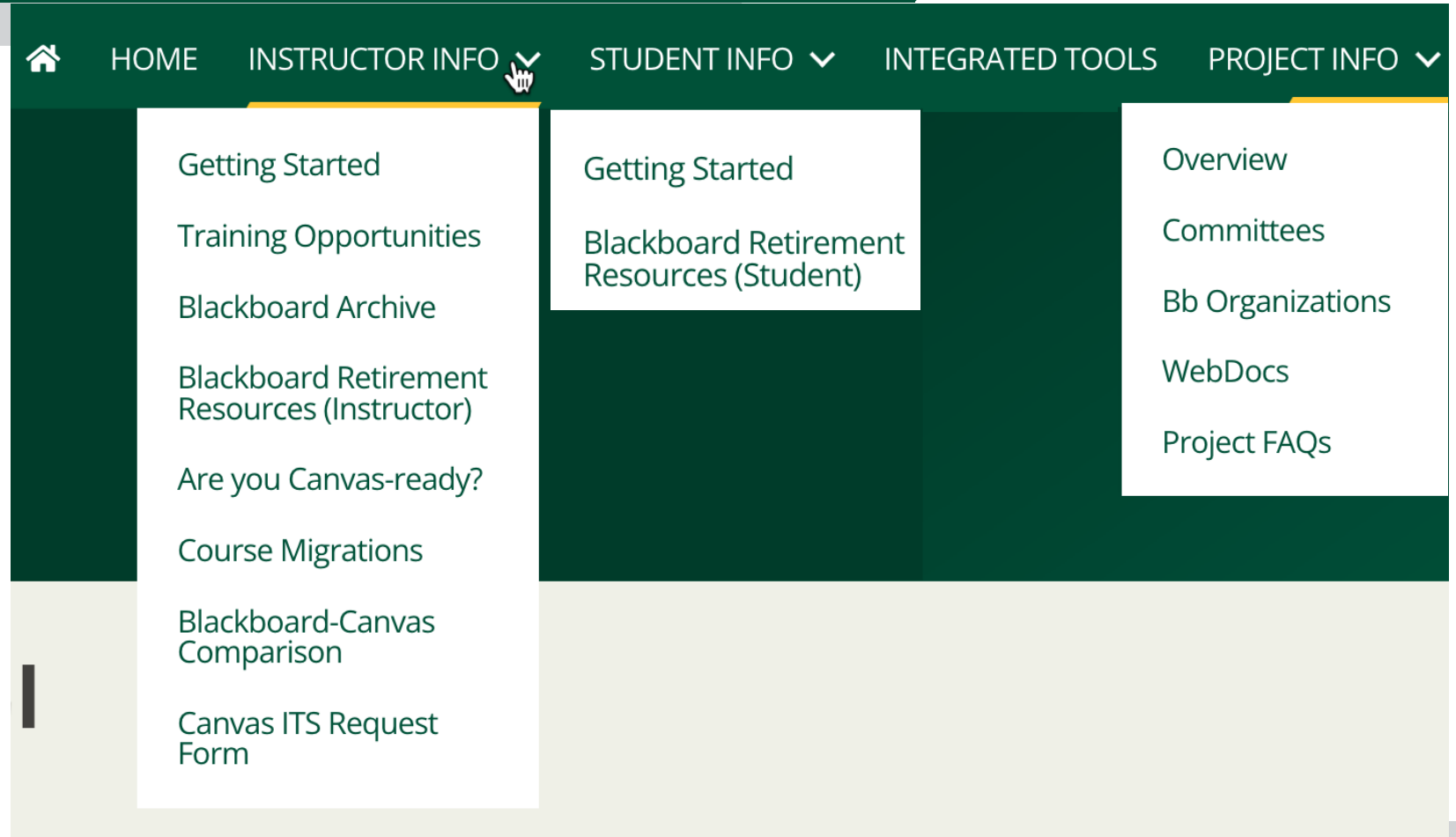
## Highlights

- # of courses: 3,959
- # of unique instructors: 1,502
- # of actual enrollees: 77,900
- 38% of sections scheduled

# Training & User Support

# LMS Project Website

- Repository for all project activity
- Designed for users to get timely information regardless of their role
- Web content developed as the project unfolded
- All communications could be found here
- Feedback button
- Will be retired once archives are phased out





# Training & Development Resources Summary

## Canvas Bootcamp

7 Sessions  
474 Attendees

## Brown Bag Meetings

12 Sessions

## Virtual Synchronous Training

68 Sessions; 316  
Attendees

## Canvas Day

146 Registrations

## Faculty Mentors

20 Mentors from  
across disciplines

## Canvas Training Portal

On demand and live  
trainings

## Getting Started with Canvas Training

22 Sessions  
241 Attendees

## Faculty Orientations

7 sessions  
260 Attendees

# 24/7 Support Summary (Jan. 2024 – Sept. 2025)

## Cases by Contact Method

	Chat	Phone	Online	Total	
February 2024	0	0	1	1	
March 2024	0	0	3	3	
April 2024	9	0	3	12	Summer 2024 Pilot – Start of 24/7 Support
May 2024	24	3	7	34	
June 2024	17	2	7	26	
July 2024	59	9	20	88	
August 2024	272	252	33	557	
September 2024	193	154	53	400	Fall 2024 Opt-In Semester #1
October 2024	126	97	33	256	
November 2024	81	58	36	175	
December 2024	125	100	17	242	
January 2025	452	344	48	844	Sprg. 2025 Opt-In Semester #2
February 2025	259	201	42	502	
March 2025	182	166	42	391	
April 2025	173	159	28	360	
May 2025	374	383	42	800	Summer 2025 Canvas Only
June 2025	221	216	36	473	
July 2025	212	334	69	616	
August 2025	635	615	93	1344	Fall 2025 Canvas Only
September 2025	470	511	116	1097	
Total	3884	3604	729	8221	

### Highlights:

- Monthly average: 411 cases
- Chat and Phone together account for over 90% of total cases, indicating these remain the dominant modes of user interaction
- Larger number of contacts corresponds with the beginning of the opt-in semesters and the first Canvas-only semester

# 24/7 Support Summary (Feb. 2024 – Sept. 2025)

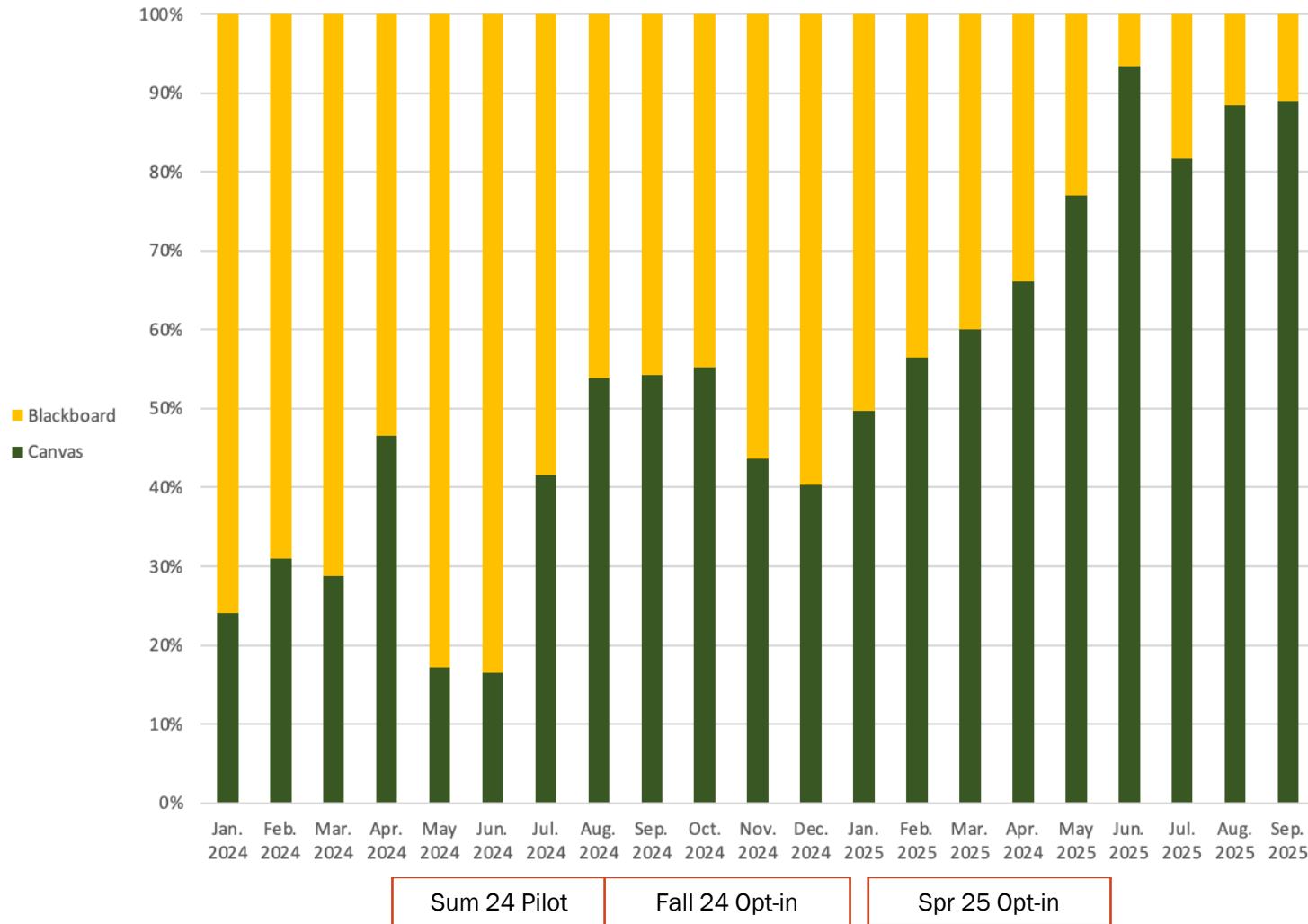
## Cases by User Role

	Admin	Faculty	Staff	Student	Total	
February 2024	3	0	0	0	3	
March 2024	2	0	2	0	4	
April 2024	5	5	3	0	13	
May 2024	5	22	5	3	35	Summer 2024 Pilot – Start of 24/7 Support →
June 2024	1	22	0	4	27	
July 2024	7	74	1	10	92	
August 2024	11	354	48	149	562	Fall 2024 Opt-In Semester #1 →
September 2024	9	218	31	147	405	
October 2024	10	152	27	71	260	
November 2024	4	104	21	48	177	
December 2024	11	173	16	46	246	
January 2025	11	543	55	240	849	Sprg. 2025 Opt-In Semester #2 →
February 2025	12	295	37	162	506	
March 2025	8	227	36	121	392	
April 2025	15	212	22	113	362	
May 2025	21	446	70	265	802	Summer 2025 Canvas Only →
June 2025	16	287	43	131	477	
July 2025	20	339	71	194	624	
August 2025	12	759	140	438	1349	Fall 2025 Canvas Only →
September 2025	15	544	97	444	1100	
Total	198	4776	725	2586	8285	

## Highlights:

- 58% originated from faculty
- **Student activity** is substantial but not peaking as sharply likely due to fewer issues or well-established support patterns.

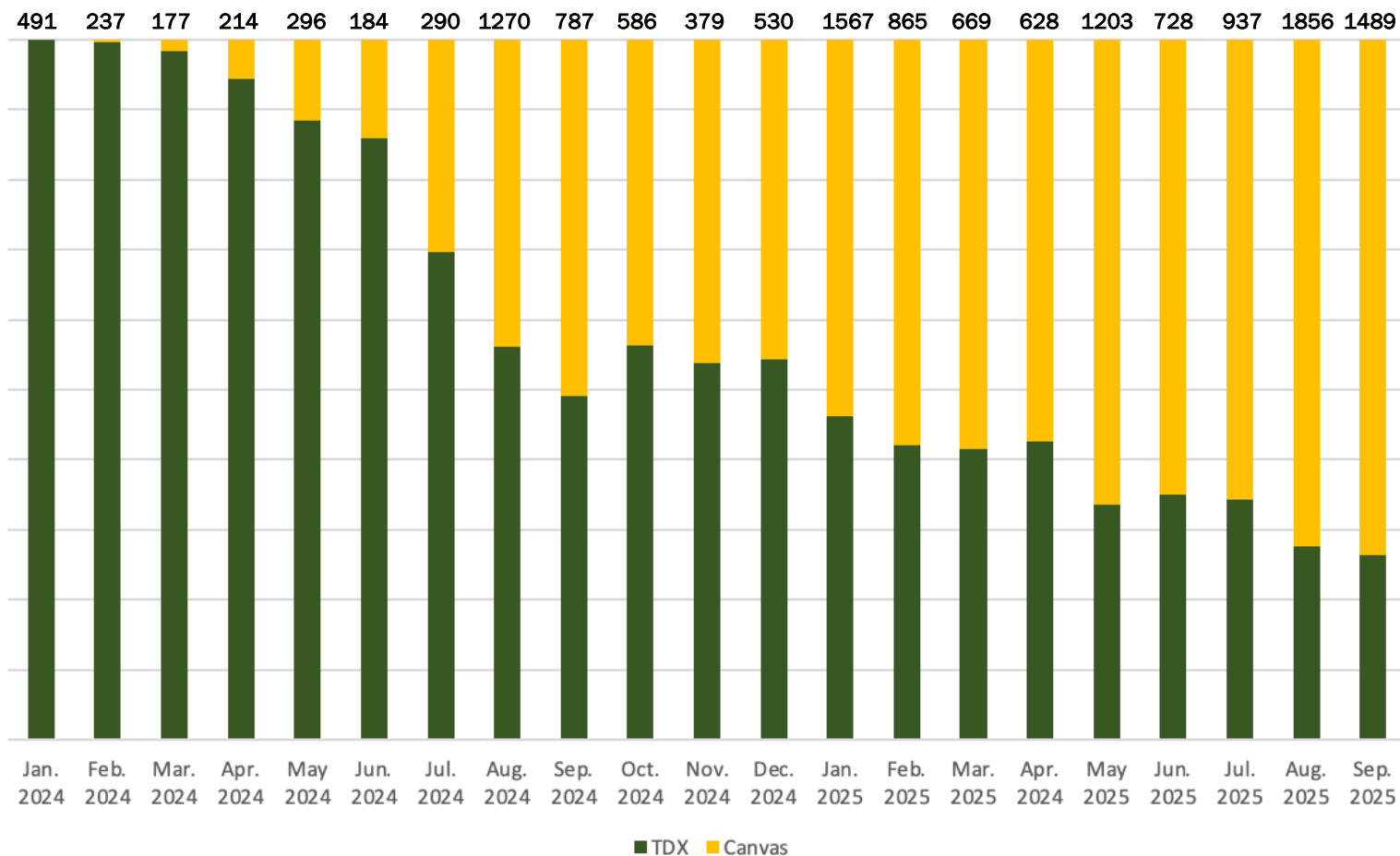
# ITS Support Summary (Jan. 2024 – Sept. 2025)



## Highlights:

- Bb LMS was the default through the Spring 2025 and was supported by ITS Support
- Tickets received after Spring 2025 ended were largely about Bb archives and course migrations.

# Total Support Case Summary



	TDX	Canvas	Total Cases
Jan. 2024	491	0	491
Feb. 2024	236	1	237
Mar. 2024	174	3	177
Apr. 2024	202	12	214
May 2024	262	34	296
Jun. 2024	158	26	184
Jul. 2024	202	88	290
Aug. 2024	713	557	1270
Sep. 2024	387	400	787
Oct. 2024	330	256	586
Nov. 2024	204	175	379
Dec. 2024	288	242	530
Jan. 2025	723	844	1567
Feb. 2025	363	502	865
Mar. 2025	278	391	669
Apr. 2025	268	360	628
May 2025	403	800	1203
Jun. 2025	255	473	728
Jul. 2025	321	616	937
Aug. 2025	512	1344	1856
Sep. 2025	392	1097	1489

# The Final Stretch Strategy

- ☐ Communication to Deans – personalized list of faculty still in Bb distributed
- ☐ Attend Department Chairs Meeting
- ☐ Non-term Course /Org Owners Communication
- ☐ Student Communication – posted 6 weeks prior to semester end
- ☐ Additional Resources Developed:
  - [Are You Canvas Ready?](#) Checklist
    - Suggested actions with completion dates
  - Web Content Solution (WebDocs) - [Resource Page](#)
- ☐ Development Resources:
  - Growing with Canvas Course & Video Shorts (all faculty enrolled)
  - Canvas Bootcamp
  - Faculty mentors, embedded in the departments, are available for consultations.
  - Getting Started with Canvas Synchronous Trainings: <https://lms.gmu.edu/training-events/>
  - Summer support available for Fall semester start

# Risks & Lessons Learned

# Project Risks

Identified Risks	Likelihood / Impact		Mitigation Strategies
There is a <b>risk in migrating the Blackboard "organizations" content</b> , in that there is no corollary in Canvas, and no pre-canned training materials available to transition this content into MS Teams.	High Likelihood	Medium Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Determine storage and migration strategy for non-course related content</li> <li>Develop training, communications products for faculty that take advantage of existing MS Teams training.</li> </ul>
There is a <b>risk in choosing the wrong course content to be migrated</b> using the K16 tool, leading to more rework and less quality outputs.	Medium Likelihood	Medium Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage stakeholders to determine which content is needed and build consensus on approach</li> <li>Provide K16 contractor support for faculty</li> </ul>
There is a <b>risk of low faculty buy-in</b> , leading to lower quality materials, delivered later than desired in the implementation timeline.	Medium Likelihood	High Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Utilize established communications vehicles for university-wide messaging</li> <li>Engage Advisory Committee for key decisions</li> <li>Change Management Plan to gauge buy-in over time</li> </ul>
There is a <b>risk that if the staff is not prepared for the new LMS</b> , the implementation will not be as successful, leading to lower quality outputs.	High Likelihood	Medium Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Train and utilize GMU Mentors in each college</li> <li>Implement strong training plan</li> <li>Comprehensive resources available on <a href="https://lms.gmu.edu">lms.gmu.edu</a></li> </ul>



# Lessons Learned

- **Governance & Decision Making**

- Clear, empowered governance accelerates decisions. Early alignment between ITS and the Provost's Office reduced downstream rework.
- Faculty representation is critical. Including high-engagement faculty early on led to stronger adoption and trust.

- **Communication & Change Management**

- Embedding communication staff, who were also connected to the Office of University Branding, from the start of the project allowed for consistency and reduced communication delays and chances of users being overwhelmed with different University communications.
- Phased adoption was the right approach. Opt-in, pilot, and mandatory phases-built capacity and allowed for incremental learning.

# Lessons Learned

- **Training, Support and User Readiness**

- Hands-on training is the most effective driver of adoption. Faculty confidence increased dramatically when workshops and 1:1 support were offered.
- Users need repeated exposure to new platforms. “One-and-done” training is not enough; spaced learning improves long-term proficiency.
- Leveraging the Canvas training services provided capacity for the George Mason team to focus on other areas of the project; were then able to re-use the content.

- **Data Governance, Migration & Course Content**

- Course clean-up improves quality. Encouraging faculty to rebuild key components (rather than automatically migrating everything) led to improved course design.
- Blackboard Organizations required a dedicated strategy.
- The pilot cohort was a critical accelerator for culture change. Champions from the pilot became trusted messengers to other faculty.

# Lessons Learned

- **Accessibility, Usability & Course Quality**

- Accessibility reviews must be built into project workflows. Proactive use of Ally, manual checks, and template guidance helped reduce remediation later.
- Course templates reduce variability and improve user experience. Programs using templates had smoother transitions and fewer support tickets.
- Mobile usability is more important than anticipated. Students increasingly rely on mobile devices; design standards should reflect that reality.

- **Vendor Partnership & Support**

- Strong vendor relationships were essential. Instructure's consistency, responsiveness, and transparency supported smoother implementation.
- Vendor-provided analytics can guide adoption. Usage dashboards helped identify areas needing targeted training.

# Lessons Learned

- **Resource Planning & Workload Management**

- Large-scale LMS transitions place heavy strain on staff. Support units, instructional designers, IT, and faculty development teams required sustained high effort.
- Cross-team collaboration was essential. Regular syncs between major stakeholder groups and other teams ensured alignment and reduced rework.
- A mature budgeting framework for cross-institutional projects is not yet in place, resulting in fragmented funding models and inconsistent assumptions. This lack of clarity contributed to delays in decision-making, difficulties securing required resources at key phases, and increased pressure on departmental budgets as the project evolved.

- **Cultural Shifts & Expectations**

- Adoption requires trust. Faculty who felt heard and supported transitioned more smoothly.
- Celebrating milestones matters. Acknowledging progress (pilot completion, first mandatory term, Bb retirement) reinforced campus momentum.