Ep. 076: Picking the Next LMS

Podcast: https://prodev.illinoisstate.edu/podcast/2022/ep076.shtml

A large group of faculty, staff, and students are picking Illinois State's next learning management system. In this episode, Dr. Yojanna Cuenca-Carlino and Dr. Rosie Hauck join Jim to talk about the process of replacing ReggieNet.

Transcript

JIM: Hi there. I'm Jim.

YOJANNA: Hi there. I'm Yojanna.

ROSIE: Hi, I'm Rosie

JIM: Let's Talk Teaching. Welcome to Let's Talk Teaching a podcast from the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology here at Illinois State University. I'm Jim Gee. It's been about five years since we've been doing this podcast, and occasionally we talk about this thing called ReggieNet. ReggieNet is the customized learning management system here on our campus at Illinois State. And it's getting replaced. So, joining me today to talk about this big project that has been going on for quite a while. First time on our podcast, Dr. Rosie Hauck, Executive Director for the Office of Advanced Technology Support, which is part of the Office of Technology Solutions. Rosie, welcome to the show.

ROSIE: Thanks. Glad to be here.

JIM: Glad to have you. And returning to our pokey little podcast, Dr. Yojanna Cuenca-Carlino, who is the Assistant Vice President for Faculty Development, Diversity and Learning. Hi, Yojanna.

YOJANNA: Hi, Jim, happy to be here.

JIM: We're replacing our learning management system on campus, we wanted to do a quick little podcast just to update everyone. And also, you know, kind of benchmark where we're at in this process. And before we got talking, before we got recording, we were like, oh, yeah, we, we started working on this a long time ago.

YOJANNA: We started a long time ago, we actually started May last year, we're really thinking about how we were going to organize this project. This is a big project that has many moving parts. So, we started back in May with a small executive committee that then, you know, with representatives from the Office of Technology and the Office of the Provost and CTLT. And we really started brainstorming. How we were going to approach this. And then, then we designed kind of like a timeline and a plan. That then we, we started, and do, you know, kind of presentations in the fall with different groups and stakeholders. So, we presented to the Senate about the need for the project, we presented the Deans, Chairs, Directors, so to gain kind of awareness about

the importance of this project and what was coming down the road. So, and then we started in forming committees, and we could talk a little bit more about the committees. If you want us to do that right now.

JIM: Actually, before we get to that, Rosie, why are we replacing ReggieNet? Which is based on Sakai, which is the, the engine that drives it? Why are we doing it?

ROSIE: Well, honestly, we have outgrown Sakai, right? We've had Sakai, I think we're coming up to almost 10 years, right? Which is quite long for any technology very, very long for any technology. And so, as a campus, you know, our needs have, have developed, society has changed, right? What we want our technologies to be able to do, what we want to do in our classes has changed. So, it's an appropriate time for us to really dig in deep to see what those needs are. And because the technology has changed, there's some really good systems out there. So, it is a good time to look in the mirror to see who we are what we want to be and look out to see what's available for us.

JIM: And also, of course, Sakai was of a certain period in, in history, because it was open source. So, it was community driven. And that community has gotten smaller too, right?

ROSIE: Absolutely. As LMSs have become more complex, it just becomes harder to develop. There's lots of demands on different functionality we want included, and at the same time you want to, you want, it to be easy to use, right? So it's complex, yet you want it to seem simple. And so, with all those different layers, the technology has gotten, you know, more advanced, right. And so, what we start to see are the LMS systems that do really well tend to garner more attention, right? They, they further develop, they get more functionalities. And with an open source one, even though we've contracted with someone to help us with the open-source side of it, we're just not seeing additional functionality being incorporated at this, you know, at the rate that we would like to be able to use it.

JIM: So, Yojanna, you're talking about committees that were formed? One of the important things, I know, that we had all talked about was that, that this is an open process, transparent process that everyone has a voice in this because, you know, unlike when ReggieNet was chosen a decade ago, you know, back then a learning management system was kind of an optional thing. Almost. It was, you know, not everyone was using it and now we have well over 90% I think in some semesters 99% of all of the regular courses have at least had the original site public. So, can you tell us a little bit more about who's involved, and you know what voices are involved in this?

YOJANNA: Absolutely, and, and first of all, we're going to say that for us, having all stakeholders at the table and everyone heard, was really important. From the beginning, we really wanted to make sure that we really not only looked at the data that we have collected, but that we actually had a lot of people involved in the process. So, so, as I was talking, when we started, you know, we had an executive team that started really formalizing what this process was going to look like. And that team decided that it was important for us to develop an advisory group that was going to be formed from faculty, staff, and students that will, that would be part of the team that would help us assess, right?

What are the new requirements, and we were going to look for, for the need for the next LMS. So, that was a nomination from the Dean's, we also asked for Sen… for Senate representatives to be part of this process. We present that to the Student Government Association, as well. And then got some, some, some students involved in that process. So, we have the executive team, then we have the advisory group. But we also have a technical team that actually is looking at everything behind the scenes. About that, and maybe Rosie can, you know, tell us a little bit of them are who are involved as part of the technical team?

ROSIE: Absolutely. So, behind the, behind the scenes under the hood. So, to say of the LMS, right, we connect to lots of different systems that we have here at Illinois State. And we want to connect perhaps to other systems that we currently haven't connected to. So, to that end, what we've done is, within Tech Solutions, we've looked at our teams, and we've identified team members across all these different areas, across all areas of Technology Solutions, to be part of the LMS team. It's a really big team, not just from the faculty side, but also from the technical side. Because ultimately, you know, we have to not only provide the support the maintenance, we want to make sure that the data that we need to go into the LMS is correct. And the data that we need to come out of the LMS to our other systems, also correct. And so, we have a pretty broad team over here just on the Tech, Tech Solution side to help advise eyes on given their expertise to make sure that as we move forward, we know what we're getting ourselves into, we have a solution and the technical side in place so that when we get to the point where we are eventually going to roll this out, right? It is going to be seamless, and we know how we're connecting the dots.

JIM: We should probably talk about what we're looking at. So, it's Canvas. And it's Brightspace D2L. Brightspace is the is the newest version of Desire to Learn. And we have a fairly rigorous process that we're going through. So, I was hoping one of you could talk a little bit about the sandbox experience, you know, we're able to finally now get into these and play as a committee. And then I think we also want to make sure we talk about some open forums that are coming up, where everyone on campus can get a glimpse of what these look like and compare them to ReggieNet. So, Rosie, do you want to start with the sandbox?

ROSIE: Absolutely. So, like Yojanna said, you know, we started off with a list of requirements that the, both advisory team and the technical team use. So, using those requirements, looking at what all the information we could find on the two systems, we know that they look good on paper, right? Or on website, right? Or on videos that we were able to view. So, where we are now is, so far all the boxes are checked, they look good, they meet our needs and requirements as we've outlined them. So, it's a hands on, right? We want that experience on both of these platforms to see how easy is it right. And so that is where we are in the in the sandbox, and why we wanted to do a sandbox with each of these vendors. And so to that end, we worked with both of the vendors to set up a sandbox just for ISU, we control you know who gets in there. And I can tell you, you know, as we've moved through this process, we kept thinking, right? Oh, this, this group needs to be in there. Oh, this group needs to be in there. Oh, I'd love to get this group's feedback, right? Because everyone's got different needs. And, and some of them are quirky, right? We have different disciplines that have different needs for an

LMS. And so right now with our sandbox, we are over 100 participants. And so, this is across, we have the technical team, who's looking at both of these systems and how to admin the different systems right so kind of the back end and how much effort it takes, how it works, what the data looks like. We have quite a few instructors of course, right? Again from different disciplines, they have different needs for the LMS and we want to get these into their hands so that they can play with it. They can try you know, how what kind of assignments, what type of activities they want to do. Whether you're in person, your hybrid, your online, all these different factors, right? How do the two LMSs meet their needs? And then we also have students as the students. Right?

JIM: Right.

ROSIE: Again, we want a great user experience, right?

JIM: Right now the sandbox process is helping us decide which of these two potential learning management systems we're going to go forward with to a full pilot test. Right?

ROSIE: Correct. Correct. So, along with the sandbox, access, what we're giving to all these individuals who have graciously voluntold, volunteered, sorry, did I say that? volunteered to help us is

JIM: I will have some editing to do.

ROSIE: Sorry about that. Just kidding. We provide them a feedback mechanism as well. Right? So there, so they are providing feedback. And we're going to look at all that to help kind of make a decision. Honestly, you know, I don't know, there's no technology, that's perfect. Eventually, we will make a choice. But then with this feedback to we will know what things maybe we have to put a little bit of extra effort on. As far as you know, maybe the development, maybe things we can do is in terms of training and support. And so we're going to, I think this date is going to be very valuable across the board, not just for this evaluation, which is a big step, but how we're going to use it moving forward, whatever the solution is.

JIM: Once that's done, then the committee's work is not over, because we have to talk about how to transition to it. And so that's something else and also recommend, maybe the use of templates are the best way to set it up and for instructors to actually use it. So...

YOJANNA: That is right. And, you know, in addition to the sandbox, we're going to have two open forums at the end of April, April, I think 26th on the 28th.

JIM: Yes.

YOJANNA: And then on one of those forums, we're going to have a comparison. So, we're going to talk on a walk through, what are currently the, the LMS that we have on ReggieNet, or Sakai, and then how does that compare to one of the vendors in this case, Canvas, and then the other open forum will be the same a walkthrough, ReggieNet, and then Brightspace D2L so that is going to be an opportunity for the campus community to attend the open forums, we're going to record these forums, and there's going to be

an opportunity for, for, for people to submit their feedback. The other thing that we have done, and I think all of you who have open my have received a message about, you know, a survey that we did. That's right, yeah. And then that was another way for us to collect data about what are the needs from the campus community. So, you know, that survey and it was Jim, you could tell us a little bit more about this, because you have been collecting that data.

JIM: So, yeah, it was it was an open survey or survey with just two questions. What do you what do you like about our current system? ReggieNet? What improvements would you want to see the next one? And so, we've, we've already gone through and done a very preliminary analysis, I got some great help from Pearl, who's our graduate assistant for communication here at CTLT. And also does some of the transcript works. So, shout out to you Pearl as your as you're transcribing this episode. But she was really great about going through and looking for some highlights. Nothing surprising, you know, we've done actually, you know, to your point, Yojanna, we've done a lot of surveys before, there were surveys that were kind of like the miso survey, or the tech wall survey before that, which were a broader scope. And then CTLT has often done surveys of faculty and students specific to ReggieNet. So, there wasn't anything too terribly surprising. Students are looking for an app, they're looking for greater a calendar function or something that shows all of their homework and all of their courses being due at once. And both of the systems as far as I can tell, so far can do that. Faculty are looking for some similar communication tools, better Gradebook experience and stuff like that. So, yeah, and as you said, we will have those up in forums, we will record those. I guess the message that comes out of this might be yes, it seems like we're moving very quickly. But that's only because we've really been talking about it to the whole campus community at once, since well, really since March, since, since February or March. But we've actually been very deliberate throughout the process. And so, what happens after April?

YOJANNA: So, we are going to everyone is obviously right now playing in the sandbox and getting that so the Advisory Group and the Technical Group, well, they will conduct the evaluation with that with the rubric that we have created aligned with their requirements. So, we're going to have a conversation towards the end of April about everyone's evaluation, we're going to look at the data that we have had anything that has come out of the open forums and then we're going to make a determination in terms of which of the two systems will serve better ISU, we're looking at everything right, like we're looking at integration, we're looking about service, we're looking about, you know, help that aids that the providers you know, give. I'm sure we're looking about the, the apps, any everything that that we are, it's accounted right. So, the goal is to by the beginning of May start really making those recommendations we met also with the Cabinet. And, and we, you know, we're going to also write some recommendations not only about the next LMS, but also about the use and implementation of the learning management system on campus. Because it's obviously very tied to student success. And, and then after that it's implemented.

JIM: Yeah. And implementation Rosie, is going to take probably about a year.

ROSIE:	Right, right. Yeah. So, as far as the timeline looking forward in the next couple of semesters, right, we will start to pilot the new LMS. First pilot, and so that'll be fall of '22, and spring of '23. And so, for the next calendar year, a next academic year,
JIM:	Right.
ROSIE:	We will have two concurrent LMSs.
JIM:	Right.
ROSIE:	As we start to transition over and at the same time, a lot of the going back to the sandbox, a lot of those members are also the support team, right? Because the better that they're familiar with the system, the better they're going to be able to provide support. So, basically an army of support staff.
JIM:	Is it fair to say, though, that yes, we'll have to, we'll have to concurrent LMSs. But the vast majority of classes are still going to be on ReggieNet, for next academic year. And, and for faculty, for instructors, and for students, it'll probably be fall of '20. Now I'm getting my year 2023. That's right. That's where we're at. Still haven't invented the Time Machine Teaching and Learning yet. So, fall of 2023 is when we would want to have everyone on the new LMS.
ROSIE:	That is the plan. That is that's definitely the plan. Actually, from the technical side.
JIM:	Yeah.
ROSIE:	It can be done a lot, pretty quickly. Right?
JIM:	Right.
ROSIE:	But, but it's not, it's not for the technical part that we're doing this, right? I think, you know, as a campus, you know, we do want to provide the support that people need and the training, right to gently move from one system to the other.
JIM:	Well, and we've done it before, and, and learn lessons from the last time we did it. And I think because these, again, are very refined products. Nowadays, it's not like back when we bought an LMS, 12 years ago or whatever. They're very refined products that the transition will be easier. So, even though we're talking about a year, that is still probably what I think it was like two years when we transferred from the old Web CT/Blackboard to ReggieNet. Yeah. So, so it's still going to happen fairly quickly. The overriding thing in all of this is that we want to keep people informed about what's going on. So, they can go to NextLMS.IllinoisState.edu. This NextLMS all one word, at IllinoisState.edu. That's the website we've created for the project. There's a link on there where you can see everyone who's involved and all of the committee's. And you can also submit feedback. And that's if you are interested, maybe in volunteering at some stage to have your class if you're a faculty member to do that, or if you have questions. We keep track of those and we get back to everyone. So, Yojanna, Rosie, thank you so much.

ROSIE: Right, right.

YOJANNA: Thank you.

ROSIE: Thanks for having us.

JIM: And that's all the time we have for this episode of Let's Talk Teaching. Again, go to nextLMS.IllinoisState.edu To learn more about the next LMS project and you can go to CTLT.IllinoisState.edu. To find out more about our unit, the support we do, and more about this pokey little podcast. For Dr. Yojanna Cuenco-Carlino, for Dr. Rosie Hauck and for all of my colleagues at CTLT, until we talk again, Happy Teaching.