



Battle of the LMS: A panel discussion

Colin Simpson¹, Dan Laurence², Penny Wheeler³ and Gordon Cunningham⁴

¹Monash University, ²La Trobe University, ³Australian Catholic University, ⁴Curtin University

Since the dawn of online learning, educational institutions have wrestled with evaluating Learning Management Systems (LMS) to find a solution that best meets their many and varied needs. These needs include the pedagogical, technological and organisational, but central to each of these is the need for a platform that maintains and extends connections between learners and educators. In this light-hearted panel discussion, our presenters will attempt to prove that their chosen LMS is the best. Through this absurd adversarial tussle, the audience will come to appreciate the nuances and complexities of LMS partisanship and some limitations of evaluative frameworks

Keywords: Learning Management System, LMS, Evaluation, Education Technology

Focus of the activity

Every higher education institution in Australasia uses a learning management system to facilitate online learning experiences for their students and manage learning materials and activities, but which LMS is best?

The selection and implementation of an institutional LMS has critical implications for quality of teaching, student experience and administration of learning at every level. With so much at stake there is no shortage of commercially driven assertions: debate often lapses into tribalism and overly simplistic comparisons. Parodying such 'noise' via a challenge-based debate between those who administer, design and deliver learning using LMSs offers an opportunity for a more nuanced perspective on the task of evaluation

In this panel discussion, seasoned LMS experts working in Australasian universities will argue for a nominated LMS (Moodle, Canvas, Blackboard, Brightspace, and MS Teams) through questions and design challenges informed by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Fearnley & Amora, 2020) and its successors (Sezer & Yilmaz, 2018), Quality Matters Higher Education Rubric 6th Edition (Quality Matters, 2020) and critical realist evaluation (King, 2017)

Panel members

These LMS experts will include Colin Simpson, Dan Laurence, Penny Wheeler and Gordon Cunningham, who work in centres for learning and teaching around Australia and collectively bring more than 50 years of experience in this field. (A fifth presenter speaking for Brightspace is yet to be determined.)

Session format

This debate/panel discussion will revolve around a series of pedagogical, design and technical questions and challenges. These will relate to implementation, learning design, platform affordances, weaknesses and workarounds, and capability building. Those participating in the session will be asked to provide a rating for each speaker's case via a polling tool, which they can adjust over time. Toward the end of the session, scores will be tallied and presented to the audience along with a summary developed by the moderator constructed from contributions and discussion threads drawn from all the audience's contributions.

Intended audience and key takeaways

This session is aimed at everyone working in Australasian Higher Education who engages with institutional Learning Management Systems, whether as educator, leader, learning designer or education technologist.

In articulating some key contextual, pedagogical, and technical factors, the more critical considerations become clearer as do new perspectives on what is most relevant to establishing effective learning architecture. While the audience will be asked to vote on a winner, the discussants intend that more deeply considered conceptions of the role of the learning management system and its connections to the whole institution will emerge from the debate and discussion.

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