

Canvas Fall 2014 Evaluation Report

January 2015 Academic Technology Services Program Evaluation

Introduction

The following summarizes the results of the Fall 2014 Canvas User Feedback Survey for students and faculty. This introduction describes the methods and goals of the surveys.

Background on the Surveys

The overall research goals for conducting surveys related to Canvas include:

- Develop trends to track over semesters/years
- Distinguish new users from experienced users for Canvas use and experience
- Hear helpful experiences and suggestions from teaching staff
- Ask a minimal number of timely questions towards actionable results

Faculty Survey Focus and Research Questions

- (1) How satisfied are faculty with Canvas functionality, to track over time?
- (2) What is Canvas feature use and perceived value for courses, to track over time?
- (3) What support resources do faculty need or see as valuable?
- (4) Background information: teaching/designer roles; degree of ongoing Canvas-use; Canvas experience as the number of courses and semesters using Canvas.

Student Survey Focus and Research Questions

- (1) How comfortable are students with Canvas functionality, to track over time?
- (2) What is perceived value of Canvas for courses, to track over time?
- (3) What support resources do students need or see as valuable?
- (4) Background information: new to Canvas or not

Method for Distributing Survey in Fall 2014:

- Survey link was posted via Announcements at the Canvas general landing page
- The survey was available for all Canvas users from December 1 to 17, 2014
- Support was provided for schools to distribute the survey link locally

Response Rates and Representativeness for Fall 2014:

- The method yielded extremely low response rates.
- Students responded at a somewhat higher rate than faculty overall.
- A significant proportion of those who responded offered constructive, substantive comments.

Table 1. Response Rates: Students and Faculty

Canvas User Group	Counts		Response Rate
	Population	Respondents	
Students	7881	266	3.4%
Faculty	1125	19	1.7%
Total	9006	285	3.2%

Table 2. Population-Respondent Proportions: By Canvas User Group

Canvas User Group	Counts		Proportions	
	Population	Respondents	Population	Respondents
Students and Faculty Only				
Students	7881	266	88%	93%
Faculty	1125	19	12%	7%
Total	9006	285	100%	100%
Note: Population figures and percentages for full set of Canvas users are estimates; for example, faculty number likely includes some who are not teaching staff. These figures exclude the administrative staff and “others” who responded to the survey (n=10).				

Table 3. Count of Responses by School: Students and Faculty

School	Students	Faculty
Division of Continuing Education (DCE)	169	6
Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS)	66	14
Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH)	17	1
Harvard Medical School (HMS)	8	1
Harvard Divinity School (HDS)	7	0
Graduate School of Education (GSE)	5	0
Harvard Kennedy School (HKS)	1	0
Graduate School of Design (GSD)	1	0
Harvard Law School (HLS)	1	0
Duplicated Total (multiple responses possible)	275	22
Total Completed Surveys	266	19
Note: Responses by school count those who answered the School question.		

Results from Open-Ended Comments

Note: Due to low response rates, the close-ended responses will not be summarized and are not reliable for longitudinal trend analysis.

Faculty Summary (15 out of 19 respondents commented)

- Faculty work outside of Canvas often for email and communications with students.
- Faculty and their students also often or sometimes work outside of Canvas for assignments and grading.
- There are limitations in grading and controlling aspects of role-access.
- There are other miscellaneous issues teaching staff raised with the platform.

Students Summary (99 out of 266 respondents commented)

- Students commented on the lack of training and specifically noted that faculty needs to have better training in Canvas (15 comments).
- Students would like the general organization of a course in Canvas to be improved and perhaps standardized, finding it confusing as is (9 comments).
- Comments often referred to challenges in communications: announcements, communication and emails, notifications and a desire for students to be able to communicate with each other (22 comments).
- Students also often commented on limitations in the system around grading, receiving feedback on assignments and submitting assignments and quizzes (19 comments).
- Students expressed difficulty with the user interface for discussions (7 comments).
- Students also commented on lecture video viewing (8 comments) and limitations with the mobile app (4 comments).

Selected Quotes: Faculty

Faculty Transition:

- I found the learning curve quite steep at the start of the semester, but it has been well worth it. Setting up my courses for spring semester has been relatively easy and I wouldn't dream of going back to iSites.

- My help tickets for academic computing support are generally very kindly and quickly answered.

Suggestions or Negatives:

- The grading system could be more flexible - allow for different grading schemes and multiple graders.
- Make it clearer how to contact individual students or sections.
- Students shied away from using Canvas to submit assignments and most seemed to prefer to e-mail them to the TF. The interface is evidently not as user-friendly as it might be!
- My only issue was as noted previously with grades for assignments being visible to students (range and average) without the validation/permission of instructor. I also think that the discussion sections could be utilized much more and we will incorporate this in our future course sections.

Support:

- It would be great to have trainings led by a course instructor or to structure training sessions around particular course-related tasks, such as building a syllabus, creating modules, etc. (Knowing what functions are available doesn't necessarily make it easy to imagine how you would use them.)
- I liked the kickoff meeting for DCE at the beginning of the term. I'd like to see more of these.
- I've enjoyed the numerous opportunities to learn about Canvas (and learn more from each one I attend)

Selected Quotes: Students

Positive Response Overall:

- Just needs discussion forums and then I won't miss iSites at all.
- Seems like a good system, just needs more training for everyone.
- ... we were told what it did, how to log in and get set up and then to contact staffers if we had any trouble. I did not have any trouble as it was pretty self-explanatory.
- I have used multiple platforms for online courses and their subsequent material. Canvas is by far my favorite if used correctly.
- Canvas is great for keeping track of deliverables. It also keeps students on track and committed.
- I used more features in canvas than in another class that used blackboard (I think it was called). Seems more interactive for distance education. I liked the link to the chat better in this venue than trying to enter a classroom. There was no set up involved and I never got kicked out like I did with chat when entering by separate link in other classes. This class utilized the chat as part of class participation more than any other class I have taken so far. The TAs did a good job connecting us to the classroom in real time.

- I really like Canvas and being able to submit my homework online. I also like doing the quizzes in class on Canvas. Overall, I think Canvas is really great!
- Canvas mobile compatibility is a great convenience.
- I LOVED Canvas. It kept me very engaged and up to date about what was happening in my course throughout the semester. Even without a tutorial, I found it very easy to use.

Issues and Suggestions

- I think the emails from Canvas can get a little annoying. I think it would be better if emails from Canvas were sent out only when truly important, not to announce the grading of every single assignment!
- ... It would be nice if each class [was] a little more consistent with how they set up their site.
- I might have had a better experience with Canvas if we were required to connect with our classmates on it for group presentation information. Using regular email was cumbersome and was too hard to follow threads. Also being able to create a Google doc within Canvas so that we could share and edit information would be great. I think you might have that ability already in canvas but in class tutorial would be great.
- It's hard to find the things I need- I end up going back and forth through many pages to find the assignments and resources and so on. I end up with lots of tabs open at once. I also sign in to visit the course website, then get sent to canvas, then try to watch the course video- and have to sign in all over again! There are just a lot of extra steps to anything I need to do, which is frustrating. I think it has a lot of potential, but is still very cluttered and awkward.