K16 SOLUTIONS

Wichita State
University

- 🎓 **16,000 Students**
- 🏛 **Founded in 1895**
- 🎖 **8 Colleges**

Wichita State University
Scaffold Migration

K16 Solutions Migrates Wichita State University to Blackboard Learn Ultra Giving Faculty More Choices for Course Delivery

Founded in 1895, Wichita State University has embarked on an ambitious expansion plan, doubling the physical size of its campus in just the last four years. The research university's urban location in Kansas' largest city provides its more than 16,000 undergraduate and graduate students with innovative, applied learning and research opportunities through co-ops and internships at more than 450 employers. Its students—who attend classes both in person and online—hail from every state in the union and 100 countries around the world.

Wichita State decided to upgrade its learning management system from Blackboard Learn Original to Blackboard Learn Ultra after conducting an internal review. With a limited staff and an enhanced emphasis on online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, leadership sought ways to make the transition less burdensome on its already busy Instructional Resources department. Using K16 Solution's automated SystemsMigration service to migrate its courses allowed WSU to reduce the burden on its internal team. It also enabled instructors to use multiple course formats simultaneously, creating a seamless transition for both faculty and students.

No Master Course Model

Wichita State allows its instructors the freedom to design their individual courses. While the boutique design approach allows for greater customization, it meant that every course would need to be adapted during the upgrade to Ultra.

"Small but Mighty" Internal Staff

WSU's internal team would not be able to manage the transition, train instructors on the new version and continue to support faculty and students with their existing learning experience at the same time. To meet the needs, WSU estimates it would have needed to hire contractors for four to six months.

Selling it to Faculty and Students

Because WSU instructors had long enjoyed customizing their courses, making a wholesale move to a new platform would require a significant amount of buy in. Instructors would also need to learn how to use Ultra and teach to an online-dependent audience accustomed to the Blackboard Learn Original format.

Blackboard suggested WSU work with K16 to ease the transition into Ultra and help get its bespoke courses into the new format as close to ready-to-teach as possible.

WSU worked with K16 to handle the initial transition of about 30,000 sections—or two years' worth of courses—to Ultra in just a few months. "K16's service was a boon," says John P. Jones, Executive Director of the Media Resources Center. "It did a ton of heavy lifting for the classes that were migrated and is making it possible for WSU to work through the transition without having to hire additional, temporary instructional design staff to shepherd the work."

The team identified courses that were 2GB and smaller for the initial migration, allowing WSU to apply some standardization, which improved course quality, explains Carolyn Speer, Director of the Office of Instructional Resources and an instructional designer.

Once K16 had transitioned the courses to Ultra, Jones and Speer shared them with instructors and gave them a choice: they could start with the migrated version or build their courses from scratch. Providing the option helped ensure that the transition didn't feel forced. While the new versions weren't perfect copies of the old courses, they were very close. "We weren't just throwing them in the deep end—we were also giving them water wings," Jones says.

An added benefit of providing migrated courses to instructors: training. "It's hard to learn brand new things without

some sort of scaffold in your head," Speer says. "So even if the instructors don't want to use the courses we've created, they can imagine the courses in Ultra. We've given them someplace to start intellectually."

Both instructors and students are pleased with the results. "I love the new UI," says Jones. "It's clean, smooth, user-friendly, consistent and mobile-friendly. Being able to swap the orientation of the grade book from student to assignment is useful, and really takes advantage of the environment."

Speer, who also teaches online criminal justice and political science courses, says she enjoys being able to use both Learn Original and Learn Ultra formats. "I expected students to push back," she said, "but we haven't gotten a single complaint."

Cost-effective Force Multiplier

Working with K16 Solutions was both easy and cost-effective. "They were accepting of our pace, rather than requiring us to fit into their preconceived way of going about the project," Speer says. The scalable solution allowed WSU to migrate more efficiently.

"From a financial perspective, K16's value as a force multiplier is critical to us in the same way that a forklift is critical to a warehouse manager," Jones said.

Customized Solution

Instructors could choose whether to use the Learn Original or Learn Ultra models based on individual needs. "Instructor choice works best for our campus," Speer says.

Built-in Training

By delivering courses to instructors in the Ultra format, WSU could provide faculty the chance to learn the product with their own materials in hand. "It was a huge benefit for us," Speer says.

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