Fall 2024 Student Feedback Report

Report Summary

Background

Western University transitioned from the Sakai Learning Management System (LMS) to Brightspace to enhance the educational experience for students. The Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) and Western Technology Services (WTS) facilitated this transition by providing extensive training resources for both instructors and students. The fall 2024 term marked the final (and largest) term of academic courses to migrate to the new LMS.

Purpose of the Survey

The primary goal of the survey was to understand the student experience using Brightspace during the fall term. This was accomplished by capturing feedback on the transition and focusing on the ease of navigation, tool usability, and mobile accessibility. More specifically, the survey aimed to identify areas where students faced challenges using Brightspace and gather insights for further improvements. The feedback will inform ongoing training, resource development, and system enhancements to enrich their learning experiences.

Survey Methods

- **Participants:** 2232 students (4.6% response rate) enrolled in fall 2024 courses.
- **Survey Period:** November 26 – December 6, 2024.
- **Methodology:** Students were invited to participate via mass email. The survey was conducted via Qualtrics and included both quantitative and qualitative questions.

Key Findings

Participant Details:

- 80% of respondents were enrolled in in-person courses, 29% took blended or hybrid courses, and 18% took fully online courses
- Most respondents were undergraduate students (74%)
- More than half of survey participants reported using Brightspace before the fall 2024 term (59%), with most experienced users reporting having prior experience with using Brightspace in high school (64%)

Feedback:

General sentiment: Mixed experiences with Brightspace, though trends suggest those who underwent the transition versus experiencing Western's LMS for the first time have a more negative experience. The general sentiment was additionally analyzed by the Student Year Level. There is an inverse relationship between students' year of study and number of individuals within that group reporting positive sentiments towards OWL Brightspace. Students in early years (e.g., first year students) expressed positive sentiments towards Brightspace in greater numbers than students in latter years (e.g., fourth year and beyond students). This indicates a trend of students who likely had experienced a transition between learning management systems (LMSs) would provide more negative than positive sentiment toward Brightspace.

This context provides some insight into the future of acceptance and general sentiment towards Brightspace going forward. As students' only LMS experience at Western will

exclusively become Brightspace over time, it's reasonable to expect that the volume of negative sentiments towards Brightspace will diminish.

Navigation and Interface: Overall, most students indicated that Brightspace was quite or very easy to navigate and students' responses about the factors related to a modern, easy to use, and intuitive interface also trend towards general agreement. Conversely, some indicated that Brightspace was difficult to navigate, complicated, or that they had trouble finding course content. This included feedback that the interface required too many "clicks" to access materials or to navigate between materials.

Feature-Specific Issues: Students expressed having specific challenges with downloading files, accessing grades, discussions, notifications, and content completion status. Conversely, responding students overwhelmingly agreed (82%, n=1367) that there were no outages in OWL Brightspace, and when asked if they agree with the statement "My course site(s) load quickly".

Mobile App (Pulse): Uptake of the Pulse app has grown since the summer feedback survey, where 40% of survey participants noted the use of the app in the fall term (up from 30% in the summer feedback survey). Of those who reported not using the app, the majority did not know it existed. Other reasons for not using the app included limited functionality as compared to browser, a deliberate choice to not be "available 24/7", and a preference for the browser-based version.

Of those who reported using the Pulse app, 25% (n=558) of responses indicated positive experiences. Students specifically mentioned features including: the ease of accessing grades, appreciating the notifications, and accessing course announcements. Responses also indicated keywords like "convenient", "accessible", "easy" with specific appreciation for speed (n=35) and an easy login experience (n=27). 3% (n=67) of responses answered this question in the negative - indicating there was "Nothing" they liked about Brightspace Pulse.

Support Utilization:

- 60% of students did not feel they needed help
- 33% received help from instructors
- Other support sources included the Brightspace Help webpage, self-guided training modules, and the WTS Helpdesk

Actionable Items

For instructors: Consult Brightspace resources provided by CTL to support a consistent user experience for students

For CTL: Provide targeted programming on streamlining course design and improving navigation

For WTS: Continue supporting the "Taking Flight" module and Brightspace Help webpage, and advertise the Pulse app

For D2L: Share feedback to inform technical and interface improvements

Conclusion

Consistent with the feedback received from students with the summer term survey, student responses indicated mixed experiences with Brightspace. Although the transition to Brightspace has generally been smooth, others felt instructors struggled with the transition, often resulting in navigational issues (e.g., content being hard to find or needing too many clicks), and some noted Brightspace features they felt could be improved.