For the first three instructional days of the 2013 fall term, the Yuba Community College District Learning Management System was unavailable to both students and faculty. The intent of this After Action Review is fourfold: to determine factors that contributed to the system failure, assess the impact on students and faculty, and to provide recommendations for strengthening the District’s capacity to respond and communicate should an event such as this occur in the future.

“This should never have happened.”

“There were many indicators that a failure of this proportion was bound to happen. My suggestions that systems are maintained on all levels to assure things of this nature don’t occur.”

Comments from DE Faculty
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## APPENDICES

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After Action Review Team:

Christopher Myers, Faculty, Yuba College  
Sherry Spina, Faculty, Woodland Community College  
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Dr. Kayleigh Carabajal, Vice Chancellor Educational Planning and Services  

January 12, 2014
Executive Summary

During the first three instructional days of the fall 2013 term, Blackboard (Bb), the Yuba Community College District (YCCD) Learning Management System (LMS) failed. Although sporadically accessible during nighttime hours, Bb was completely locked for 34 hours over the three-day period. Sixty-seven faculty members, teaching 128 sections, and 2,953 students were directly impacted by this system failure.

During the event, responsibilities for communication to students, faculty, staff, and Bb technical support were unclear. As a result, the communications themselves were untimely, uneven and not easily understood. Not surprisingly, a higher than anticipated number of students withdrew from Distributive Education (DE) sections in the two weeks following the incident.

Immediately following the event, the Vice Chancellor for Educational Planning and Services sought volunteers and formed an After Action Review (AAR) team. The objectives for the review were fourfold:

- determine factors that contributed to the system failure;
- assess the impact on students, faculty, and staff;
- formulate recommendations for minimizing the reoccurrence of such an event in the future, and
- gather suggestions for improving communication during events that impact the District community.

The AAR team interviewed staff members, administered online surveys to eLearning faculty and students, examined documents, and explored student attrition data. This report presents the findings from the review.

Key Findings:

- **Contributing factors**: Although system failures do occur with technology-supported systems, the two factors that contributed significantly to the magnitude of this system failure were avoidable. The contributing factors were:
  - *A series of isolated decisions made at the DE department level*:
    - The most critical of these decisions was failure to secure timely replacement of the aging LMS system. In 2011 Bb announced the company’s intention to discontinue licensing and operational support for WebCT 8.0.1. This is documented in the 2011-2012 Distributive Education Program Review. Surprisingly, despite the Bb announcement, and ongoing concerns about poor system performance raised by both faculty and students, no evidence of budget requests for LMS replacement were submitted at the college or district level.
    - Over the same time period, DE chose not to install six patches to the aging system, thus rendering WebCT 8.0 even more vulnerable to failure.
  - *A fragmented and decentralized distance education system*: The DE function is administered in a decentralized fashion. Residing in Yuba College, the DE department is accountable to the College, yet provides services for online and instructional television course delivery across all District locations. Server support and integration with Colleague are the responsibility of
Information Technologies, a District department. Service agreements across the colleges, College DE and District IT departments do not exist and responsibilities remain unclear. During the event, this fragmented system caused delays not only in communication, but more importantly, in resolution of the issue. Prior to the event, the lack of a centralized system for tracking concerns and complaints regarding the poor performance of the LMS over time is further evidence the decentralized approach contributed to this event.

- **Impact:** The incident negatively impacted students, faculty, and staff as well as enrollment for fall 2013. Two-thirds of student (67.58%) and eLearning faculty (92.85%) survey respondents self-report a negative impact as a result of this event. The loss in student enrollments in the two weeks following the incident was higher than anticipated as compared to the prior fall term attrition during the same time period.

- **Communication:** In general, student and faculty survey responses indicate dissatisfaction with communication during the event.
  - The majority of student survey respondents state information was not provided quickly enough, was not available to faculty in the courses in which they were enrolled, and was difficult to find.
  - Students were likely to report that communication with other students was as effective as that provided by faculty or staff. It is noteworthy that student survey respondents commended DE and IT Helpdesk staff for the communication they provided.
  - No evidence was found that a comprehensive communication plan existed in the event of system failure.
  - Seventy (47.9%) of the student survey respondents provided suggestions for improvement of communication, including automatic email notifications, text messaging, assuring all faculty and staff are aware of the issue, providing information regarding how the delay would impact assignments and grading, and indicating what was being done to address it.

Further, departmental and District responsibilities for communication to students, faculty and technical support providers were unclear. During the first two days of the event, DE leadership contained communication solely to the eLearning listserv and website. While this approach reflected a typical communication pattern DE employed during prior “sluggish” periods with Bb, the approach proved insufficient for an event of this magnitude.

- **Recommendations:** Four recommendations emerged.
  - Centralize and clearly articulate DE responsibilities and accountability.
  - Assure a systemic approach to the distance education function that includes a strong connection to educational planning, technology infrastructure and planning, and budgetary decision-making.
  - Establish a District Distance Education Committee to assure ongoing faculty and staff input and expertise in the future maintenance and development of this critical academic service.
  - Develop, implement, and assess a comprehensive communication protocol for students, faculty, and staff to include systematic tracking regarding system performance.
Following the executive summary, this report is divided into four sections: Contributing Factors, Impact, and Communication. Verbatim comments extracted from the online surveys are italicized throughout the document. Additional information including comprehensive survey results, interview information, etc. can be requested from the Office of the Vice Chancellor Educational Planning and Services.

**I. Contributing Factors**

The responsibilities for DE services and decisions are decentralized and not well understood across the District. During the interviews, stakeholders characterized the DE system as “fragmented”. As a result, over the last two years, DE made critical decisions in isolation.

- CE 8.0 is an outdated LMS at the end of useful life. DE chose not to install six service patches, thus rendering the aging system more vulnerable to failure. Bb communicated their intention to discontinue licensing and support through written communication in 2011. Bb operational support for CE 8.0 was discontinued in January 2013. Had the six patches been installed earlier, the institution could have requested an extension of operational support to January 2014. DE did not apply for an extension. When this shortcoming was finally discovered in late spring 2013, YCCD secured an extension upon payment of an additional fee and with the condition that the patches be installed. The installation of the patches occurred prior to the summer 2013 term, but they were not fully tested prior to the fall term. (See page 12 for additional information regarding the resolution of the problem).

- The selection process for an LMS replacement occurred outside the College and District budgeting process. DE did not investigate potential budgetary impact prior to seeking faculty input on the preferred LMS. As implemented, this selection process neither conformed to industry standard software procurement practice nor to District procurement mandated requirements. Further, it failed to occur in time to influence 2013-2014 budget development. Despite being included in the 2011-2012 Distributive Education Program Review, no evidence was found of a budget request at the College or District level. As a result, the 2013-2014 budget did not include funding for this sizeable purchase.
II. Impact

The AAR reveals the system failure had a significant and negative impact on students, faculty, and staff. In addition to self-reported impacts drawn from survey responses, a larger number and percentage of students withdrew from DE sections in the two weeks following the event as compared to withdrawals during a similar timeframe the previous fall.

1. **Student Impact:** Over two-thirds (67.58%) of student respondents indicate this event exerted a large or some impact on their educational experience during fall 2013.

![Figure 1: Self-reported Level of Event Impact on Students by Percentage (N=146)](image)

Source: AAR Online Student Survey December, 2013

Typical student comments include:

“The whole thing was a terrible experience for my first year in college. I hope the new Canvas will take off without too much trouble.”

“I emailed the instructor and was dropped from the class which was not what I wanted. I never even got an email saying the system was down. I checked every day and tried logging into my class every day. I was never told what the problem was. An email would have been nice.”

“I would have liked an email or a text message. Also, more than half of this semester there has been major issues with my class actually being on. There has been technical difficulties where either the class wasn't on or if it was on, there was no sound. It hasn't been an easy semester with this class. I feel behind from the beginning and have been trying to catch up ever since.”
2. **Faculty Impact**: Nearly four-fifths of eLearning faculty (38.81%) responded to the online survey. The largest majority (92.85%) of respondents state this event impacted their teaching experience.

Typical faculty comments include:

“Students were quite upset and worried about getting their work in. Faculty spent a LOT of time responding to emails from students outside Blackboard, as well as soothing students in face-to-face encounters. The material that was to be delivered during the "outage" needed to be postponed for later delivery. Additionally, there was not a lot of trust in the system staying up so the work done by students was, in many cases, submitted hastily.”

“Demonstrating how to use Blackboard - which is a requirement in my classes - was not possible during the first two days of class. Bear in mind that the first days constitute an entire week of class. Having students access material on Blackboard during that time, around which some of my lessons were centered, was not possible. Not having any kind of information for my students was demoralizing, as was looking like a fool when I tried to pull up Blackboard during the first day of class.”

![Figure 2: Self-reported Level of Event Impact on Faculty by Percentage (N=26)](image_url)

Source: AAR eLearning Faculty Survey November, 2013
3. **Enrollment Impact:** Student attrition is higher than anticipated when compared to prior fall DE student numbers. As can be seen from the following figure, fewer students enrolled in DE sections in fall 2013 as compared to the prior fall (3117-2953= 5.26% reduction). For fall 2012, 255 fewer students were enrolled prior to “No Show Drop” Date (pre-census date), resulting in an 8.18% student attrition percentage for this time period. For fall 2013, however, this number rose sharply, with 357 fewer students enrolled just prior to census date. Because of the smaller initial enrollment numbers, one could reasonably expect this number to be lower rather than 102 students higher. Overall, this resulted in a 12.09% attrition percentage.

While the reader is cautioned many factors impact students’ decisions to withdraw or drop courses, the event very likely contributed to some of these decisions.

![Figure 3: Comparison DE Student Headcount in Fall 2012 to Fall 2013 - Start Date to Pre Census “No Show Drop” Date](source)

*Source: Colleague XUCT Report Extracted August 24, 2013*
III. Communication

1. **Students:** Overall, students express dissatisfaction with communication surrounding the event. Typical student comments:

   "The college needs to be more proactive with communication. Most professors were unaware of major problems with Blackboard or had no information or options available when system was down."

   "...I think in order to improve communication during that event you need to better inform your staff what was going on/what would fix it if anything."

As can be seen from Figure 4, the largest majority of students (78.87%) report college email is the most effective venue for communicating in an event such as this. It is noteworthy, a number of survey respondents indicate their YCCD email automatically transfers to their private email. Further, over one-third of student comments suggest using multiple means of communication.

   "...I do check my college email periodically. Especially any time when it pops up on my regular gmail account. I also read the portal information webpage."

![Figure 4: Students (N=146): Communication Venues Accessed as Compared to "Most Effective"

Twitter: 2.10% 3.79%
Facebook: 12.68% 12.88%
Text Messaging (Automatic Alert): 40.85%
College Webpage Announcement: 43.66% 49.24%
Portal Announcement: 50.70% 62.12%
College Email: 78.87% 68.94%

Source: AAR Online Student Survey December, 2013
While over three-fifths (62.12%) accessed the portal announcement, just over one-half (50.7%) indicate this is the most effective method of communication. Just over two-fifths (43.66%) state the college website is effective. One of eight students (12.88%) accessed Facebook and for these students this was also considered to be the most effective communication venue.

The reader is cautioned the survey was administered via an email message soliciting participation. Further research is warranted to determine optimal communication venues for students in events such as these.

![Figure 5: Student Question 3 - Was the information provided by the following sources effective in keeping you informed of the progress in resolving the issue during the 3-day time period?](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>39.58%</td>
<td>37.80%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>25.20%</td>
<td>26.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective</td>
<td>38.19%</td>
<td>37.01%</td>
<td>40.65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AAR Online Student Survey December, 2013

Student survey responses clearly indicate faculty members did not receive information in a timely fashion. As a result, students were just as likely to rate information provided by other students (38.19%) as effective in keeping them informed as that provided by faculty members (37.01%).

This finding is concerning. Of the 156 student respondents, 67 (42.94%) are enrolled solely in online courses and rely heavily on faculty communication, especially during the first week of class. Assuring faculty receive timely and accurate information is likely a focus of the protocol for distance education communication.

It is noteworthy that students who accessed the DE or IT Helpdesk commended these staff members for their effective communication during the three-day period.
2. **Faculty:** Interestingly, faculty respondents rate Portal Announcements and College Email as the “Most Effective” communication venue during an event such as this. The District will be well served in assuring timely and accurate communication using these venues in the future.

In general, communication during the event was problematic. First, the interviews revealed DE employs only the eLearning Listserv and website to communicate problems with the LMS system as routine practice. Containing the issue to only those impacted by the event is the rationale underlying this communication strategy. In this event, because of the magnitude of students impacted, faculty and staff not directly associated with DE courses also received inquiries and concerns from students. No information was provided to them until well into the second day of the event.

Second, the responsibilities for communicating with technical support staff at Bb were unclear and changed from the DE department working alone to a collaborative effort with the IT department. This collaborative involvement was critical in final resolution of the issue. Because a communication plan to elevate technical problems and assure IT’s involvement did not exist, valuable time was lost in resolving the system failure.
Furthermore, no venue existed to assure the information provided to faculty staff, and students was consistent, accurate, and up-to-date. It is imperative to develop, implement and assess a communication protocol for sharing information with faculty, staff and students.

Lastly, long-term acceptance of a faulty system was a surprising finding for the AAR team: Archived email indicate that the CE 8.0 system “sluggishness” and poor performance was regularly reported and broadly experienced for several years preceding this event. Typical verbatim survey responses acknowledge this finding:

“Our students need access from day 1, as we begin with content immediately........So that was frustrating. I believe that we are all tarnished with the same brush when technology fails. It appears that the college has major issues when we can’t keep our technology up to date. Our syllabi tell students they must use their BB account for all communications--difficult to do when the system is inoperable. So we already are deviating from the syllabus on day 1. And the really sad thing is that I am so resigned to this that I just accepted the issue as “here it comes again.” I think that speaks volumes to our technology issues on campus. I am still having issues now; our ITV classes aren’t always taping. That is still a big frustration for our students.”
(Faculty comment)

“Find an alternative to Blackboard as this is a fairly regular issue each semester” (Student comment)

In conclusion, four recommendations emerged from the AAR. Through developing and assessing the implementation of the following, we anticipate a greater capacity for the District to minimize a reoccurrence and maximize our capacity to effectively communicate during large-impact events.

1. Centralize and clearly articulate DE responsibilities and accountability.
2. Assure a systemic approach to the distance education function that includes a strong connection to educational planning, technology infrastructure and planning, and budgetary decision-making.
3. Establish a District Distance Education Committee to assure ongoing faculty and staff input and expertise in the future maintenance and development of this critical academic service.
4. Develop, implement and assess a comprehensive communication protocol for students, faculty, and staff.
APPENDICES

Appendix A: Event Highlights

From August 12-14, 2013, BlackBoard (Bb), the Yuba Community College District (YCCD) Learning Management System was largely unavailable to students and faculty. Although the system was sporadically accessible during nighttime hours over the three-day period, Bb was completely locked for a total of 34 hours.

- **August 12** (Bb down, Yuba College’s Distributive Education (DE) department primarily responsible for addressing the issue):
  - Yuba College DE staff were aware the system was sluggish for several days prior to the term start date. Because this was recognized as “typical system performance” at the beginning of each term, the magnitude of the event was not fully known until multiple faculty members notified DE and Information Technologies (IT) staff early Monday morning that Bb was unavailable.
  - DE support staff submitted a request for operational support to Bb (Tier 1).
  - DE staff posted an afternoon message to the eLearning website that the system was intermittently unavailable.
  - IT informed DE staff that the issue was not related to Colleague as all data pushes were turned off.

- **August 13** (Bb remained down, YCCD’s IT department assigned primary role for resolution)
  - After determining this was not an IT hardware issue, nor was it related to Colleague data pushes, VCEPS assigned the software issue to IT for resolution.
  - IT staff contacted Bb technical assistance.
  - VCEPS sent email to the eLearning list informing them IT was now responsible for resolving the issue.

- **August 14**
  - IT staff engaged in a 14 hour telephone call with Bb. Issue resolved at 9:30 pm*.
  - YC PIO posted messages to Facebook and Twitter. IT updated both college websites and posted Portal Announcements every two hours with updates. Final Portal Announcement posted at 11:00 pm announcing system issue resolved.

- **August 15 and 16**
  - Vice Chancellor Educational Planning and Services (VCEPS) hosted an open forum each day for anyone requesting information on the Bb incident.
  - VCEPS committed to a full After Action Review (AAR) to address lingering questions surrounding the event.

- **August 20-24**
  - DE staff posted a message to faculty, staff and students on the eLearning website from the VCEPS acknowledging and apologizing for the inconvenience caused by the incident.
Monitoring student enrollments in DE sections from August 12 to August 24 revealed a higher than anticipated student attrition in those sections as compared to the prior fall term.

*August 14 - Problem Resolution:

During the 14 hour service call, Bb technicians (with assistance from staff in IT and DE staff and IT leadership) examined logs, rebuilt files, reinstalled previously loaded patches and passed the call to a variety of experts around the world. The end result was “a need for special software settings”. When the six patches that DE chose not to install previously were finally applied in June 2013, these software settings were overwritten. With few users in the system during the summer term, no disruption to access occurred. Without the settings, when large numbers of users accessed the software simultaneously at the beginning of fall term, the software began to slow trying to create views for each user until it slowed to a complete halt. Had the patches been installed in a timely manner, the requirement for the special settings would have been addressed incrementally. In short, it is likely this system failure would not have occurred.
Appendix B: After Action Review Methodology

The AAR team met in September 2013 to determine objectives and methodology for the After Action Review. The objectives were fourfold, to:

- determine factors that contributed to the system failure;
- assess the impact on students, faculty and staff;
- formulate recommendations for minimizing the reoccurrence of such an event in the future, and
- gather suggestions for improving communication during events that impact the District community.

As a result, the team implemented a multi-component methodology including interviews with DE and IT staff, a document review, data analysis and student and faculty surveys.

Interviews

- The AAR team developed a list of potential interviewees and seven interview questions (See Appendix C). The team circulated the questions in advance to the interviewees. One interviewee was not able to attend the interview session but provided written answers which were fully considered by the team.
- The AAR team conducted a group interview with Distributive Education and Information Technologies staff members and individual interviews with the Deans of both Distributive Education and Information Technologies.
- Following the interview session on September 27, 2013, the AAR team articulated two key findings (see Page 1 of this report).

Surveys

- The AAR team developed a six-question survey for students and an 8-question survey for eLearning faculty.
- The surveys were administered in November and December 2013. Survey respondents included 26 (of 67) eLearning faculty and 146 students enrolled in DE sections in fall 2013. Response rate for faculty was 38.81%.

Document Review

- Correspondence with BlackBoard
- Distributive Education Joint Program Review (2011-12)
- The AAR team could find no evidence of a budget request for a new Learning Management System despite memo from BlackBoard regarding phase-out of WebCT Vista CE 8.0 system.
Appendix C: Interview Questions

After Action Review
Interview Questions

1. **Event Description:** Please tell us in your own words what you experienced during the three-day period that Blackboard access was unavailable (August 12-14).

2. **Timeline:** When and how did you first learn about the issue? Can you share a timeline of the impact on you during this time (e.g., what you did you do each of the three days and did your actions change over the three-day period?)

3. **Pre-event Planning:** Were there plans in place in your area to address the situation during the three-day period (e.g., communication protocols for faculty, staff and students?)

4. **Tracking:** Did you track communications that occurred with faculty, staff and students impacted during this event?

5. **Factors:** From your perspective, what factors contributed to this event?

6. **Preparing for the Future:** From your perspective, how can we prevent events such as this from occurring in the future? How can we be better prepared to respond to an event such as this in the future?

7. **Recommendations for the AAR Team?** What recommendations do you have for the AAR Team as we prepare this After Action Review?
Appendix D: Notes from Open Forums

Summary of the
Blackboard Information Meeting
District Board Room and
CCC Confer
Thursday, August 15, 2013

ATTENDEES:
Board Room: Rod Beilby, Kayleigh Carabajal (Presenter), Edward Davis, Renee Hamilton, Lisa Jensen-Martin, Brian Jukes, Martha Mills, Marcia Stranix, John Thoo, Karen Trimble
CCC Confer: Angela Fairchilds, Greg Kemble, Anonymous Participants

Background:
- We are currently on WebCT 8.0. WebCT was purchased by Blackboard some years ago. They did a number of updates over the year, however, Yuba decided not to apply all the updates.
- About two years ago, Blackboard made the decision to phase out CE 8.0 and would no longer support WebCT as of January, 2013. They did offer an extension through January 2014 that 60 institutions world-wide participated in. When the district discovered it in April 2013, we applied for and were granted the extension through January 2014 at a cost of $40,000.
- In the spring when we experienced major sluggishness with the system, we asked IT to step in and get us to where we needed to be. Last year we centralized the purchase of new software and license renewals through IT so faculty would not need to worry about it being available to them.

Current Status:
- Carabajal acknowledged the frustration that all are experiencing with the new set of problems and was truly sorry that any of us had to go through this.
- All day yesterday and through the night, Blackboard searched through the database and found a solution at 9 p.m. last night. We understand that if the system makes it to noon today, we should be okay for the remainder of the semester.
- When Carabajal became aware of the issues with Blackboard, she immediately informed the Chancellor and promised him regular updates.
- As for the Governing Board, we are required to give a DE report to them on an annual basis. In July, we explained to them that we had an aging system and the issues that we were facing with the current system. The LMS went to bid over the summer and a decision was made on Monday. After the decision was made Business Services had to engage in negotiations with the bidder. The Board of Trustees is coming together next week possibly Tuesday, to approve the purchase of an LMS. Be aware that they do have the right to not approve the purchase. They are aware DE has a $3 million impact on the district through apportionment.
• On Tuesday evening a notice was posted to the portal and social media explaining that we were aware of new issues with Blackboard. IT posted updates to the portal every two hours to keep us aware of the progress.
• We moved ITV1 and Nursing course streaming links to the portal class site.
• Recommend that faculty teaching enhance classes who are able to post content into the portal class site do so.
• As we are able to migrate content into the new LMS, we will communicate it. Faculty who are willing may then transport information to the new LMS and will be given full support to do so.
• Carabajal appreciated the positive suggestions that she received on improving the system. She added that she has a background in DE instruction and taught DE courses through 2009. She is committed to supporting an optimal online program for our students.
• Concerns about accreditation and regulations have not been addressed as of yet. The first priority was to fix the system and will respond with an after action review.

Timeline:

• Week of August 19th – Governing Board will be asked to approve the LMS purchase
• Following Governing Board Approval: LMS timeline and plan will be rolled out
• September – Begin training and migration to the new system
• January 2014 – Complete transition to new LMS

Questions and Answers (Q/A):

Q: Would it help if web enhanced instruction migrated to the portal?
A: Yes, anyone who moves off the current systems is assistance. The fewer people logging in, the faster the system will be.

Q: Faculty have asked for enhanced capability on the portal. Is that possible and how long would it take?
A: That is a good idea. If faculty want enhanced capabilities, they will need full training as they will have “write” ability on the system, which could have a potential to the system. Would like to offer training and those who go through it would get enhanced rights.

Q: Would a faculty member be willing to provide the training?
A: Jukes had a faculty member who was willing to create Camtasia video training. We will tap into faculty expertise. We will work on a method to create and advertise on the portal.

Q: Will any training videos be vetted by IT before they are made available?
A: Yes.

Q: What other privileges are faculty asking for in class team sites?
A: One faculty member has individual folders for each student and each peer group. As an example, students can critique other students’ essays. We do need to publish instructions for Turnitin on how it can be accessed through the Portal.
Q: The first thing every morning, I log into the Blackboard system and stay in it all day. Is that slowing down the system?
A: No, it is the actual log in.

Q: Is there a place for all the information (instructions, training videos, etc.) to be stored online?
A: Although we have an eLearning web site, Carabajal, Mills and Trimble will review and come up with one place for all the information that can be readily available to everyone.

Q: Who do I contact when I have problems?
A: Although IT took on the work, the control chain is still the same.

Q: Faculty still do not go to the portal. When the information is put on the portal, could an email be distributed to all faculty directing them to go to the portal for updates?
A: Yes. This calls for a portal redesign. The original intent was a learning environment. When other groups saw the capabilities of the portal, it morphed away from its original intent. We didn’t have a communication plan for anything that went wrong in Blackboard. Because it involves everyone, we need to broadly communicate to all district employees and students.

Q: Operations such as hospitals that rely on electricity have backup generators. Is it feasible for us to have a backup LMS (a free one) that could be switched on overnight?
A: There are colleges that allow faculty a choice. They can use the district supplied LMS or use a free version such as Moodle.

Q: Do institutions that have that option have the ability to transfer courses to the other LMS overnight?
A: There are tools to help with the transition, but there is no program that will run it automatically for all courses. It needs to be done class by class and takes some work. We have a choice: do we spend our energy moving things off one system to another or do we spend it fixing the system. There are pluses and minuses. Even if IT were to move courses to the new system, it would be hours of work to learn the new system and explain it to students. This could create even more confusion. As we move to the new LMS, it will be hosted and there will be backups and support.

Q: You mentioned that the new LMS will be potentially running this semester with some training going on. If I’m excited about it and get the training I need, will it be possible to migrate my course to the new system and begin using it this semester?
A: It is possible, but we need to think about the impact to our students and filter decisions through what is best for our students. Keep in mind that students would have to learn and become familiar with a new system partway through the semester. The question then become, “If we can do it, should we do it?”
Q: I agree we should not switch in mid-semester, but I have a late start class that I could use in the new system.

A: Another option is to ask students if they are willing to move to the new system partway through the semester.

**Summary of the Blackboard Information Meeting**

**District Board Room and CCC Confer**

**Friday, August 16, 2013**

**ATTENDEES:** Barbara Anderson, Kayleigh Carabajal, Renee Hamilton, Bill Heidbreder, Greg Kemble, Al Konuwa, Christopher Myers, Robert Mathews, Marcia Stranix, Maris Wagener

**History:** The Blackboard system we are using is CE 8.06 and is 12 years old. It is an aging, sluggish system that we have known needs to be replaced. At one point in spring, the system slowed to a halt. At that time Carabajal directed the Information Technologies Department (IT) to work with the Distance Education (DE) Office to discover what was wrong and to help bring it back up. At some point 2010 or 2011 Blackboard decided to discontinue support for CE and that any user that wanted to remain on it through January 2014 needed to apply for an extension letter. Yuba did not apply until this summer. At that time we negotiated $40,000 for the operational support through January 2014. It was some of the best money spent because it was that service that got us through this past week.

The system has not been supported by IT in the past although they had gradually assumed some control. Last fall the Turnitin license was transferred to IT so faculty could focus on teaching and learning rather than negotiating for software.

**What occurred this week:** When the most recent situation became clear there was no communication to the campus community on Monday or Tuesday. Late Tuesday evening the VCEPS Office posted the initial announcement on the portal and IT was asked to become more instrumental in resolving the situation. The IT staff worked with Blackboard in the both the U.S. and Australia and some were up over 24 hours to resolve the problem. Two-hour updates were made on the portal with the final announcement on Wednesday evening at 10:07 p.m. saying that the system was stabilized. IT informed us that if the system made it through noon on Thursday that it would possibly make it through the end of the term. One question posed was did the Chancellor and Board know about the situation? Please know that the Vice Chancellor provided immediate updates to the Chancellor and some of the Board members who were attending the Governing Board Orientation on campus were notified. A DE report is due to the Board on an annual basis. No evidence was found of one having been submitted in past. The Vice Chancellor submitted it for first time in July. The highlight of the report was our aging system and that we had an
immediate need to replace the system. They are aware of the impact DE has on the district and students. In 2012-13, 9.1% of the Full-time Equivalent Students (FTES) came from DE. Since July the Governing Board has been aware of the process we were going through and were aware of what was occurring. Next year we will showcase some of the excellent practices we have in the online environment.

Carabajal explained that she taught her first DE class in 1989, and was the first CTE instructor at her college to offer a fully online course in the early 1990s. She experienced the glitches in the technology and having to explain to students that it was not working and needed to work out another method.

We have about 174 courses in the system now and the impact on the system is huge. IT moved the nursing and ITV video streaming into the portal. We may need more faculty to move their web-enhanced courses to the portal. We will provide training.

**Next week:** The Governing Board will have a special meeting on Tuesday, August 20 at 5 p.m. to entertain a recommendation from the Chancellor for a specific Learning Management System (LMS). The bidding process closed a week ago today. The scoring team met on Monday and a recommendation is going to the Board. For those who are interested, the agenda will be posted at 3 p.m. on Monday, August 19 in BoardDocs. The Governing Board retains the right to not approve the LMS we are recommending. If they approve the LMS, on Wednesday we will roll out a training plan. The initial training will be virtual. We need to be completely up and running in January 2014 so we are on fast forward. For approximately a 30-day period, the production database will be set up, at that time we will be able to begin populating the courses to be offered in spring 2014.

**What we can learn from this:** It is very apparent we do not have a communication plan to communicate important information with faculty, staff, and students. We hope to develop a robust communication plan that we can use for other emergencies such as power outages. The other thing learned from this instance is that our faculty came together with positive, wonderful, creative solutions. On Wednesday morning a faculty member was in my office with ideas of how we could move off the system. We do have the ability to come together as a community.

**Questions and Answers:**

Q: Did the scoring committee participate in selecting the LMS?

A: It was done in two phases. The faculty met and looked at products and indicated which selection criteria were important to them. The faculty members came together again in the summer to forward their recommendation. None of the eLearning faculty who participated in the recommendation were included in the scoring team and this is what protects the process. A scoring criteria was also applied that look at financial criteria and the ten (10) criteria based on what eLearning faculty rec to us in spring.

Q: Did the administration determine the actual scoring values?

A: The values came from Business Services. It is the same process that is used in processes such as this.
Q: When Blackboard decided not to continue supporting CE why did we not ask for the extension letter originally?
A: Thank you for asking. After we have made whatever adjustments need to be made and begun the process for the new LMS, we will go through an after action review (AAR). While I cannot answer the first question at this time, when we do the AAR, it will be revealed. We will candidly look at what occurred and what brought us to this place. It will not be about fault or blame. It will be about how to prepare ourselves for the future.

Q: Will the role of the DE department be reviewed in the AAR? Now most of the function is being addressed by IT. Will there be a discussion about realigning.
A: The AAR will bring together all the fact so we can make competent decisions about the deployment of our resources. There will consideration on whether we are deploying our resources in the best manner. The training will not go into IT. IT’s role is to provide a stable infrastructure. They are not in the business of training. Training will come from a different direction. Also, the point of contact will remain the same for now. You will call Jeanette O’Bryan and Sukhi Grewal, but they will work closely with IT.

The license for WebCT was $29,000 the additional support was $40,000. We will also need to put in the resources for the cost of the new LMS. This will be a major impact for our budget this year because there was not a budget for the new LMS system. We have had to be creative for the purchase of the LMS. This year, if it is supported by the Board, we are taking funds from the utility contingency fund for 2013-14. This is the fund for increased utility costs.

Q: We knew we were looking at purchasing a new LMS because the eLearning committee was looking at new systems. Why would we not have budgeted for it?
A: That is a question I spent a lot of time thinking about. (Christopher Myers volunteered to serve on AAR committee. Carabajal commended Marcia Stranix had volunteered to move a mid-term course to new LMS.)

Q: Is part of the process going to be looking at responsibility. I hear a lot of who was supposed to prevent this from happening. Would the AAR look at restructuring who is responsible for what.
A: Accountability is my middle name. As we grappled through this on Monday/Tuesday, my question was who was responsible for informing the district community. No one stepped forward so I jumped in with the announcement on the portal.

Q: This slowdown happened before. I expected someone would say we need to fix this, but didn’t. Then, it happened again.
A: Organizations that engage in AAR ask the hard questions and ensure that we do not put ourselves at risk by continuing to put up with vulnerabilities like this. That is why I am looking at an open, transparent AAR. I am committed to making sure we have an optimal teaching and learning environment.
Q: I appreciate your professional optimism. But out of respect, I do want you to know that people are angry and there has been a lack of transparency in this. It feels like we have to throw a fit to get anything completed. Or others may think “I’m not going to serve on the eLearning Committee because they don’t listen to my voice.” It felt weird to not have anyone from the eLearning Committee on the scoring committee. I still feel a lot of frustration for what happened. I was on the eLearning Committee and found out by chance that it was going out to bid and that the scoring committee would not include a member from the eLearning Committee. It leads to a feeling of apathy.

A: I appreciate your level of candor. There are a number of things we are bringing forward from the past. There are things to improve as far as communication. I cannot lead you to believe this time it will be different. All I can do is tell you I am committed to transparency.

On Monday, IT was working to resolve the issues with Blackboard, but IT does not control the individual that does the work. That was resolved on Tuesday. Organizationally, it is our responsibility to ensure the online environment is seamless and working at least 99.9% of time. We need clarity, communication, commitment, and a very clear delineation of who is in charge of what.

Q: I feel it answers one aspect of the question, but leaves untouched the question of why we had a group of people serving to help decide on which LMS we would recommend, but then there was a completely different process that integrated their input. Was it because of a legal process?

A: Let me start by saying that this is not the way a large software purchase is typically made. Typically a team is put together to examine the infrastructure requirements, needs of the institution, and then look at possible alternatives. In looking at alternatives a full review of the company’s business sustainability is also accomplished. Then user groups are asked to review a number of options that meets the budget and specs. This time we did it in the reverse. The users were first asked to review software without any limits on cost. Typically this is an 18 month roll out and typically put out on a project plan where everyone knows what their responsibility is and there is a communication process. I am not clear on how the process occurred here, but we will certainly find out. Once we got to the process of where we went to bid, we had to be very clear that the choice had not already been made. Once the specs are online the vendors who apply have an opportunity to ask questions. One question was if a decision had already been made and did they even have a chance. Had there been any cross pollination between the two groups, the district would have been in a liability situation. There was no one on the committee who would have been biased by the decisions from the first committee. However, we had the criteria that the eLearning Committee said they wanted. Because we did it with the two different teams, we protected the district from any liability. No one can say that the bidding was biased.

Q: Was the second committee comprised of users or was it all administration?

A: There were no end users. It was entirely administration or Business Services staff.
Q: Will the eLearning Committee’s findings be presented to the Board? Will they see the eLearning Committee’s conclusions?
A: Because of the function of the eLearning Committee, the recommendation was certainly embedded in the choice of the successful bidder, and it was incorporated through the criteria that the scoring committee used when they made the choice. This process was instituted and implemented in a way that I have never seen before. Typically, the user recommendation is the last recommendation.

Q: Who made the decision on the order of the process?
A: I’m sorry. I can’t answer that. I can only speak about my involvement in the process when the eLearning Committee got together to make the recommendation. I did bring in IT support. I requested the eLearning Committee to bring a recommendation. I will look up the data and it will be in the AAR.

Q: This won’t be the last time we make a large purchase, and it is important for us to find out how this happened so it doesn’t happen again. Could the confusion come from one college providing a service to another?
A: I thank you for bringing up an important issue. It is multi-layer. How do you vet and choose a large software purchase. For example, “How was TracDat chosen?” “How was CurricUNET chosen”? This was certainly something the accreditation team asked when they came. It is the process any time you purchase a large ticket item. As an example, Colleagues is $290,000 per year. If we purchase the student ed plan to add to that how is that choice made? Typically you have a software plan.

Q: I was at the Board meeting when it was announced that they would be buying the portal system we have. They were told it would solve all our problems. It has certainly not lived up to what we were told. I heard that the Board was told CurricUNET would free up the Curriculum Committee Co-Chair’s time, but we now see that is not the case. I am concerned that they hear what the faculty input was.
A: What we did with the scoring process in the end was absolutely critical and essential. It could not have been done any other way and still protect the district from liability. I understand the concerns. I continue to say I will not be held hostage by the past. But we need to learn from the past so we are not vulnerable like this in the future.

Q: Was the process such that we had to take the low bid?
A: No, we were not bound to take the lowest bid. We put in RFP that we would choose the most appropriate bid, not the lowest. That is where your criteria came into play.

Q: What is the duration of this version of the LMS system? The software companies seem to come out with new versions every year so we have to update. Should we be planning for the cost of updates now?
A: That is why it makes so much more sense for the contract to go through IT and the Business Services Department because we were very clear that it would include automatic updates in the
licensing cost, and we were very clear that it be a hosted solution to reduce the impact on the infrastructure here.

Q: Will the Board’s discussion and vote be in open session? Will we get to hear all of it?
A: Certainly, it is an open meeting and you are welcome. The moral support of all you being in the room would be wonderful.

Q: I’m thinking the eLearning Committee suggested what they wanted. The second committee looked at the particular aspects they wanted. That kind of worries me.
A: Your concerns are absolutely valid. That is why I will suggest that future purchases are done the correct way. We will look at cost, the financials, and see if the company is fiscally sound with a sound business plan. We will then determine the options and have the users choose from the options.

Myers added that in the business world, you would prequalify the vendors before the users even look at the products. It was backward.

Q: The eLearning Committee looked at student success.
A: All of us around the table would say we are looking at student success. I would propose that everyone on the scoring committee was looking at student success.

If you have additional questions, please email or call Kayleigh Carabajal at kcarabaj@yccd.edu or 530-741-6793.

Thank you to the eLearning faculty for their patience working through this week and for supporting your students through this circumstance.

We will combine the notes from Tuesdays meeting with these in the After Action Review.
Appendix E: Survey Questions

Online Student Survey Bb

Welcome

From August 12-14, 2013 Yuba Community College District experienced difficulties with BlackBoard, our Learning Management System. As a result, students enrolled in online and ITV courses could not access coursework in BlackBoard during this time period.

We are asking you to complete this short survey to help us understand how well we communicated during this time and the impact this event had upon you as a student enrolled in one or more distance learning classes. The survey is completely anonymous. Your responses can not be tied back to you in any manner. The results will be reported in the aggregate only.

We will use the results to learn from you how we can improve and better communicate with our distance learning students. Please take the 5-10 minutes necessary to complete this 5-question survey. Thank you in advance for your participation.

1. From August 12-14, 2013, we used five venues to communicate the problem and provide updates on our progress in resolving the issue.

Did you access any of the following for updates on this problem during that 3-day period?
Please check all that apply.

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2. Was the information provided by the following sources effective in keeping you informed of the progress in resolving the issue during the 3-day time period?

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3. To communicate status updates, which method(s) is most effective for you?

Please check all that apply.

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4. How could the college have improved our communication to our students during this event?

5. Please rate the level of impact this event had on your educational experience during this fall semester.

- Little impact
- Some impact
- Large impact
- No Opinion

6. I enrolled in the following during fall 2013 semester:

- Distance education courses only (online and/or ITV)
- Combination of face-to-face and distance education courses
Introduction

As you are aware, from August 12-14, 2013, Yuba Community College District experienced difficulties with BlackBoard, our Learning Management System. As a result, students and faculty could not access coursework in BlackBoard during this time period.

An After Action Review Team is now examining this event to determine how we can minimize the likelihood that such events will recur in the future as well as how we can optimize communication during events that impact our faculty, staff, and students.

This event impacted 2953 students and 152 faculty members. We are asking you to complete this short survey to help us understand how well we communicated internally during this time and the impact this event had upon you as a faculty member. The survey is completely anonymous and no IP addresses are collected. Your responses cannot be tied back to you in any manner. The results will be reported in the aggregate only.

We will use the results to learn from you how we can improve and better communicate with our distance learning faculty. Please take the 10 minutes necessary to complete this 8-question survey and submit by November 25. Thank you in advance for your participation.

1. From August 12-14, 2013, we used several venues to communicate the problem and provide updates on our progress in resolving the issue. Did you access any of the following for updates on this problem during that 3-day period? Please check all that apply.

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4. How could we have improved our communication to you and your students during this event?

5. Please rate the level of impact this event had on your teaching experience during this fall semester.

- [ ] Little impact
- [ ] Some impact
- [ ] Large impact
- [ ] No Opinion
6. If you answered "large" or "some", feel free to add comments here on how this event impacted your teaching experience.

7. I am teaching the following during fall 2013 semester:
   - [ ] Distance education sections only (online and/or ITV)
   - [ ] Face to face sections only
   - [ ] Face to face sections that are "web-enhanced" with some instructional materials available in BlackBoard
   - [ ] Combination of face-to-face and distance education courses
   - [ ] Combination of face-to-face, web-enhanced, and distance education courses

8. Do you have suggestions or comments for the After Action Review Team as we examine this event and make recommendations for improvements in the future?