



## University Relations

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News Release

# UW System's change to new digital platform leads to rapid online transition

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MADISON, Wis.—In the summer of 2017, the University of Wisconsin System began implementing its new online learning platform. As a result, the new platform has facilitated the transition of thousands of in-person courses to online delivery in a matter of weeks, a large-scale success in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We never could have imagined the disruption this pandemic has caused our students and faculty,” said UW System President Ray Cross. “Nevertheless, our new online learning system has allowed us to continue providing the education students need and expect at the time we most need it.”

“One of our top priorities during this challenging time is making the transition to distance learning as easy as possible for our students,” Cross added. “The new digital learning environment provides students an easy-to-navigate platform that is flexible enough to meet their needs as their classes shift online.”

A digital learning environment (DLE) is a platform of digital tools and resources used to support, enable, or manage learning. The UW System's large-scale transition to a cloud-based DLE has allowed it to more effectively navigate the shift to emergency remote instruction by the System's 13 universities as they respond to COVID-19.

The DLE, which is designed to be easy for students and faculty to use, was in place during the Spring 2020 semester at all UW System universities to support face-to-face, hybrid, and online courses. However, a limited number of faculty members used the platform for fully online instruction. Now nearly 5,000 faculty, instructional staff, and graduate assistants have published nearly 17,460 courses online as of April 8. In addition, the exponential growth of both web conferencing and video creation shows that instructors successfully identified ways to enhance their courses with real-time interaction and videos for and by students.

With the new DLE, all course materials are available online for instructors to use with students, and instructors who were not already using it were able to use spring break to quickly publish their courses online. That rapid deployment of courses would not have been possible with the tools available in the former online learning management system.

“We have already seen great success with our new DLE, including dramatic increases in our media management system, used to create, store, and view videos, as well as a 5,600 percent increase in usage of our web conferencing tool,” said Vice President of Administration Rob Cramer. “Without the systemwide change, we would not have been able to adapt to distance learning as quickly and effectively as we have.”

Implementing the platform over three years cost \$6.06 million, \$1.16 million less than what was budgeted. The platform is used by 12 UW System universities, while UW-Madison undertook a similar rebuild and moved to a separate Canvas system on an earlier timeline.

UW System universities are using the Canvas platform as the core of the new DLE that brings uniformity to data collection and reduces variability in class structure all while encouraging collaboration and leveraging the unique strengths of UW universities to create the best user experience for students. Visit UW System's [digital learning environment \(DLE\)](#) website for more information.

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*The University of Wisconsin System serves approximately 170,000 students. Awarding nearly 37,000 degrees annually, the UW System is Wisconsin's talent pipeline, putting graduates in position to increase their earning power, contribute to their communities, and make Wisconsin a better place to live. More than 80 percent of in-state UW System graduates stay in Wisconsin five years after earning a degree. The UW System provides a 23:1 return on state investment. UW System institutions also contribute to the richness of Wisconsin's culture and economy with groundbreaking research, new companies and patents, and boundless creative intellectual energy.*  
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