

3/1/2024

From: John Jones, Executive Director, Media Resources Center

To: Faculty Senate

Subject: A partial response to the WSU & LMS Tech Companies slides by Dr. Susan Sterrett

Senators and Colleagues –

The presentation by Senator Sterrett was tabled due to time considerations, and given that her slides were shared, I thought I'd package and share some notes I have on those slides as a response for the Senate.

Top Level Summary:

- The AI tools in Blackboard are safe for instructor use, not available for student use, and have been vetted by the university's Data Management Committee, including the Chief Information Security Officer and the Chief Privacy Officer through the Data Management Committee process.
- We are in Blackboard and have not conducted an LMS review to consider a change for a variety of reasons (see below), largely based on tactical challenges like other competing priorities and resources.

Overall:

- The threat presented by **AI in Blackboard (OpenAI or others)** - The tools that have been provided in Blackboard are implementations of Microsoft's re-packaging of the OpenAI model – which *Microsoft has created as a way to make the tool safe for Business and Academic use*. This is the same engine that is behind Microsoft Bing & Copilot, which are safe for our use (guidance is being prepared by ITS at this time).
 - The tools were presented to and approved for use by the DMC and the CISO
 - The tools are only used by the instructor and are designed to help the instructor in the act of building the course. (see the table describing these tools at the end of this memo)
 - The entire interaction happens within Microsoft's systems and is not used beyond the user's needs – it is not used to train, retrain, or improve the AI model in any way.
 - Canvas is also implementing AI into its offerings, for example through a partnership with the Khan Academy and their instructional AI, Khanmigo. The primary distinction between Blackboard and Canvas in the implementation of AI is that Blackboard is making these AI tools available as a part of the core product and Canvas is charging for them as an add-on.

Cowley County CC, KU Med, Ft. Scott CC, KUMC, KCKCC, Benedictine, Ottawa, Haskell, MSU, UCM, Drake, NIU, University of Illinois at Chicago, and more).

- **Slide 4: Open AI + Anthology, what's the relationship?**

- Senator Sterrett quoted an article about Blackboard's AI announcement that claims that Anthology is partnering with OpenAI. This article is dated July 31, 2023, and several articles came out at about the same time. The other articles talk about how Anthology is using "Microsoft Azure OpenAI services" but don't talk about a partnership between Anthology and OpenAI.

- f* This is an important distinction ("OpenAI" vs "Microsoft Azure OpenAI Services"). Anthology has a strong relationship with Microsoft, and Microsoft has created an implementation of ChatGPT that is safe for business and academic use (the Microsoft Azure OpenAI Services mentioned in these articles). Microsoft has a deep relationship with OpenAI, and through that partnership has leveraged the Chat GPT tool to create the Microsoft Azure OpenAI services which create a walled garden where information/data is not saved and sent back to the AI for future training.

- f* This "walled garden" is created by eliminating the part of the AI's work cycle that sends information back to the AI for training and development. Microsoft's delivery of OpenAI's model is essentially a static product that is not learning, only interacting with us locally. By ensuring that nothing gets fed back to the AI, the environment is made safe for all kinds of uses that would not be responsible while interacting with a version that was learning from us in the exchange.

- **Student Privacy:** All tools provided in Blackboard are instructor-only tools, so the students do not interact with them, and the AI does not have access to student data. There is no risk to student privacy.
- **Faculty Ownership of Content:** All tools provided in Blackboard are content creation tools. The tools only have access to the content given to them in a prompt or a reference that is being used (like a content item within the course). Nothing is sent back upstream to the AI for training and is only stored in Microsoft's databases temporarily to allow for the tools to operate within a safe environment. Nothing about AI tools is a threat to faculty ownership of content greater than posting that content in the LMS represents.
- **Security against Cyberattacks:** Although Anthology is not publicly funded and is not subject to SEC oversight, there are industry standards they carefully adhere to, and our security professionals

- **Blackboard Ultra** is (now) a very good product, providing a student and instructor experience that is a very strong competitor to Canvas – better in some ways, and certainly an excellent modern LMS. Most of the institutions that left Blackboard (like KU) did so at a time when Ultra was still struggling to catch up to Canvas, and the decision they made at that time made sense for them (KU made the choice to move to Canvas in 2020, announced it in 2021, but has taken until this fall to fully implement Canvas). Blackboard will regain some (if not all) of its lost market share in the coming years.

Resources for Faculty to Learn More

In the interest of transparency and having an informed institution, I always try to create and promote places for faculty to learn more about the pros and cons of each platform. I have created a list of resources for faculty to learn more about Blackboard Ultra and Canvas LMS. I have also created a list of resources for faculty to learn more about Blackboard Ultra and Canvas LMS.

