



- Hello, everyone. I am Rosa Conti, a current graduate student at Post University studying the field of educational technology.
- This presentation will recommend a learning management system – or an LMS – within a higher education environment: Post University.
- Research considerations were based on years of using an LMS as an undergraduate and graduate student and time spent testing and performing demonstrations in two additional LMSs.
- The work herein considers the roles of instructor, course designer, and developer – but primarily caters to the goals and experience of the end-user: the learner.
- We will look at the challenges, opportunities, and essential features of an LMS, as well as a review a benchmarking chart that will help us to zero in on a recommended LMS for Post University.

## Post University



U.S. News & World Report regularly recognizes Post University for its online programs.

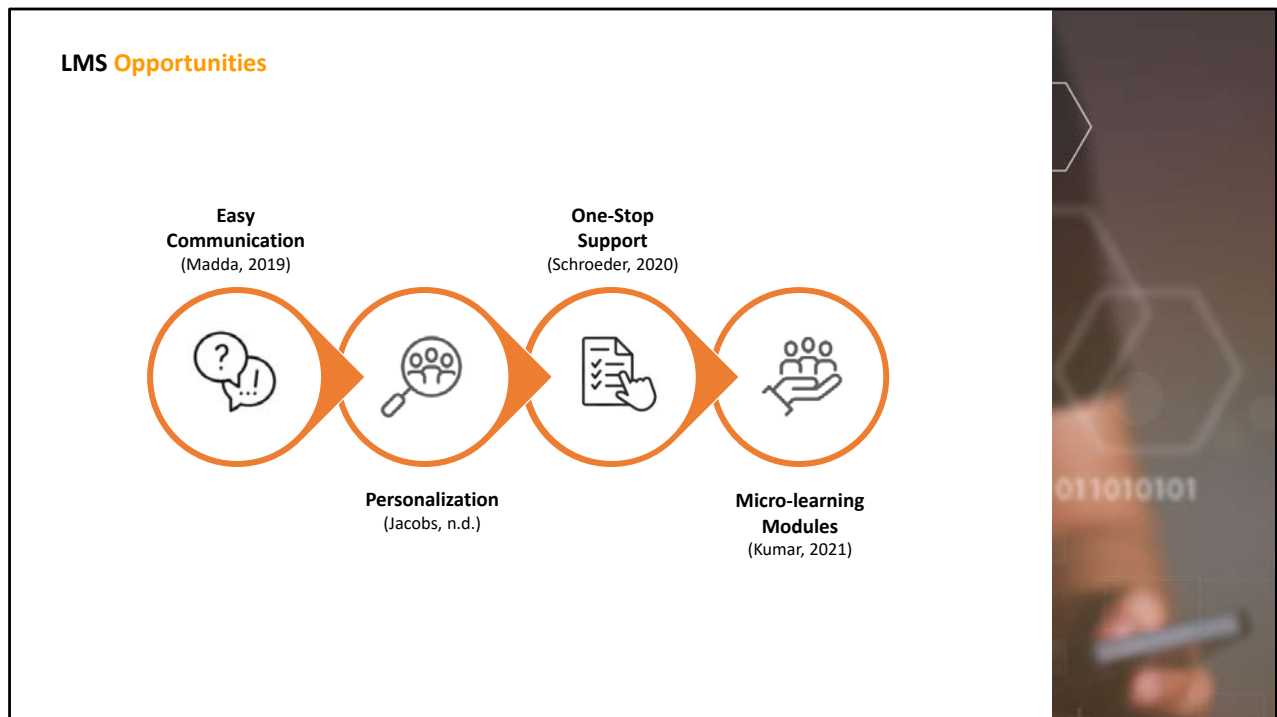
- A higher education institution founded in 1890
- Offers courses on campus, entirely online, or through a hybrid format (online + on-campus)
- Has five schools:
  - Nursing & Health Sciences
  - Business
  - Arts & Sciences
  - Public Service & Education
  - Continuing Education
- Delivers more than 50 undergraduate and graduate degrees and certificates

(Post University, 2022)

Post University currently uses Blackboard's LMS (classic version).



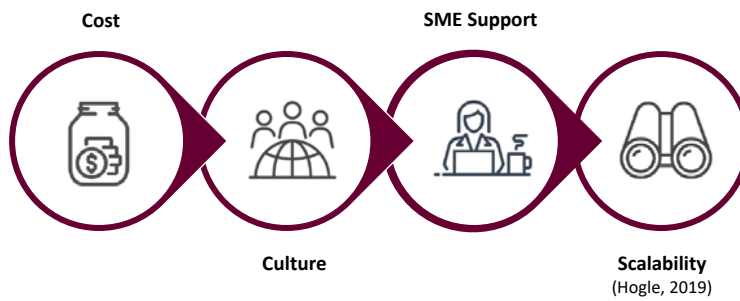
- Post University is a higher education institution that is well versed in delivering quality online education.
- It is regularly recognized for its development and delivery of online programs.
- Courses are offered in a variety of ways – on campus, purely online, or a hybrid of both.
- With five schools under its umbrella, it delivers over 50 undergraduate and graduate degree programs and certificates.
- This is all to say that Post University is no stranger to working with a learning management system to administer its online courses as it currently uses Blackboard's classic version.



An LMS offers many opportunities for administering online education. Amongst them are time, money, consistency, and flexibility. Here are a few more that I consider being essential.

1. **Easy Communication:** Instructors and students can communicate easily with each other (Madda, 2019).
2. **Personalization:** Personalizing an LMS system provides “just-for-me” experiences for learners (Jacobs, n.d.). These can include personalized dashboards, course recommendations, customized messages and languages, and more.
3. **One-Stop Support:** With everything in one place, students will be able to find the resources and support they need to complete their coursework (Schroeder, 2020).
4. **Micro-learning Modules:** Bite-size lessons reduce cognitive overload, increase attention, and create better engagement for learners (Kumar, 2021).

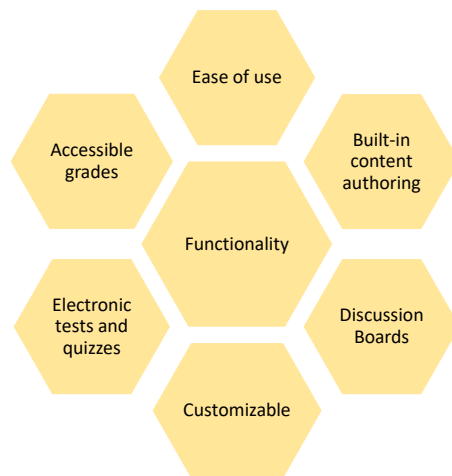
## LMS Challenges



An LMS also encounters challenges, such as role delegation, time management, unreliable internet connectivity, and insufficient training. Here are a few more critical ones that are important to know when considering an LMS.

1. **Cost:** An LMS requires financial investment both upfront and ongoing. Even though an LMS can save money in the long run (amongst other benefits), there still needs to be a budget to get and keep it off the ground.
2. **Culture:** Stakeholders need to buy-in and support the new LMS. Employees should be onboarded through engagement campaigns, change management efforts, and user training.
3. **SME Support:** Having trained, on-site subject matter experts (SME), such as LMS administrators and IT staff, is necessary to manage ongoing nuances. Managing an LMS requires dedicated attention, involvement, and expertise.
4. **Scalability:** An LMS should be able to expand to meet the learners' and organization's needs. Stay away from a "one-size-fits-all" mentality (Hogle, 2019).

## LMS Essential Features






While LMSs offer many diverse features, some are more important than others depending on an organization's current and anticipated future needs. Staying within the focus of a higher education institution, specifically Post University, the following seven features are recommendations for this LMS proposal.

1. **Functionality** – The LMS does what it's supposed to and does it well.
2. **Ease of use** – There is a good flow and design layout, the content is organized and easy to navigate, and the interface is comfortable for the learner.
3. **Built-in content authoring** – The LMS should be able to create learning content using text and embedded media, and it is advantageous to have a notable Rich Text Editor (RTE).
4. **Discussion Boards** – These should be easy to use and incorporate well into the course outline. Learners should be able to create their own posts and not just reply to the instructor's.
5. **Customizable** – An LMS can be customizable on many levels. An important area is the ability to personalize to-dos, tasks, alerts, and reminders.
6. **Electronic tests and quizzes** – These should be easy to create, assign, embed into courses, and use. The learners' experience should be intuitive and easy.

7. **Accessible grades** – Providing students with a way to view their course and overall grades encourages transparency and allows students to track their own progress.

### LMS Benchmarking Tool

- 1 = Feature not offered or cannot be found in LMS  
 2 = Feature offered in LMS but is limited or does not work well  
 3 = Feature is offered in LMS and works well  
 ★ = Operates notably well

LMS Essential Features	 CANVAS BY INSTRUCTURE	 talentlms	 Blackboard NOW PART OF ANTHOLOGY
Functionality	3	2	3
Ease of use	2	2	3
Built-in content authoring	★ 3	2	3
Discussion Boards	3	2	★ 3
Customizable	3	3	3
Electronic test and quizzes	3	3	3
Accessible grades	★ 3	1	3
	20	15	21

This benchmarking chart illustrates the seven essential features to look for in an LMS that we just discussed and rates the following three LMS platforms – **Canvas**, **TalentLMS**, and **Blackboard** – against these features.

Here, we use a rating system of 1 to 3 with:


- “1” indicating if the feature is **not offered** in the LMS,
- “2” if it is **provided but does not function well or is limited**, and
- “3” if it **works well**.
- Also noted by a blue four-point star are areas which operate notably well.

As you can see, Blackboard received a perfect score of 21 when comparing these seven essential features. Canvas comes in at a close tie with 20 points. Talent LMS is the weakest at 15 points.

## LMS: Canvas

1 = Feature not offered or cannot be found in LMS  
 2 = Feature offered in LMS but is limited or does not work well  
 3 = Feature is offered in LMS and works well

★ = Operates notably well

LMS Essential Features		Feature Review
		
Functionality	3	The interface is crisp and clean, and all its functions work well.
Ease of use	2	Links are created in different areas of the site, and it can be confusing for the learner to know where to navigate next. Canvas is not intuitive to use.
Built-in content authoring	★ 3	The Rich Format Editor (RFE) is robust, and embedding media is easy and looks very nice on the page.
Discussion Boards	3	Discussion Board works well, has an RFE, and allows embedded video.
Customizable	3	Content customization, branding, and personalization, such as settings and automated emails are offered.
Electronic test and quizzes	3	Quizzes are easy to create and function well for the learner. Due dates, points, time limits, and allowed attempts are customizable.
Accessible grades	★ 3	Canvas has a designated link that displays an impressive calculated chart of all assignments, grades, and their weighted percentages.

20

I reviewed **Canvas** by creating a two-module course.

- Its aesthetics and typography look very nice.
- Clicking throughout the site feels quick and functions well.
- Its Rich Format Editor and detailed access to grades earn notable mentions.
- The downside to using Canvas, which prevented it from earning a perfect benchmarking score, is that it is lacking in ease of use. Links are created in different areas of the site, and it can be confusing for the learner to know where to navigate next to avoid missing an assignment. This can be avoided with an insightful course designer who creates a landing page explicitly listing all the links in one place. Still, without assuming this, this is one area to pay attention to when considering Canvas as an LMS.

## LMS: TalentLMS

1 = Feature not offered or cannot be found in LMS  
 2 = Feature offered in LMS but is limited or does not work well  
 3 = Feature is offered in LMS and works well

★ = Operates notably well

talentlms		Feature Review
LMS Essential Features		
Functionality	2	The interface is not intuitive. The content views more organized for the Instructor/Designer than the learner. Assignments are sequential and appear in ordered progression on the screen.
Ease of use	2	A navigation bar is missing. The top header is not intuitive where the learner is in the course, and they may miss the tab that offers an overview of the course contents as it not clearly marked.
Built-in content authoring	2	The Rich Format Editor (RFE) is lacking. The font is changeable but is glitchy and can revert to default. Content pages do not look modern.
Discussion Boards	2	Discussion Boards are one of the weakest aspects of TalentLMS. They are difficult to create, and the intro is limited to 255-characters. Learners contribute to one discussion vs. creating their own.
Customizable	3	Content customization, branding, and personalization, such as settings and automated emails are offered.
Electronic test and quizzes	3	Quizzes are easy to create and function well for the learner.
Accessible grades	1	The course layout does not show the learners' progress through modules. They can only see their progress for the entire course.

15

I reviewed **TalentLMS** by creating a two-module course.

- I found the best feature in Canvas to be Instructor's "view" while creating the course. Here, each assignment, quiz, discussion board, or other work appears in an organized fashion using section headers and subfolder-like areas.
- A weakness of TalentLMS is that this at-a-glance course overview is not provided to the learner. While a link on the top navigation bar displays all coursework in the unit, it is not intuitive to find and could be missed.
- Another weak feature in TalentLMS is its discussion boards. It is difficult for the Instructor to assign different discussions to multiple units, and learners cannot create their own. Instead, they can only contribute to the one assigned by the Instructor.

### LMS: Blackboard (Classic View)

1 = Feature not offered or cannot be found in LMS  
2 = Feature offered in LMS but is limited or does not work well  
3 = Feature is offered in LMS and works well

✦ = Operates notably well

LMS Essential Features	<b>Blackboard</b> <small>NOW PART OF ANTHOLOGY</small>	
		Feature Review
Functionality	3	The interface is crisp and clean, and all its functions work well.
Ease of use	3	Navigating through weekly units and across the course is intuitive, easy, and consistent.
Built-in content authoring	3	The Content Editor is robust, and embedding media is easy and looks very nice on the page.
Discussion Boards	✦ 3	Discussion Board works notably well, has an RFE, and allows embedded video. Learners can create their own posts.
Customizable	3	Content customization, branding, and personalization, such as settings and automated emails are offered.
Electronic test and quizzes	3	Quizzes function well for the learner.
Accessible grades	3	Accessing grades in Blackboard is easy for learners to do.

21

I did not create a course in **Blackboard**, although I have many years of experiential knowledge of this LMS as a student of higher education.

- Based on extensive experience and research, Blackboard fully meets all the seven essential features discussed herein.
- No weaknesses have been discovered.

## LMS Recommendation for Post University

### Blackboard<sup>®</sup> NOW PART OF ANTHOLOGY

Meets all benchmarking standards  
Effective and easy to use  
Customizable  
Simple navigation  
Organized course content  
Generous Content Editor (WYSIWYG)  
Aesthetically pleasing  
Existing culture  
Stakeholder buy-in



There are advantages and disadvantages to most LMSs. However, **Blackboard is the clear winner** with a solid score against all benchmarking features.

- Canvas would have been a good contender if it were more intuitive and its assignments weren't scattered throughout different links on the site.
- TalentLMS is also lacking, most notably its weak functionality, discussion board features, poor formatting toolbar, and limited visibility to learners of their grades.
- Blackboard offers many facets that can deepen learning, such as learners being granted the ability to create their own discussion posts, compared to Canvas or TalentLMS, where learners contribute to an existing one.

For reasons illustrated herein, as well as considering the opportunities and challenges discussed earlier, **I recommend that Post University continue using Blackboard's classic version for its online courses.**

As a reminder, opportunities for a well-designed LMS include easy communication, personalization, one-stop support, and micro-learning modules – all which Blackboard is presently engaged in and has successfully demonstrated for many years. Likewise, because Post University is already well-versed and invested in using Blackboard, the challenges one can encounter when getting an LMS off the ground are likely no longer concerns. For instance, the initial cost has already occurred, stakeholders are long invested, the trained

support staff is intact, and the learner culture continues to embrace the use of Blackboard successfully.

In conclusion, I believe that **Blackboard** reflects the potential that an LMS can offer its learners toward their goals and online educational experience.

– END –

## References

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