Turning AUTh into e-University

Pinelopi Giovanitsa

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, IT Center, PO Box 888, EL 54124, pgiovani@it.auth.gr

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1. ABSTRACT

Among other universities, AUTh is nowadays facing the need to accommodate new technologies in its learning process. Therefore, AUTh uses learning platforms such as moodle, blackboard and eclass to provide its educators, students and administrators an integrated system to create personalized learning environments. Learners of our university and worldwide, have the ability to take courses entirely on-line through downloading the course material, chatting with the instructor, taking exams and watching the lectures on demand or in real time, only by using a web browser at home without any cost.

2. INTRODUCTION

In the mid-2000s, AUTh decided to use centra, eclass and blackboard as its main learning management systems. It was at 2010 when those systems were mature and the users of the university were really familiar with the idea of online learning. In 2013 due to the cost of the usage and the administration of those platforms, AUTh decided to turn into open source learning management systems and moodle was chosen as the best solution to merge all the courses in one platform. In fact, moodle was chosen as the main learning platform only for members of the university and alongside, for the project called "Open Courses", eclass was chosen as the platform for all freely accessible and available to everyone institutes' courses over the internet.

3. REPLACING BLACKBOARD WITH MOODLE

When the decision was made to move from blackboard to moodle, one of the main concerns for the two centers involved, IT and Central Library, was to limit the burden that the teachers or the students might experience while using this new learning management system. Therefore, 92 instructional meetings, took place from the staff of the Central Library, educating more than 1200 users, both teachers and students, to our new platform. Alongside, the same staff created and distributed 19 manuals with guiding tools and how-to questions to help the users of the university. It is important to mention that guiding the teachers and organizing new instructional meetings are daily duties of the Central Library staff.

The main issues, raised by users, that both centers had to answer, was the transition and the enrollment of the students in particular courses, the upload and the distribution of the course material, the creation of new courses and the use of the new tools that moodle offers. In general, our users did not experience much difficulties while using this new system. Most of the teachers have the experience to use that kind of platforms and there is also the support staff in both centers that they can always turn into. Respectively, our students are familiar with learning management systems and the do not put so much effort to learn how to use a new one. Furthermore, there are a lot of comments from students who want all of their teachers to participate in this central learning systems.

3.1 Issues and considerations behind the process

While choosing the moodle platform as the central management system, issues about the philosophy of the LMS, were raised. We had to take into consideration what tools our users want, what features they like and what data instructors need to guide and support student learning. Furthermore, the choice of compatible browsers, languages supported and active user community were very significant. In addition, we had to check what migration and conversion tools to use in order to eliminate the possibility to lose any course material that had to be created from scratch. Also, one of the main aspects we had to focus on, was the security provided from the LMS as far as online testing, plagiarism and grading were concerned. The technical aspects that we had to answer were the hardware, software, network and staff requirements, the features of backups provided and the storage capacity that was needed.

3.2 Taking with numbers and similar experiences

In 2014, prior the replacement of the commercial learning management system blackboard with the open source moodle, the number of users was nearly 50.000, the number of courses was 2.246, the cost of the license was approximately 70.000 euros and 4 people were needed to support the users and manage the platform.

Nowadays, moodle supports more than 54.448 users (among them 46.788 students and 1.260 teachers) and 4.340 courses. 3.714 of them are active and 32.048 students logged in the past six months to view the courses they participate in. The total amount of the courses in moodle comes from the old ones that were migrated from blackboard, the new ones that were asked to be created from scratch and the number of courses from all the independent platforms from various faculties who decided to get merged in the central learning management system. This merge, made the educational process much easier for the users as their need to participate in all of their courses from one placed was fulfilled. In addition, with the use of moodle there is no need for any licensing cost and 5 people work on the platform only at the 75% of their time.

In comparison with other universities or colleges that experienced the migration from blackboard to moodle, in Aristotle University of Thessaloniki six months were needed to complete the process. University of Dar-es-Salaam (UDSM) had 415 courses, with 73 of them active, and 19.528 users. It took two active years to migrate from blackboard to moodle. Beaufort Country Community College (BCCC) had 250 courses per semester with more than 1.000 users and needed two and a half years to migrate. University of Alberta had 15.000 courses, 8.400 academic and faculty staff, 6.500 support staff, 51.900 users and seven years were needed to fully migrate from one LMS to the other.

4. ECLASS ONLY FOR OPEN COURSES

As mentioned before, IT center uses the open source platform called "eClass" for hosting its open courses. There are 385 courses with 279 of them available for anyone around the globe, 189 teachers and approximately 21.383 learners. There is no cost in using the platform and only 2 people are needed to support the users and manage the system.

5. CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that turning AUTh into an e-university has many benefits. It is not only the cost that was decreased but also the administration and management time that is now spent. AUTh community has understood the significance of elearning and Information Technology Center is adopting all the new techniques to provide this service worldwide.

6. REFERENCES

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Pinelopi Giovanitsa https://gr.linkedin.com/in/pinelopi-giovanitsa-914034a6