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.
- **Why Blackboard and not Canvas** –
    - Blackboard has been WSU's LMS since the 90s, and while history isn't a great reason to stick with a product, it's where we're starting.

- Since early in my tenure in the MRC, we have considered making changes to our LMS choices in a roughly three-year cadence that comes ahead of the year we renew the contract.
    - We (Anna Porcaro, Carolyn Speer, and myself) started an LMS review in 2015-16 because we had the resources and capacity to make the change to a new LMS if that was the recommendation of the review. The review committee met several times and created a review process leveraging the contributions of 45 faculty and students. Unfortunately, new priorities emerged that would require major adjustments from faculty, and we decided that two major changes over the next several years would be too much to ask, and we tabled the LMS review.
    - In 2018-19, we considered the possibility of reviving the review, but other priorities were still demanding a lot of attention and the financial resources necessary to make a switch from one LMS to another were not available, so the Provost agreed to go ahead and renew with Blackboard for another three years. We did start to pay attention to Ultra and consider making it available.
    - In 2021, we were still surviving Covid, and most faculty who had not taught online before Covid had just learned to teach in Blackboard. We did decide to transition to the Ultra Base Navigation and to make Ultra available as an option but continued to allow people to use Blackboard Learn
        - Over the next several years, we have been teaching in both, building a base of instructors with successful Ultra experience.
    - Now, in 2024, we are transitioning to Ultra for instruction with the benefit of years of experience working in Ultra with early adopters, and with successful Ultra users in all colleges to help support other faculty in the transition.
        - Feedback from faculty using Ultra is very positive, after some understandable hiccups in the process of transition.
    - We might consider a new LMS review this year, but that is dependent upon resources.
- Another key part of the conversation is the way in which the university is making an effort to concentrate on ecosystems of tools within vendor families like EAB, Ellucian, Microsoft, and Anthology because *it's far more important now than it was even five years ago that our tools are part of an integrated whole*.
    - Many more university systems are now integrated with Blackboard and dependent on it.
    - Our investment in Anthology products gives us leverage with the company that provides better pricing and attention when we have issues/development needs. (Anthology products and services include Blackboard, the Support Center (BB Support and the OneStop), Program Marketing services, Milestone, Anthology Ally, and Engage)

Slide notes

- Slide 3: **Institutions using Blackboard or Canvas**
    - While it's true that WSU is one of a minority of institutions that are using Blackboard rather than Canvas, there *are* others in the state and region (Fort Hays State,

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.
        - 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.
            - 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.
        - Articles published at the same time as the one quoted report that the tools in question are Microsoft Azure OpenAi services and not OpenAI directly. This is a misunderstanding or misquote in the article, likely the result of the confusing namespace (which I confirmed by reaching out to Anthology, see below)
            - Anthology's initial announcement, and posts from the same period, reporting on the same announcement and referring to "Microsoft Azure OpenAI" service or tools:
                - https://www.anthology.com/news/anthology-adds-microsoft-ai-to-blackboard-learn
                - https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/anthology-accelerates-innovation-in-higher-education-with-microsoft-azure-openai-service-301878915.html
                - https://campustechnology.com/Articles/2024/01/26/Anthology-Offers-Framework-for-AI-Policy-and-Implementation.aspx
        - **I have confirmed this with Dominic Gore, Senior Director of Product Management with Anthology.** His response: "I can confirm that we are only working with Microsoft with respect to the Generative AI capabilities (AI Design Assistant) we have released into Learn Ultra, leveraging Microsoft's Azure AI Services. We don't have a relationship in this regard with Open AI." - and he offered to have his PR folks correct the article that Senator Sterrett cited.
- **Slide 19: Concerns:**

    - **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 evaluate the risks associated with each of these vendors carefully.
- **Slide 24: Questions**
    - **"Does the institution have sufficient knowledge and expertise regarding the technology and risks involved, or should it aim to upskill key stakeholders?"**
        - Yes – both. We have experts on campus and we are upskilling others (for example, John Jones completed a Wharton School certificate course on Enterprise AI last spring, Carolyn Speer serves on Anthology's company-wide AI Advisory Committee, WSU has joined a national consortium dedicated to AI Safety, and so on). We have experts in cybersecurity, data management and protection, and Privacy – all of whom signed off on the Blackboard AI tools in the DMC process.
    - **"What are the risks and harms of using generative AI in a manner that is illegal or unethical..."**
        - About the same as the use of any resource in an illegal or unethical way: serious, but not disproportionately serious, and the implementation of these tools makes it very difficult for them to be used in a harmful way inside Blackboard.
    - **"Are there similar efforts..."**
        - Several, all in flight at the moment. Stay tuned.
- **Slides 26-28: On the moral rights concern**
    - Nothing implemented presents any risk at all to the moral rights of authorship, by student or instructor.
    - "Lack of Knowledge or control" – We *do* know. The instructor controls what is shared, and anything shared is only stored on the Microsoft servers (as safe as it might be in OneDrive). AI–generated content is saved in the course if the instructor saves it there, but it's not saved by the AI for training, retraining, or developing the AI.
- **Slides 29-34 Cyberattacks**
    - This is an area where the dramatic improvements made by ITS, by the CISO (partnering with the CIO and the CDO) have made major improvements to the security of our systems and the way relationships are vetted – and we are applying these standards to existing vendors as renewals come up. Most of those improvements are not visible to the faculty and staff, and there's not much reason for them to be made visible.

- **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 and ask questions, so I'd include a reference to these options:

- Join the Faculty Senate Accessibility and Technology Committee, where we regularly bring issues and plans to the committee for information sharing and consultation.
- Come to the ARC sessions, especially the panels on Tech decision-making, which repeats in most ARC seasons.
- Join the OIR Facebook community.
- Read the Teaching Today newsletter.
- Explore Linkedin Learning to learn more about Generative AI – also, for the ARC we have prepared playlists of LiL training to help people become more conversant with AI:
    - From May 2023: Introduction to Artificial Intelligence and AI Trends
    - From August 2023 Gen AI/ChatGPT Bootcamp
- Email MRC@wichita.edu or OIR@wichita.edu

AI Tools in Blackboard

Name	**Function**	**Input**	**Who uses**	**Where is data transmitted**
Generate Learning Modules	Provide a structure for a class	Name of the course. Any description added in the tool by the professor	Professor	Microsoft servers (held no longer than 30 days. No data is used to train, retrain, or improve Microsoft's generative AI models.
Generate Learning Module Images	Easy, customized images for learning modules	Name of module. Any description added in the tool by professor.	Professor	Microsoft servers (held no longer than 30 days. No data is used to train, retrain, or improve Microsoft's generative AI models.

Generate Content Editor Images	Provide images to illustrate instructor-provided documents	Instructor provided document	Professor	Microsoft servers (held no longer than 30 days. No data is used to train, retrain, or improve Microsoft's generative AI models.
Generate Test questions and Question Banks	Provide editable questions covering instructor-provided content	Instructor provided document	Professor	Microsoft servers (held no longer than 30 days. No data is used to train, retrain, or improve Microsoft's generative AI models.
Generate Keywords for Unsplash	Supports finding appropriate images from the Unsplash (real image) index	Module name	Professor	Microsoft servers (held no longer than 30 days. No data is used to train, retrain, or improve Microsoft's generative AI models.
Generate Rubrics	Provide and editable, customizable rubrics for assignments/assessments	Name of the assignment	Professor	Microsoft servers (held no longer than 30 days. No data is used to train, retrain, or improve Microsoft's generative AI models.
Generate Journal, Discussion, Assignment prompts	Provide editable prompts for assignments. Prompts based on Bloom's Taxonomy.	Name of assignment. Instructor provided a description.	Professor	Microsoft servers (held no longer than 30 days. No data is used to train, retrain, or improve Microsoft's generative AI models.