

Major South African Universities Leverage Blackboard Learn in the Cloud

University of the Free State, University of Johannesburg and University of Pretoria transition their LMSs to a SaaS delivery model

LONDON, Feb. 28, 2019 /PRNewswire/ -- Blackboard today announced that the University of the Free State, the University of Johannesburg and the University of Pretoria are now leveraging the Software as a Service (SaaS) deployment of Blackboard Learn, the company's flagship Learning Management System (LMS).

Thanks to the AWS-powered SaaS deployment, the three universities, which are ranked by QS among the top ten institutions of South Africa, will benefit from several enhancements including zero-downtime updates, continuous delivery of new features and reduction of costs. The institutions also have the option to implement the Ultra experience, the next-generation user interface of Blackboard Learn, or continue to leverage the Original experience their students and teachers are familiar with. This flexibility allows the universities to answer their specific requirements, and to further focus on delivering an unparalleled teaching and learning experience that meets the needs of students and faculty.

The University of the Free State (UFS) has been successfully utilizing Blackboard Learn as a self-hosted solution for some years. Recently, the IT department and the Center of Teaching and Learning (CTL) decided to take a new approach to the management, maintenance and support of the LMS. The transition to the SaaS deployment perfectly answered the different needs, with the IT team becoming more service oriented and the CTL directly managing the LMS. Thanks to the flexibility of the SaaS delivery model, UFS continued to use the Original experience for the Bloemfontein, QwaQwa and South (undergraduate programs) Campuses and fully implemented the Ultra experience in the delivery of fully online and distance programs on the South Campus.

"The SaaS deployment of Blackboard Learn provides UFS staff and students with a technological environment that enables teaching and learning, which is crucial to student success and engagement," said Tiana van der Merwe, Deputy Director for the Centre for Teaching and Learning at UFS. "As one of the oldest universities in South Africa, we believe that keeping abreast of technological advancements is what an institution of higher learning must be doing."

The University of Johannesburg (UJ) has leveraged the full power of Blackboard Learn via managed hosting for many years. While completely satisfied with the results achieved so far, the University leadership felt that transitioning to a SaaS deployment was critical to deliver on their vision for the next years. The transition to the cloud has been completely transparent for students and teachers who continued to use the LMS without any disruption. After moving to the SaaS delivery model, UJ implemented the Ultra Base Navigation, a component of the Ultra experience that provides quick access to the most critical information from across all courses while maintaining the Original courses currently in use by their faculty and students.

"Moving to a SaaS deployment and enabling the Ultra base Navigation was a natural choice to keep the University of Johannesburg aligned with its strategic objectives of global excellence in teaching and learning," said Riaan Loots, Senior Manager of Centre for Academic Technologies at UJ. "The increased adoption of blended and fully online programmes at the University means that Blackboard is crucial for our day-to-day teaching and learning activities. The new SaaS model is scalable during peak periods, has no downtime and offers fast delivery of enhancements and new features – all benefits which we could not ignore."

The University of Pretoria (UP) has been a client of Blackboard for the past two decades and, over the years, has integrated all other solutions of the Blackboard portfolio. Their managed-hosting deployment has been instrumental in delivering an enhanced teaching and learning experience to students and faculty. To further build on these successful outcomes, UP decided to move to a SaaS deployment and reap the benefits it provides, while ensuring that staff and students continued to leverage all the features of the Original experience.

"The SaaS deployment of Blackboard Learn provides staff and students with greater stability and availability that further enhance the overall online experience," said Dolf Jordaan, Deputy Director E-Learning & Media Development at UP. "It also contributes to creating an educational eco-system to support teaching and learning, and student success strategies. Moreover, the transition has significantly increased the value of our investments in education technology, enabling our University to expand its leadership role in e-learning across Africa."

"We are thrilled that UFS, UJ and UP are now able to experience all the benefits of the SaaS deployment of Blackboard Learn," said Robert Speed, Vice President of Russia, Middle East and Africa at Blackboard. "These successful transitions are only the first steps and we look forward to continuing our partnerships with these forward-thinking institutions, further supporting them as they unlock all the new possibilities a cloud-based approach brings to teaching and learning."

About Blackboard

Our mission is to partner with the global education community to enable learner and institutional success, leveraging innovative technologies and services. With an unmatched understanding of the world of the learner, the most comprehensive student-success solutions, and the greatest capacity for innovation, Blackboard is education's partner in change.

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