Online Delivery Platform Selection

The initial drafts of the Labs That Work... for Everyone leadership development program will be on the open-source Moodle platform. In our search for a learning management system (LMS), we developed required and desirable features, and reviewed a wide range of options. Our criteria and the platforms we reviewed most intensively and those we evaluated at least superficially are listed below. Moodle meets all of the required, and most of the desired, criteria. We have engaged an instructional designer and technology consultant to implement the pilot content on the platform, one who is deeply experienced with it and will help us to use and benefit from the full range of its power and features.

SELECTION CRITERIA

In our platform explorations, we began by assessing prior experience on another platform used in one of our previously-developed programs. This gave us insight into the features and limitations which are of particular importance for our target content and audience. That reflection resulted in selection criteria focused on design flexibility and user interface. After internal evaluation, we engaged an instructional design consultant familiar with a wide range of platforms to move from our experience and selection criteria to a final recommendation. We adopted the recommendation to use Moodle. Developing our components on an open source LMS ensures wide compatibility should we later want or choose to offer the LTW program through other platforms.

SELECTION IMPLEMENTATION

The LTW program will be implemented in a series of episodes, each comprising:
1) a narrative scene
2) online video content (interviews and lecturettes), and
3) related activities and reflection points

Videos, text, quizzes, and slides will be integrated using html5. The activities will also be available through a logbook for those who prefer to work offline, on paper or their own digital files. The html5 packages for video content will support video files optimized for both computer and mobile devices such as MP4 and WebM formats.

For the pilot, we will host an instance of Moodle using Amazon Web Services. This provides flexibility to start with a small pilot and adjust resource usage for user needs. Further, access to the server running Moodle provides us control over the platform template to tailor the online look and feel with our approved LTW/HHMI/Illinois/NCPRE branding.

This implementation of Moodle incorporates the ability to show a video player, with user control over playback speed and captioning, as well as the ability to integrate questions and pauses within videos as desired. It provides the ability to embed slides with video, question/reflection answer boxes, and quizzes. It is also possible for users to create their own summaries and to export their written notes. We plan to create a beta version of the curriculum incorporating table reads, interview clips, and logbook activities.

April 2020
SELECTION CRITERIA
Design features, including:
• Flexibility in integrating substantial information with control over order and configuration (e.g., not limited by platform-dictated flow in predetermined number and size)
• Inclusion of discussion boards; interactive Q&A
• Transcription for accessibility
• User ability to make and retain (export) personal notes
Professional appearance, at minimum:
• Clean user interface
• Customizable

Ease of use
Wide range of interaction capabilities
• Video, text, chat, etc.
• Functionality
• Backend base
• Course designers’ access for control over features, look and feel
Compatibility with other interfaces as needed
• Ability, and effort required, to transfer to another platform if desired
Smartphone user interface
Range of purchasing options for us (membership size)

PLATFORMS EVALUATED
Thinkific
• Limited cohort interaction capabilities
• Sleek; too restrictive
• Tech support paywall
edX
• Open source; could include add-on features
• Team familiarity
LinkedIn Learning
• Users must connect their LinkedIn account for premium features
Canvas
• Association with K-16 coursework; limited air of professional development
Bridge (Canvas executive ed platform)
• Limited interaction capabilities: no discussion boards
• Good data analysis functions
• No media library
• Customizable interfaces

Coursera
• Restrictive interaction and presentation capabilities
• Widely used, with attendant brand impressions
• Corporate strategy for monetizing changes leave unpredictability
• Limitations on customization of interface
Talent LMS
• Too complex, barriers for entry for users to learn
SmarterU
• Paywalls deemed a barrier
• Not a modern look
Versal
• Limited customizability
LearnUpon
• Branding limitations
Harrison Metal
• Very traditional LMS
• Requires google account

PLATFORMS CONSIDERED*
*Not evaluated in-depth (initial review deemed unsatisfactory for further consideration)

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