

# Enhancing the Learning Experience at Not Just One but Five Institutions

With a thoughtful, multi-phase strategy, Sam Houston State University is implementing Blackboard for over 36,000 learners across the institution and its shared service partners.



Sam Houston  
State University

Founded in 1879, Sam Houston State University (SHSU) is Texas' third-oldest public educational institution. Between its Huntsville campus and SHSU Online, the university serves a community of over 21,000 undergraduate and graduate students.

**INSTITUTION TYPE:**  
FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC

**LOCATION:**  
HUNTSVILLE, TEXAS

**STUDENTS:**  
21,000+

**ANTHOLOGY PRODUCT:**  
Blackboard

*"It's a cleaner, modern interface that is more intuitive and user-friendly for students. And at the end of the day [getting content to students] is job number one."*



—Jacob Spradlin

Director of Online Instructional Development and Support, Sam Houston State University



## The Challenge

A dedicated Blackboard® customer since 2000, SHSU saw an opportunity to better serve its students and faculty by upgrading to the Ultra instance of Blackboard. However, its path to implementation includes a unique hurdle.

As a member of the Texas State University System, SHSU provides shared services—including Blackboard support, faculty development, and instructional design—to four other state institutions. That meant scaling the transition across five institutions while ensuring consistent training and development.



## The Solution

SHSU INTRODUCED A FOUR-PART FACULTY TRAINING PROGRAM:

### 1. Course Building

### 2. Communication

### 3. Assessment

### 4. Transition Guidance

+ ROBUST WEBINAR TRAINING

SHSU's answer to the challenge was to create an "ecosystem of support" and establish a comfortable transition on-ramp.

"The first thing we did was communicate," remarked Jacob Spradlin, SHSU's director of online instructional development and support. "When you have one institution with multiple diverse colleges inside of it, that's hard enough. But when you think about serving five institutions with different types of students and faculty, you have to be very thoughtful about how you implement."

Starting in May 2022, the university introduced a four-part faculty training program, including course-building, communication, assessment, and transition guidance sessions. The training enabled faculty to experience Blackboard from a learner's perspective while gaining familiarity with the Ultra course view. SHSU also offered a robust webinar series, reaching an enrollment of 389 by July 2023. The webinars were complemented by a suite of resources such as certification programs for online teaching, instructional videos, email feature updates, and on-site training visits.

SHSU strategically onboarded a small group of early adopters, which provided valuable lessons for future cohorts. It is also partnering with K16 to facilitate content migration from Original to Ultra. Using a phased implementation, the first two institutions are moving into full Ultra course view in the fall of 2023, with the remaining three institutions (including SHSU) going live in the fall of 2024.

When implementation is complete, SHSU will have migrated nearly **15,000** courses to Blackboard, which will be used by **over 36,000 learners** across the **five institutions**.



## Insights Delivered

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**No news can be good news:** Early in the roll-out, SHSU was surprised to receive minimal student feedback. This proved to be a testament to Blackboard's intuitive interface that aligns with learners' digital expectations and competencies. Surveys revealed that students immediately understood how the LMS worked and where they could find content. Specifically, the institution found that the dashboard allows students to effortlessly access grades and class content, enhancing overall student satisfaction.

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**Universal design, simplified:** SHSU appreciates that Blackboard caters to everyone. Accessibility features are seamlessly integrated, reducing the need for constant modifications and workarounds. This translates to a smoother design process and higher-quality courses.

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**It keeps getting better:** One aspect that is winning over faculty is the fact that Blackboard is rapidly improving.

“Every month, there’s something that’s going to help them do their jobs,” noted Spradlin. “The faculty is very responsive to that. They feel like someone’s listening to them.”

SHSU communicates updates through links and videos. New and evolving features such as progress tracking, uploadable test questions, and student progress analytics have garnered positive feedback and accelerated faculty adoption.

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**Feeling part of the community:** SHSU encourages faculty from all five institutions to join the Anthology Community at [community.anthology.com](https://community.anthology.com). From learning best practices from peers to requesting new features in the [Anthology Idea Exchange](#), faculty can get the most out of Blackboard and help shape the LMS's future.



## Words of Wisdom

SHSU's Director of Online Instructional Development and Support Jacob Spradlin offers the following advice for anyone considering the transition to Blackboard:

### Now is the time.



Blackboard is the most modern LMS available today and is constantly improving.

### Don't reinvent the wheel.



Existing resources, such as the [Anthology Adoption Toolkit](#), provide a plan and remove the guesswork from implementation.

### Leverage the community.



Many higher ed professionals have walked this path before and are happy to share their insights.



Hear more from Jacob Spradlin at [anthology.com/sam-houston-state-university](https://anthology.com/sam-houston-state-university)



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Products and services highlighted in this customer case study:

**Blackboard**

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