From: "Edelman, Benjamin"
To: "Oberholzer, Felix" <foberholzer@hbs.edu>
Cc: "Applegate, Lynda" <lapplegate@hbs.edu>
Subject: RE: ATSC and Canvas plans
Date: Sun, 31 Jul 2016 21:30:56 +0000
Importance: Normal

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I discussed this further with IT staff last week. They are firm in their view that it is better to stick with the current approach than to change to something more automated. Their reasoning has shifted somewhat, but generally the factors influencing their decision include FSS training materials already completed and training substantially underway; the desire for an official supported solution from Instructure (maker of Canvas); and their perception that my approach could at some point malfunction or cease to work at all. An important background principle, which is left unstated but I think influences their thinking, is that they consider this kind of manual task to be well within the scope of FSS work – may not be fun, may not be strictly necessary, but it goes with the job.

I see some merit in each of these points. Personally I would have weighed the arguments differently, and I would have placed more emphasis on FSS productivity and morale, ease and speed of updates for instructors and staff, and general innovation and efforts to be, and to be perceived to be, using information technology effectively.

Nonetheless it is what it is. I don't think I'm going to convince them, and I've said what I can. It is possible for me to distribute my tool directly to users, but I credit the value of working through IT. So that's where we end up. It seems the course copy feature will be the manual process, 70 clicks each time a change is made to an RC courses and 7 times the number of sections for EC courses, as discussed two weeks ago.

It's probably important that FSS's and even faculty not know my tool exists. I won't tell anyone further about it. I expect that FSS's would be quite surprised, and some probably disappointed, if they knew we had a one-click replacement for IT's lengthy process, but that we had decided not to share that solution with them.

This discussion led me to think somewhat further about how ATSC can be most useful in improving the quality of IT service for teaching and learning. My personal sense is that there's plenty of room for IT to improve, and it seems like ATSC should aspire to be a meaningful part of that process. Over the years, I feel I've had the most success improving IT offerings when I meet intensely with relevant staff, iterating through their design process and prototypes and trying to flag issues early enough that it's still timely to take action. The current ATSC model seems like almost the opposite of that – work being presented to us at a stage (and in a format) where it's exceptionally difficult to make changes; and where even the seemingly-most-straightforward improvements, such as your (Felix) very sensible suggestion of trialing the course eval tool with an RC course, somehow are seen as major changes that are viewed with great skepticism. A separate concern is that where IT's proposed approach has downsides, I don't get the sense that they're presenting those as crisply as they might. (For example, did you know that the new video tools system has no "download" feature for faculty teaching internationally, who need to bring files on a laptop or USB key? And apparently this will be difficult or impossible to add due to the vendor's architecture.) At least ATSC takes a modest amount of our time. But it would be interesting, and perhaps useful, to discuss alternative or additional models that might lead to deeper engagement. In the interim, as I have for some years, I continue to meet with several IT teams somewhat more frequently, and much more informally, to try to help with improvements to other projects they're working on.

From: Oberholzer, Felix
Sent: Monday, July 25, 2016 10:43 AM
To: Edelman, Benjamin <bedelman@hbs.edu>
Cc: Applegate, Lynda <lapplegate@hbs.edu>
Subject: RE: ATSC and Canvas plans

Hi Ben,
Thanks for reaching out. There is obvious value in a more automated approach. The value will differ significantly across courses; some are very good at choosing and making available all the materials at the very beginning of the term, others less so.
I am fine with your working (and trying to influence) IT, Steve and Beth in particular, but, in the end, the decision is theirs. What got us into trouble with Learning Hub was weak leadership in IT combined with faculty pushing in directions that turned out to be costly in the longer term. While I am interested in finding a better solution, I need you to work through IT and not through the faculty. If an improved solution becomes available and is supported by IT leadership, I'd be more than happy to speak with Rob and VG about why we are making the change.

I hope this is helpful. Let me know if you would like to chat about any of this.

Best,
Felix

From: Edelman, Benjamin
Sent: Sunday, July 24, 2016 3:39 PM
To: Applegate, Lynda; Oberholzer, Felix
Subject: RE: ATSC and Canvas plans

That's a great idea. I'm happy to try to contact them. I'd probably start with a few unit coordinators since I know the unit heads are busy. But I will wait a day for Felix to weigh in.

I also happened to bump into Rob Huckman on Friday. He now chairs the RC so has a special connection to (and duty to!) the ten-section courses most affected by the problem I raised. He was concerned and is interested in finding a better way if we can.

From: Applegate, Lynda
Sent: Sunday, July 24, 2016 9:42 AM
To: Edelman, Benjamin <bedelman@hbs.edu>; Oberholzer, Felix <foberholzer@hbs.edu>
Subject: Re: ATSC and Canvas plans

Hi Ben and Felix.

Nice to see you at the ATSC. I do not use the MBA course platform since I only teach in Exec Ed and the issues are not as significant for the exec ed long programs since the max we have are two sections. That said, they are still significant. Maybe, for now, in addition to involving faculty leading the MBA program, it would also be good to involve involve some of the unit heads in these discussions and also talk with the unit coordinators.

Thanks for your support.

Lynda

From: "Edelman, Benjamin" <bedelman@hbs.edu>
Date: Thursday, July 21, 2016 at 4:57 PM

To: "Oberholzer, Felix" <foberholzer@hbs.edu>, Lynda Applegate <lapplegate@hbs.edu>
Subject: ATSC and Canvas plans

Felix, Lynda –

Nice to see you today. And it seems like IT has made good progress in the areas discussed.

I didn't hesitate to share my concerns about multi-section management and copying. Of course it would have been easy to smile and accept the proposed approach. But I'm mindful on the burden on FSS's -- not to mention faculty who manage their own multi-section EC courses, as a notable minority of us have over the years. I'm also concerned about the likelihood of errors in the planned procedure. (I know I'd eventually screw this up, as 'most anyone would. It's just too easy to miss a section when doing ten by hand.) My thinking is informed by knowing exactly how to build a better way, even within the confines of Canvas's architecture and without changing any Canvas code. In fact I demonstrated the improvement to IT staff in April (just after the prior ATSC meeting), and as promised I sent them working code this afternoon. My tool successfully replaces the 70-click process with a single click.

The timing today didn't leave much time for either of you to weigh in. I don't know if this is an issue you've thought about, but perhaps it's worth some discussion amongst ourselves. If you think I'm off-base here, I'd like to hear that so I can reconsider.

My hope at present is to work up my proposed alternative – demonstrate that it is reliable, show it to our contacts at Canvas to confirm that they're not planning any change that would disrupt it, and help IT present this feature to Canvas users in an appropriate way. I can do all of this in parallel with IT staff for now continuing on the current approach.

Ben