Blackboard's AI Design Assistant: Streamlining and Inspiring Course Design at Wichita State University

Early adopters of the AI Design Assistant, Wichita State University is bringing AI innovation to instructors without the hassle or the cost.

Wichita State University (WSU) has a long tradition of innovation and applied learning while still maintaining its position as the most affordable research university in Kansas.

With its striking campus, state-of-the-art labs and research facilities, and balance of classroom and real-world learning, WSU is known for its emphasis on the student experience. Importantly, WSU also provides robust tools and resources to its instructors and instructional designers to ensure this focus on the student extends to the online learning experience as well.

INSTITUTION TYPE:
FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

LOCATION:
WICHITA, KANSAS

ORGANIZATION SIZE:
23,000+

ANTHOLOGY PRODUCT:
Blackboard

What the AI Design Assistant gives faculty is a wingman or a partner in developing content in a way that only another subject matter expert can. They can bounce ideas around with the AI Design Assistant—almost like having a graduate assistant—but the instructor is ultimately the one in charge.

John Jones
Executive Director, Media Resources Center, Wichita State University

Anthology

The Challenge

Reducing Instructor Workloads with the Help of AI

Bucking the idea that higher education is often slow to adopt new technologies, WSU's Office of Instructional Resources (OIR) is always exploring ways to make innovative tools available to faculty and instructional designers. Looking to magnify the reach of individual instructors, streamline their workflows, and reduce their administrative burden, the Institutional Resources team had begun developing guidelines and training on how they could incorporate generative AI into the course-building process.

But then, in July of 2023, the team was shocked to learn that Anthology, the provider of their campus-wide LMS, Blackboard®, was one step ahead.

The Solution

AI Innovation Without the Perspiration

Sitting in the audience at Anthology's annual user conference, Anthology Together 2023, Carolyn Speer recalled, "I gasped out loud" at the announcement of the AI Design Assistant.

As the director of the Office of Instructional Resources, Speer had been leading the charge on finding ways to take advantage of generative AI to benefit instructors at WSU. "I knew it would be a lot of work, but I had already begun developing training on different AI tools that instructors could use to make their lives easier. So, this announcement showed us that Anthology also saw the opportunity, understood what instructors needed, and developed something we could use right away." Jokingly, she added, "Once I got over being annoyed that I had spent my time working on this, I was really excited to see the tools in action and how faculty might respond."

Reassured by Anthology's Trustworthy AI Approach, the OIR team submitted the AI Design Assistant to the WSU Data Management Committee for approval to use. Once approved and the features made available to users, the team was pleasantly surprised by the warm reception from faculty and instructional designers alike.

I use the AI Design Assistant to create learning modules for all my classes. I can take the syllabus and course information for a class and quickly turn it into a course structure in Blackboard. It speeds up the development process, [but] it doesn't replace the human aspect of quality course design—it just reduces the tedium of developing classes and lets experts focus their energy where they should.

Rachel Bastian
Instructional Designer, Wichita State University

Instructional Designer Rachel Bastian also shared that by reducing the burden of administrative work on instructors and instructional designers, AI tools can actually improve course content and instruction. "By making the relatively easy but time-consuming tasks like creating exam questions much faster, instructors can create new questions every semester instead of re-using old ones, and incorporate more formative assessments into their courses which can help monitor and improve teaching and learning."

Besides saving instructors valuable time, John Jones, the executive director of the Media Resources Center, added that the AI Design Assistant can provide inspiration to subject matter experts as they develop their courses. As a research institution, WSU has many instructors who are very narrowly focused in their fields, but don't have the same depth of expertise in instruction and "The AI Design Assistant can help bridge that gap."

"It was obvious in the development of the AI Design Assistant that Anthology has the same values as us when it comes to how to responsibly and appropriately adopt AI. And it's not just how the technology was developed, but the way the tools are used with direct involvement from the instructor or subject matter expert. We're on the same path to explore innovative technology, and we're excited to see how Anthology expands its use of AI in the future."

John Jones
Executive Director of Media Resources Center,
Wichita State University

Insights Delivered

Adopting AI With No Additional Costs

In addition to the efficiencies and inspiration that faculty and instructional designers have been able to achieve with the AI Design Assistant, WSU has also noted the benefits of incorporating AI technology through an existing and trusted partner. Included within the core license of Blackboard and with no additional cost, enabling the AI Design Assistant was a simple process and obvious choice.

"Since the AI Design Assistant was developed by Anthology and came included in the core license of Blackboard, it was much easier to manage than if we had to work with another vendor or had an additional licensing requirement. Having access to this new technology without having additional costs meant we didn't have to pass through any fees on to students—which was of the utmost importance to us, and made the decision to leverage these tools much easier."

Carolyn Speer
Director of the Office of Instructional Resources,
Wichita State University

Epilogue

As early adopters of the newly launched AI Conversation tool, WSU continues to participate in various client-led programs that will improve upon and help further develop the AI capabilities in Blackboard today and tomorrow.

> Looking to provide additional efficiency for your institution's instructors? Learn more about the **AI Design Assistant** and access a **free trial of Blackboard** today.

Products highlighted in this customer case study:

Blackboard

Learn more at **anthology.com**

Anthology

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