

## Online Education: The Future of UTS

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June 20, 2017



A glimpse into the future of education at the [Unification Theological Seminary \(UTS\)](#) was on display Monday, June 19 at the [Barrytown campus](#) in upstate New York. A day-long seminar was held for the faculty, administration and staff of UTS, at which time the [learning management system \(LMS\)](#) called [Canvas](#) by Instructure was introduced. The message is clear and definitive - online learning is very much the future of higher education, and the world of edtech and the virtual classroom is not only here to stay, it continues to evolve and adapt to improve the user experience.

[Lisa Ames](#), who has used several different LMS platforms in her administrative career at a college level, decided to become a Canvas trainer based upon her good experience as a Canvas user, and the unparalleled customer support that Canvas provided. Lisa led the UTS group of 20-plus attendees through two, three-hour sessions with a lunch break in-between. Each session covered a host of topics, through which the group was guided section-by-section and point-by-point. UTS professors were walked through the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting and delivery of courses. It was a soup-to-nuts overview, which began with the setting up of a personal profile and ended looking at tools for grading. The value of the program for both the teacher and the student was very clearly presented.



The sessions were engaging, and though there was a lot to cover, the group remained involved and responsive. Many questions from the UTS professors were met with “That’s a good question,” from Lisa. The one-day workshop is the first of many onboarding experiences for the UTS faculty. Canvas also offers targeted instructional videos and training documents, plus 24/7 customer support when needed.

“A lot of education courses are moving to online,” said Ames, “all universities want to offer the opportunity for face-to-face, blended and online courses, so that people can take their courses and finish their education in ways that are most convenient to them.”

“So, when you’re talking about your adult education population, you’re talking about those who are juggling career and family, and they have a lot of other different stresses. They need to take their learning in smaller chunks of information so they can fit it in-between different things and still gain the kind of knowledge they need to advance their career.”

Other age-old traditions are being challenged. Does learning still take place sitting at a desk, whether in the classroom or at home? Statistics now show that as much as 70% of distance learning - regardless of

age - takes place on hand-held devices. In fact, for some inexplicable reason, users spend more time on hand-held devices.



“Our studies are showing that students are accessing content more from mobile devices than they actually are from the browsers,” explained Ames, “and they’re spending more time in the content too. Our stats were about 11 minutes on a mobile device reading through an actual lecture on the content of a course, and only about 6-7 minutes on a browser before becoming distracted and clicking off.”

Canvas may be easy to use by today’s tech savvy students, but the success of the learning experience will lie with professors being competent in navigating the software, and being able to expertly set up their Canvas site. UTS is committed to have its faculty get all the support needed to begin using the Canvas platform, and hands-on assistance in their online course design.

The target date for the launch of the UTS online courses using the Canvas LMS is approximately 3 months, with two courses set to begin in the fall 2017 semester, and the addition of two more courses in the spring semester, 2018.