The Fabulous Four of Modern Learning: How the University of Leeds, Anthology, Microsoft, and AI Combined to Help and Inspire Instructors

A collaborative effort and modern LMS boost efficiencies and possibilities for a world-leading university.

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

More than a Century of Driving Innovation in West Yorkshire

Founded in 1904, the University of Leeds has long been regarded as a higher education leader in the United Kingdom. It currently supports nearly 40,000 students and contributes a whopping £1.3 billion to the UK economy each year, a feat that has seen it recognized among the top 75 universities in the world. Given their institution's strong focus on research, the team at the University of Leeds understands that partnerships with industry and technology are fundamental to modern learning: "Through collaboration," reads their **mission statement**, "we harness our expertise in research and education to advance knowledge, transform lives and shape a better future for our communities, our region and the world."

ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

INSTITUTION TYPE:
PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

LOCATION:
LEEDS, ENGLAND

POPULATION: 39,800

ANTHOLOGY PRODUCTS:
Blackboard LEARN

anthology
Advancing Knowledge

🔲 The Challenge

Providing Teachers with the Necessary Time to Deliver Quality Classes

Across the UK and much of the globe, the demands on instructors' time continue to grow. The rapid adoption of online and other modalities has increased the volume and complexity of production tasks, **adding to teacher stress** and reducing the time they can spend focused on their learners.

Even at an established institution like the University of Leeds—whose proven approach to nurturing faculty is reflected in 29 members of their staff being awarded National Teaching Fellowships—instructors have felt extra pressure in recent years. Following the upheaval of the pandemic and the additional stress it induced, the university's leadership was actively looking for learning technologies that could simplify production tasks and save faculty time.

> "We knew that it was crucial to save staff time, and that we needed to focus our instructors' efforts on tasks that add value to students."
>
> **-Paul Cave,** *Digital Education Manager at the University of Leeds*

> "At the University of Leeds, we have a really powerful partnership agreement with Anthology. When Anthology worked with Microsoft to develop AI functions for Blackboard Learn Ultra, we were heavily involved to ensure that it met the needs of the sector."
>
> **-Paul Cave**
> *Digital Education Manager at the University of Leeds*

💡 The Solution

As a long-time Blackboard® Learn partner, the team at the University of Leeds was familiar with the vast range of options that Anthology extends to participate in product development. Via the Anthology Community, customer partners have access to the Idea Exchange, focus groups, forums, office hour meetings, and more, all of which provide direct interaction with product development teams and input into the future of Anthology solutions.

In April 2023, Anthology and Microsoft began to investigate the possibility of using generative AI in Blackboard Learn Ultra to empower instructors and extended the invitation to customer partners to participate. The two organizations have collaborated to pioneer the use of AI to enhance efficiency and improve learning outcomes while maintaining data privacy and security, and engaged institutions to ensure the approach was fit for purpose in education. The AI Advisory Council, comprised of 19 clients from five countries, worked hand in hand with product development teams across a series of working sessions to

devise and test the functionality of the AI Design Assistant. The University of Leeds immediately recognized this as a fantastic opportunity to add efficiency for their instructors and leaped at the chance to be involved.

Following this collaborative process, the **AI Design Assistant** was launched in Blackboard Learn Ultra in September 2023. Powered by the Azure OpenAI Service, it provides instructors with AI suggestions to inspire course structure, test questions, authentic assessment tasks, and grading rubrics.

Insights Delivered

The AI Design Assistant Is Saving Instructors Time

The response to the AI Design Assistant has been overwhelmingly positive. Across the five months since release, 95% of instructors say that it is saving them time, while 92% would recommend it to their peers. [1]

The profound benefits have been especially felt at the University of Leeds. Having participated in the development process, they were eager to have this functionality in their instructors' hands and enabled the AI Design Assistant as soon as it was available.

> "Blackboard Learn Ultra's AI Design Assistant has taken a task which might have taken me a full day down to a few minutes. This has given me more time in the classroom with my students and allows me to give them the experience that I would like them to have."
>
> **-Dr Steven Montagu-Cairns**
> *Associate Professor in Law at the University of Leeds*

Epilogue

The University of Leeds, Anthology, and Microsoft believe that the current AI Design Assistant features are just the tip of the iceberg for AI in higher education. All three, along with hundreds of other leading institutions across Anthology's global network, are committed to ensuring that AI's potential is realized in a way that is ethical and responsible and advances exceptional teaching and learning practices.

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

[1] In-app feedback, September 2023–February 2024.

Products highlighted in this success story:

Blackboard LEARN

anthology
Advancing Knowledge

Learn more at **anthology.com.**