



Making education and technology click.

Benefits of Switch to ANGEL Realized at Ole Miss Online

INTRODUCTION

Change can be unsettling, and Andy Harper, Ph.D., University of Mississippi history instructor and academic technology specialist knew instructors and students were comfortable with the popular course management system they'd used for five years. Still, Harper was uneasy with the direction Ole Miss Online's current LMS provider was taking. By late fall 2002, Harper was concerned enough with the direction of the status quo to measure the importance of a quality learning experience against the value of comfort. Shortly thereafter, Harper began researching LMS alternatives.

Harper used readily available resources and his own experience as both an instructor and LMS administrator to compare and analyze LMS features. He contacted colleagues for opinions and references. When he narrowed his choices to three, Harper previewed each LMS individually. In April 2003, the University of Mississippi's Ole Miss Online and Independent Study programs became licensed ANGEL users. Harper cites three reasons for choosing ANGEL:

- Easy to use
- Easy to train
- Superior Service

EASY TO USE

One word Harper uses to describe ANGEL's ease-of-use is "intuitive." He relates ANGEL's intuitiveness to what he calls its "linear nature." ANGEL "allows you to put items wherever you want to put them and move them anytime you want to," says Harper. With these comments, Harper is touching on ANGEL's task orientation a design focus that places items needed to complete a task logically in the workflow and allows users to move items to best fit their individual needs.

Of course, when Harper cited ease-of-use as a factor in choosing ANGEL, his focus was on instructors and students. As Harper and staff migrated courses to ANGEL, they quickly realized that in ANGEL ease-of-use applies to system administrators too. Harper and staff originally estimated they could migrate half the Ole Miss Online courses to ANGEL over the summer. But ANGEL's conversion utility made the migration process much easier than anticipated and by the beginning of the fall semester; they had all but two courses up and running in ANGEL.

EASY TO TRAIN

Harper's initial judgment that it would be easy to train instructors and students to use ANGEL has been proven in practice. Harper and staff now provide less training than they did for their previous CMS. "If the learning curve for using something difficult is steep," says Harper, "the learning curve for using ANGEL is the opposite – maybe shallow." Those who were experienced using the school's original CMS "jumped right in and started using ANGEL." Working with departments to identify individual instructors to serve as mentors has helped those with less

experience advance quickly in ANGEL. For those who want more, formal training now consists of monthly voluntarily sessions for new and experienced users.

The time IT staff spend responding to student needs has also declined with the Ole Miss Online ANGEL adoption. Harper says their customer service time with students "has been cut down to very little, generally to the first week after classes begin." Student preference for ANGEL is evidenced in the department's CMS evaluation. When surveyed, the majority of students who had used the school's previous CMS and ANGEL preferred ANGEL.

SUPERIOR SERVICE

Since becoming an ANGEL customer, Harper has experienced the commitment to superior customer service behind the promise he received as a potential customer. He's almost surprised that he can "talk to a person in ANGEL Learning support."

Harper asserts, "It has never taken more than 24 hours to have a problem completely fixed," sharply contrasting this turnaround time to the "two to three weeks" he experienced with the programs' previous LMS provider. And while Harper makes a point to state that "no program is perfect," he counters that admonition with, "ANGEL Learning responds to problems with clear answers about why something happened without passing blame. Honesty and professionalism are key."

ADDITIONAL BENEFITS REALIZED

Although Ole Miss Online and the university's Independent Study program

have used ANGEL for nearly a year, users and administrators alike continue to realize ANGEL advantages above and beyond those they anticipated at adoption.

INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY

Harper claims ANGEL's preset actions make taking advantage of ANGEL's next-generation features "easy" and attributes a "huge increase in productivity" to ANGEL's triggers and actions. Instructors in the Independent Study program's asynchronous classes previously checked their class drop boxes time and again to see if assignments had been submitted. With ANGEL, instructors set actions to alert them via email when assignments are submitted. They also set actions to send an email to students when submissions are graded. Removing the need for constant monitoring and individually emailing students allows instructors to spend their time on more productive endeavors.

ENGAGED STUDENTS

ANGEL's triggers and actions also "keep students engaged," says Harper. His favorite example is an email automatically sent when papers are received. Online assignment submission has verified for Harper a previously unsubstantiated belief that students work late into the night. When a paper due at midnight is received a few minutes before, the student gets an email in return. The email tells the student the paper has been successfully received and advises them to "get some sleep." Harper reports that students respond very positively to the humor and the personal touch.

INCREASED RELIABILITY

Adopting ANGEL has virtually eliminated "down time problems" Harper and staff

assumed were common to all CMS. Tests and evaluations now "work fine" and proctored exams are not a problem, because "they go through when scheduled." According to Harper, down time with ANGEL has been minimal and short when it occurs.

INCREASED USAGE

A short nine months after adopting ANGEL Ole Miss Online doubled their number of users and user access to ANGEL continues to climb.

LOWER TOTAL COST OF OWNERSHIP

Since the adoption, Ole Miss measures savings, not only in terms of ANGEL's reasonable pricing, but also in terms of a lower total cost of ownership on the basis of:

- timely migration performed with tools included in ANGEL.
- decreased support and training costs.
- timely response to support issues.
- productivity increases resulting from features available only in ANGEL.
- student engagement that has the potential to increase retention and enrollment.

When Andy Harper proposed that the University of Mississippi's Ole Miss Online and Independent Study programs switch from the popular CMS they had used for five years to ANGEL, he was taking a risk. With the proposal, he was asking CMS users to step out of their comfort zones. But it was a calculated risk. Harper believed temporary discomfort with a new system would quickly be outweighed by benefits realized.

To date, Harper's instincts and research have paid off, and according to Harper, "We still have a lot to learn about all the things ANGEL can do for us."

ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI, OLE MISS ONLINE, AND THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF INDEPENDENT STUDY

The story began in 1848 when The University of Mississippi opened its doors to its first 80 students. Enrollment is now a record high 14,500 students. With a goal of bringing the resources of the university to the people it serves Ole Miss continues to expand its courses and degree offerings. Ole Miss Online courses are synchronous courses that last a semester at the University of Mississippi. Students must be admitted to the University before they can enroll in an Ole Miss Online course. Courses offered by the Department of Independent Study are asynchronous. Courses offered by both programs are fully accredited through The University of Mississippi and the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools and developed and conducted by University of Mississippi faculty members and approved by appropriate department chairpersons.

ABOUT ANGEL LEARNING, INC.

ANGEL Learning develops and markets the ANGEL Learning Management System (LMS). ANGEL|LMS is the enterprise learning management system that combines an open, flexible architecture with a complete set of easy-to-use features. This proven, powerful system allows instructors to efficiently manage instruction, communicate quickly, easily, and effectively, and develop the sophisticated learning experiences today's demanding educational climate requires.

ANGEL Learning evolved from research and teaching experience at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis. Today, though ANGEL Learning has grown from a campus-based organization to a profitable firm with global reach, the company stays loyal to its academic roots.

ANGEL customers include two of the largest universities in the United States, Penn State University and Michigan State University, large community college systems, small and large public and private postsecondary institutions, K-12 school systems, and businesses across the country. Visit the ANGEL Learning website at www.angellearning.com.