Standard for Archiving Canvas Courses

Background: Virginia Tech's Learning Management System (LMS), Canvas by Instructure, has been in use at the university since 2015. The longevity of this platform and the accumulation of data necessitates a process for archiving and eventually deleting old course sites in Canvas. Faculty are experiencing issues such as their list of courses on the "All Courses" page becoming unmanageably long. Additionally, course selection functionality (such as in the "Inbox" tool) is negatively impacted when faculty have many past-term courses to scroll through. Archiving courses will help alleviate these issues and will generally improve performance of the platform. Furthermore, eliminating old course content from the LMS will reduce risks for the university that might be associated with that data (e.g., accessibility compliance requirements). The expected outcomes of this standard include improved system hygiene and overall LMS performance for years to come.

1. Purpose: This standard establishes the expectation that Canvas course content will be archived after at least 4 calendar years have elapsed since a course ended. The standard further outlines the stages of course material status in Canvas as determined by the course end date.

2. Scope: All course sites in Canvas that were provisioned to support for-credit courses are in scope of this standard. Academic faculty and college/department administrators are the most impacted with the requirements of the standard; however, general management of the process and tools is the responsibility of the Technology-enhanced Learning and Online Strategies (TLOS) unit in the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost, in partnership with Information Technology Learning Systems (ITLS) in the Division of IT.

This standard only applies to content in Virginia Tech's main instance of Canvas (canvas.vt.edu). The Canvas instance associated with the TLOS Professional Development Network (profdev-lms.tlos.vt.edu) is intentionally excluded from this standard.

3. Standard: Courses will be maintained, archived, and deleted as follows:

For 1-4.5 years after the end of a course, the course will remain active in Canvas.

For 4.5-8 years after the end of a course, the course will be archived and retrievable (restorable to main Canvas) upon request by the faculty owner. A process will be created to allow such requests to be submitted, tracked, and audited. Courses restored will be copied from the archive (not moved from the archive) and it's at the discretion of the faculty owner to decide if they want to retain the course indefinitely in live Canvas after a restore OR ask for it to be deleted.

Eight years or more after the course ended, the course will be deleted from the archive and no longer retrievable. There is a way to manually mark a course to be kept indefinitely in the archive should this need arise. Requests here will be managed by a ServiceNow incident sent to TLOS.

NOTE: During year 1 of content archival (AY 2026), NO CONTENT will be purged from the archive. Starting in July of 2026, the courses older than 8 years will be purged permanently. This gives us time to validate processes during our first year.

Example of how standard will be implemented:

Month	Courses in Canvas	Courses in Archive	Courses purged
As of July 2026	2022, 2023, 2024, 2025, Spring 2026, Summer 2026	2018, 2019, 2020, 2021	2015, 2016, 2017 (includes empty shells from these years)
As of July 2027	2023, 2024, 2025, 2026, Spring 2027, Summer 2027	2019, 2020, 2021, 2022	2018
As of July 2028	2024, 2025, 2026, 2027, Spring 2028, Summer 2028	2020, 2021, 2022, 2023	2019

All course content and student work products (in provisioned course sites only) will be covered by this plan. The exception is data stored in third-party sites for our Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI) integrated tools. The LTI tool data is not within Canvas itself and therefore no data from these tools will be extracted or stored in our archive directly, but pointers to such content in third-party sites will be maintained. Should a course be copied from the archive, back into Canvas as active, it is expected that the tool data will still be available.

While the gradebook will be kept in the archive, our system of record for grades after a semester ends is Banner. Details can be viewed in the archive, but one should not assume that the final grade in Canvas matches what was submitted by the teacher at the end of a semester.

4. Compliance and Enforcement: This standard will be validated for compliance once per year and reviewed by the Senior Director of IT Learning Systems, no later than August 15. Each year, after the Spring term ends, processes will be run to archive and delete courses per the schedule in the table above. Should we fall out of compliance, work will be done as soon as possible to get back to compliance, with the work completing no later than December 15th of the same year. The main consequence here for non-compliance is confusion amongst our faculty, so consistency of process year over year is key for campus-wide trust in Canvas and the Canvas support operation.

5. Definitions

Course: A course is the key unit for this standard. There are two major components here: course content and student work products.

Course Shell: A container for course materials. Most shells are provisioned automatically using data from Banner, but they can be also added manually by teachers.

Course Content: This represents the materials in a course added by the teacher or a TA, including but not limited to Pages, Modules, Quizzes, Assignments, Calendars, etc. This data generally can be re-used and is often copied between course shells each semester.

Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI): This is the 1edtech standard by which tools are added into Canvas. These tools can be authored by Instructure, but most of these are from third-party vendors.

Provisioned Course: Courses that are created, using a data feed from Banner, within an academic term. "Other" courses in Canvas have been created manually by teachers or Canvas administrators. The archival plan will explicitly exclude non-provisioned courses. One easy way to tell if a course has been provisioned is the presence of a course SIS_ID in the format {DepartmentName}_{CourseNumber}_{CRN}_{TERM}, for example: MATH_1024_12345_202509.

Student Work Products: Specific work done within a given semester by a student. This includes, but is not limited to, assignment submissions, discussion board posts, quiz submissions, uploaded videos, and grades.

See also the IT Glossary and Division of IT Acronyms Glossary for further definitions.

6. References

Canvas Archival Tool: https://www.instructure.com/services/canvas-archiving
Policy 2000 Management of University Records https://policies.vt.edu/2000.pdf
University Records Retention Schedule https://lib.vt.edu/content/dam/lib_vt_edu/urig/univ_sched.pdf

7. Maintenance of Standard

IT Learning Systems is responsible for this IT Standard. Technology-enhanced Learning and Online Strategies (TLOS) partners with the Division of IT on Canvas maintenance and support. Questions may be directed to tlossupport@vt.edu.

8. Revision History

Version 1, August 2025.