At the University of Michigan, Box enables students, faculty, researchers and staff to innovate and collaborate more easily.

"By its very nature, academic culture is open and participatory. Our focus was always on finding the best way to improve collaboration—not on moving to the cloud for its own sake."

Bill Wrobleski
Program Director,
Infrastructure Projects,
The University of Michigan

The Challenge

- As a leading academic institution, the University of Michigan has always been deeply invested in staying at the forefront of innovation. But in the fast-developing world of IT, that's easier said than done. With 19 schools and colleges, U-M's IT was decentralized and non-standardized, and users were adopting third-party, consumer cloud services. CIO Laura Patterson sought solutions that would consolidate and streamline the university's infrastructure while empowering faculty, staff, and students to collaborate and innovate more easily.

- In seeking a solution, U-M had two key requirements: First, that the service would provide robust protections for institutional information. And second, that the service would go beyond storage and offer collaborative functionality as well. Unlike Box, most consumer cloud service don't support features like version-tracking, comments, and editing, all of which are crucial to collaborative work.

- At U-M, researchers collaborate both within the university, in team-based interdisciplinary endeavors, and with other researchers around the globe. They needed tools that would allow them to work with both internal and external (global) collaborators.

- In the university's classes, faculty-to-student and student-to-student collaboration is essential, too. Faculty wanted to take advantage of cloud-based tools for viewing, monitoring, and commenting on student work. And with team-based learning as the model at U-M, students needed tools for storing, sharing, and working on projects together.

- Department administrators were also seeking tools that would improve their workflows. The Department of Classical Studies, for example, had relied on shared Outlook calendars to organize its many events, and they were searching for a new solution.

- When students arrive on campus, they bring an average of three to five mobile devices, and they expect to access information from any of those devices. U-M wanted to meet that expectation, with the goal of enabling students to study, work on projects and collaborate with anyone, anywhere, anytime.

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The Solution

- In 2010, U-M launched NextGen Michigan, a five-year plan to adopt cutting-edge technology that advances research, teaching, and learning at the university. One component of that plan is M+Box, U-M's cobranded adoption of Box. CIO Laura Patterson and her team intend for Box to serve as a file-sharing, storage and collaboration solution across the university, with the ultimate goal of promoting greater collaboration and faster innovation.

- Unlike the personally maintained solutions that users had adopted (Dropbox, SkyDrive, iCloud, and SugarSync, to name a few), M+Box has the necessary security and compliance protections to keep U-M's proprietary data secure. As a result, users can store and share many types of university-related information with M+Box.

- Via shared folders on Box, U-M's researchers can interact securely and efficiently with collaborators around the world. They can share and access large media files instantly, iterate versions in a single repository, and make edits and comments as they go.

- Thanks to 50GB of storage per seat and multiple collaborative tools, M+Box enables professors and students to interact in extremely productive ways. A U-M kinesiology professor uses Box to receive, organize, review, tag, and comment on student work, including 3D video files that are too large to be supported by other cloud solutions. And within the teams, students can easily share and communicate with each other, accessing the latest version of their project in a single place and commenting as they collaborate.

- In M+Box, the Department of Classical Studies found a solution not only to its calendaring problem—a shared Box folder—but for collaborating on agendas, budgets, and marketing materials as well. They no longer experience the annoyances of attempting to email large files, and with a single shared location for files, they don't have to hunt through their inboxes. Plus, with Box Sync, changes are uploaded and shared even when staff work offline for a time.

- Box's mobile apps make it an ideal solution for a university, where students and faculty don't tend to work on set schedules or in set locations. Anyone with an M+Box account can access Box from any device they use, which means that collaboration can happen at any time, in any place. And because it's a cloud-based solution, Box has unlimited capacity. It can easily handle U-M's tens of thousands of users on hundreds of thousands of devices.

"Collaboration is very strategic to the future of the university. We're seeking to build a collaborative environment that is easy for researchers, students and staff to use in their interdisciplinary work and that enables faster innovation."

Laura Patterson
CIO,
The University of Michigan

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The Results

- Since Box became available to all U-M students, faculty, and staff in spring 2012, over 33,000 people have adopted it and usage continues to grow steadily.

- U-M has integrated Box into its learning management system, allowing users to launch Box from the LMS with just a click. The faculty has requested even more integration into Box, and IT is examining the options.

- In a survey, 19 out of 20 of one professor's students found M+Box valuable, and all 20 said that it facilitated valuable interactions among students. 20 out of 20 reported they would recommend using it in other courses.

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