New Features of Blackboard Learn 9.1

Building Content Feature Enhancement

Blackboard Learn has new features and capabilities that everyone will appreciate. Blackboard Learn uses a web 2.0 interface that allows users to drag-and-drop items that appear on the screen, select drop-down menus, and even access contextual help. Users will enjoy using fewer clicks to navigate the system and complete tasks.

New course home page

- Each course opens to a course home page that includes new modules including “What’s New” and “To Do.” This provides a students’ with information on what has changed in the course since that student last visited, what items require the students’ attention, and what items are past due or are due in the near future.
- Instructors can modify the course home page, adding, removing, and repositioning the modules for a more customized learning environment.

Improved course management workflow

- Blackboard’s course content creation and editing tools are now embedded throughout the course and no longer require instructors to open a separate Control Panel. Instead, instructors can click on the Edit Mode switch in the top right corner of any Blackboard course page.
- Instructors have direct access to edit and organize their Course Menu and can easily drag and drop Menu items to change their order.
- Course Menu items that do not contain any content are automatically hidden from the students’ view but are always visible to the instructors in Edit Mode. Once content is added to a Course Menu item, Blackboard automatically makes that Menu item visible to students.
- Course Tools and Communications Tools have been combined into a single Tools area that appears within the default Course Menu. Instructors can easily control which tools are available to students.

Inline confirmations

- Blackboard Learn now displays a confirmation note on the user’s editing page whenever a task is completed; eliminating frequent “OK” confirmation page clicks.

Upload Content Using New Content Types

Several content types for uploading content to an area within a Course have been changed or added:
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- **Audio**: This new content type provides a separate method of adding an audio file. This content type includes fields for accessibility.

- **Image**: This content type was available in Release 7.3, but the user interface for adding this type of file has changed.

- **URL**: This content type was available in Release 7.3, but the previous name “External Link” has been changed to “URL.”

- **Learning Module**: This content type was available in Release 7.3, but it has changed to include a hierarchical Table of Contents.

- **Lesson Plan**: This provides a new type of content container (similar to a folder) that has a tabbed format to add different content items. This feature allows students to view content with a lesson profile and instructional objectives.

- **Blank Page**: This new content type provides a method to add a page to a Content Area or the Course Menu. This content page can contain images, text, and hyperlinks.

- **Mashups**: This new content type enables Enterprise Edition clients to pull data from the following third-party application content into Blackboard Learn: YouTube videos, SlideShare presentations, and Flickr photos.

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**Learning Module Feature Enhancement**

Learning Modules offer a simple and intuitive means for instructors to organize and structure course content with a hierarchical organization so students can navigate through content in a logical, sequential way. Overall, it is a great tool for both designers and students because it offers new ways to structure and navigate content.

- **Table of Contents View**
  The Instructor can choose whether to present the content contained in the Learning Module in a hierarchical, outline-style format. Using this view, a student will be able to navigate through the Learning Module in the manner prescribed by the Instructor. If the Table of Contents is selected, the Instructor can also select the numbering or lettering format to be used in the Table of Contents.

  The Table of Contents can be manipulated by Instructors and students to accommodate individual viewing preferences. It can be minimized and oriented on the left side or along the bottom of the screen.

- **Content Folder Structure**
  Instructors may create folders and sub-folders within Learning Modules and populate them with content. As the Learning Module is populated, the Table of Contents will be created accordingly and numbered or lettered automatically in the format selected by the Instructor.
Sequential Navigation of Content
When an Instructor chooses sequential navigation, items in the Learning Module will become viewable as users progress through the content. Without sequential navigation, all content items in the Learning Module are viewable and users may navigate the content at will.

Lesson Plans
The Lesson Plan feature enables Instructors and Course Designers to create a structured unit plan with distinct and customizable sections that provide a means of documenting information such as description, learning level, delivery instructions, and so on. Lesson Plans also include content designed for an individual unit using any type of content or tool enabled in the Course.

As a planning tool, the Lesson Plan feature will benefit Instructors by allowing them to centrally plan and consolidate materials and resources.

Creating Customized Lesson Plans
Each section of a Lesson Plan can be individually renamed and reorganized. There is a high degree of variation in institutions as to what information and details are required in Lesson Plans. The Lesson Plan feature has maximum flexibility to accommodate these variations.

Controlling Visibility
The Lesson Plan feature enables Instructors to select which Lesson Plan sections are visible to Students. This enables Instructors to include non-Student-facing instructional information (such as instructions for delivery in the classroom, comments, suggestions for use, and so on) in the Lesson Plan while also including Student-facing information (such as learning objectives, materials needed, Student team assignments, and so on). In effect, Lesson Plans provide a planning tool for Instructors and Course designers as well as a tool for organizing Student-facing instructional materials.

Mashups
- In Web 2.0 applications, the term “Mashup” refers to displaying data from one third-party application in another application. You can now easily integrate rich media learning content using Web 2.0 resources from YouTube, SlideShare, and Flickr. Faculty can deliver more engaging course content in a convenient and powerful way by searching, finding, and inserting in a few clicks. Blackboard has added an accessible YouTube player to make it accessible to everyone.

- Mashup integrations with popular services allow Instructors and Students to discover, select, and embed content from those services without ever leaving the Blackboard Learn interface. This provides a seamless, easy-to-use experience that does not require the user to jump between Blackboard Learn and other sites or to have any particular knowledge about or comfort with HTML codes.

Assignments
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- Blackboard’s Digital Drop Box has been integrated into the Assignments tool; the drop box is no longer available.

- Instructors can now choose to deploy Assignments to all students individually or to groups of students. This allows instructors to assign a single grade to all of the students in a group and also to override that group grade and assign a student a different grade. Instructors can allow students to submit multiple attempts for the same assignment. Each attempt can be graded and commented on individually.

- Instructors have the ability to give specific students an additional attempt at an assignment in order to accommodate extenuating circumstances.

**New self and peer assessments tools**

- Blackboard Learn supports the creation of self- and peer-assessments of text, images, and digital-based information. Instructors can create an exercise with a list of questions for the assessor as well as a variety of grading or marking criteria. The instructor then distributes the assessment and chooses if students will assess their own work or the works of other students. In turn, the students submit the work to be reviewed by the instructors.

**Introducing SafeAssign**

SafeAssign is a free plagiarism prevention tool that allows for you to protect the originality of work and ensure a fair playing ground for all your students. SafeAssign is integrated with Blackboard and prevents plagiarism by detecting unoriginal content in student’s papers within your existing teaching and learning environment. SafeAssign can also further deter plagiarism by creating opportunities to educate students on proper attribution and citations while properly leveraging the wealth of information at their disposal.

SafeAssign can be used in two ways:

1. Faculty Members can set up SafeAssignments in their Blackboard courses and let students submit papers to these assignments, in a way very similar to the one provided currently by Blackboard Learning System. As students submit papers, they are checked against SafeAssign’s comprehensive databases of source material. The papers will then be delivered to Faculty Members through the Blackboard Learning System together with the originality reports, with the results of the matching process, attached to them.
2. Faculty Members may upload papers directly with the Direct Submit feature, without student involvement.

SafeAssign checks all submitted papers against the following databases:

- **Internet**: comprehensive index of documents available for public access on the Internet
- **ProQuest ABI/Inform database** with over 1,100 publication titles and about 2.6 million articles from ’90s to present time, updated weekly (exclusive access)
- **Institutional document archives** containing all papers submitted to SafeAssign by users in their respective institutions
- **Global Reference Database** containing papers that were volunteered by students from Blackboard client institutions to help prevent cross-institutional plagiarism.
Interactive Tools (Student Engagement)

Blogs (no more Homepage)
- Blogs have replaced homepages. Students can collaborate on blogs or individual blogs can be used to reflect on learning.
- Blackboard 9.1 has built in private Blog and Journal tools that let students create and share ideas with their instructors or other students enrolled in a particular class.
- Group journals allow groups of students to reflect collaboratively and comment on their fellow group members’ findings. To maintain privacy, group members may add journal entries anonymously.
- Course blogs allow all users in a course to share their thoughts and work in one common area that everyone in the course can read and add comments. New Blog feature replaces the Bb Homepage option.

Why use Blogs?
- Students can interact with one another or the instructor in creative ways. They interact via the Comment feature.
- Instructors can moderate the blogs. They do this via the Comment feature.
- Blogs deliver reflective learning.
- Unlike discussion boards, where the emphasis is on public debate, blogs provide an emphasis on sharing ideas and public reflection.
- Blogs enable a student’s thoughts on a subject to unfold over time. Other students and the instructor can see the growth in the student’s learning.
- Another way of stating the purpose of blogs: Blogs deliver public reflection with peer and instructor review.

Wikis
- Wikis are sets of pages that can be collaboratively edited by the instructor and students enrolled in the class. In essence, they can build a Website together that includes text, images, and more. Wiki’s are now available in the interactive tool area.

Why use Wikis?
- Students can creatively collaborate to design special projects.
- Instructors can grade Wiki projects.

Journals
- A journal is an online diary which contains entries that normally only the individual student and the instructor can access. The privacy factor and the separate individual entries makes the journal different from a blog or a wiki. Journals are also indexed weekly or monthly.

Why use Journals?
- Instructors can ask students to reflect on a particular topic or aspect of the course.
- Students can engage in private and internal reflection.
- Instructors can review and comment on reflection.
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- Journals can be opened so that students can see one another’s journal entries (beneficial in a course that emphasizes learning from one another).
- Journals enable a student’s internal thoughts on a subject to unfold over time.
- Another way of stating the purpose of journals: Journals provide formative assessment with student/teacher interaction.

Easier Group Creation

- Instructors can now create any number of groups at once.
- Students can randomly be assigned to groups, manually assigned by the instructor, or asked to sign-up for a group themselves.
- Students can create their own self-enrollment groups, although instructors have the option of modifying or restricting access to these student-created groups.

Notification Dashboard

The homepage (displays in each course) includes:
Needs Attention: Displays all items in a course that require some type of interaction
Alerts: Displays past due and early warning notifications for all courses
What’s New: Displays a list of new items in relevant courses and organizations.
To Do: Displays the status (Past Due/Due) of relevant course work and tasks

Grade Center Feature Enhancement

Completely redesigned Grade Center

- The Grade Center (formerly Gradebook) now allows instructors to create their own calculated columns, enabling calculations such as dropping a student’s lowest quiz grade.
- Instructors can enter results, scores, percentages, and other forms of grading directly into the Grade Center spreadsheet. This inline editing process is similar to entering grades into Microsoft Excel.
- The Grade Center automatically records each grade’s history. If an instructor or a TA changes a student’s grade, Blackboard’s grade history will show the new grade, all old grades, when the grades were changed, and who made the changes.
- Instructors can create “Smart Views” that categorize students based on selected criteria. This is helpful for instructors who have merged multiple class sections into one Blackboard course but who wish to still view and enter student grades based on the students’ original course sections. This is also helpful for instructors who have multiple TAs and who want to divide the management of student grades between those TAs. Instructors can create Smart Views to list students based on performance criteria (ex. students with a current failing average or those making an “A” on a selected test).
Any Smart View can be designated as a “favorite” which makes it instantly accessible from the class’s front page. Imagine a scenario of an educator creating a Smart View that displays students who are falling under a certain grade threshold. By designating that Smart View as a favorite, the educator can access it from the front page Control Panel and instantly view those students and immediately take the appropriate action.

Instructors can create and print grade reports—such as final grades—to hand to students or add to the instructors’ portfolios.

For instructors who use Excel to supplement Blackboard’s grade calculations, the Grade Center can now recognize all changes that should be updated to the Grade Center and will upload multiple columns in a single step.

Anonymous Grading

Instructors can grade assignment and test attempts while information identifying the Student remains concealed. Only after the grade for the attempt has been submitted will the identity of the Student be exposed. The objectives of grading anonymously include creating a grading workflow that is less prone to bias or favoritism on the part of the Instructor. It also serves as a protection for Instructors who may be subject to a complaint of unfair grading.

The Instructor will have the option of selecting to grade anonymously before beginning the grading process for the item. The order of the attempts is scrambled during the anonymous grading process to address scenarios where an Instructor may have a class somewhat memorized by alphabetic order. This feature is accessed through the column contextual menu in the Grade Center. In addition, it can be activated when grading by test attempt as well as when grading by question.

Test Feature Enhancements

Copy Test, Surveys, and Pools

Instructors can now copy a Test, Survey, or Pool directly from the List page. This addresses a common scenario in which an Instructor needs to provide a pre-test and post-test and needs to create two assessments that have more or less the same form. This capability also allows users to easily create new, smaller pools that contain a subset of questions of a larger pool. It is a much faster way to create similar tests compared to the import feature, which requires more steps.

Question Finder

Instructors and Course Builders can create Tests, Surveys, and Pools by reusing questions that have been collected in the Question Finder repository. The list of questions available under “Find Questions” can be filtered by Test, Survey, or Pool, or by such attributes as question type, category, topic, or level of difficulty. As the user selects these attributes, the list of questions updates dynamically. The filtering capability is further enhanced by a search capability, which allows the user to refine the filtered list.

The discovery process is also aided by a new section in the user interface that acts as a staging area for questions. The user can peruse and select or deselect as many questions as they want. When they are finished, this collapsible staging area will contain their selected
questions. The staging area allows users to keep track of how many questions they have selected.

**Link to Questions**

Instructors and Course Builders can choose to link to or copy questions from any Test, Survey, or Pool within a Course. Linking to a question ensures that any changes to the original question are reflected in all links. Copying a question creates a separate question that is not affected by changes to the original question. Questions can be copied between Courses, but they cannot be linked across Courses.

- **Question Sets**
  Instructors can use Question Sets to randomly select a set number of questions to appear on a Test that are pulled from a specific group of questions selected by the Instructor. Instructors can select to include questions from one or more existing Tests and Pools. From this set, the Instructor specifies how many questions to display on the Test. The specific questions displayed are chosen randomly each time the Test is taken. This provides Instructors and Course Builders with a better idea of what will be displayed to Students than when using Random Blocks. This will make it easier to review the appropriateness of questions and help reduce the need to recreate Question Sets.

- **Batch Deletion and Point Updates**
  Instructors and Course Builders can perform basic actions such as question deletion and point updates as batch actions, which can be targeted by question type. Users can update points for individual questions as well as points per question and number of questions to display for Random Blocks or Question Sets directly from the Canvas page. Taken together, these changes improve Instructor productivity and allow them to edit tests in less time.

**Textbook**

A new button is available in Content Area that enables Instructors list textbook information for their Course.

**Minor Updates and Improvements**

**Embedded Help**
- Embedded help throughout Blackboard helps users with and without disabilities access the features of Blackboard easily. The personal setting to hide or show help until the user chooses to call upon it again helps users from both perspectives: it removes text from the application that may be distracting, or it adds text to the application that helps them without forcing them to leave what they are doing. Institutions also have the option to customize this help text to meet their specific needs.

**Announcements**
- Instructors can now change the display order of their announcements.

**Calendar**
- Instructors can now add a start time and stop time for each Calendar event.