Blackboard Quick Start Guides

Creating Course Content

Interesting and original course content will bring students into a course and keep them there, learning and interacting. Content for Blackboard courses can be created directly within the course, or it can be created using other applications such as word processing, spreadsheet or HTML authoring tools and then uploaded into the course. Content can also be copied from other course, and links to content on the Internet or other media servers can be incorporated inside a course to bring it directly to students.

ISSUES AND ANSWERS

Issue: It is difficult to format items across a page horizontally using the Visual Text Box Editor.

Answer: Use tables to format the layout of text and other elements on a page. Use a border of "0" to get the desired alignment without the look of a table.

Issue: Some students are having difficulty reading the text on the pages and understanding the content of multimedia files.

Answer: Be aware of the need for accessible content. Insure that text is large enough for users with visual impairments, and font colors are readable against the background color. Provide alternative methods of receiving content from multimedia: provide deaf users with a text transcript of video/audio clips, and provide blind users with descriptions of visual indicators.

Issue: Links in a course pointing to items in the Content System no longer work.

Answer: If the file name and/or path changes to items stored in the Content System, links contained in a course will not longer be valid. Use the tool on the Control Panel called Check Collection Links to verify and repair the links.

BUILDING CUSTOM CONTENT

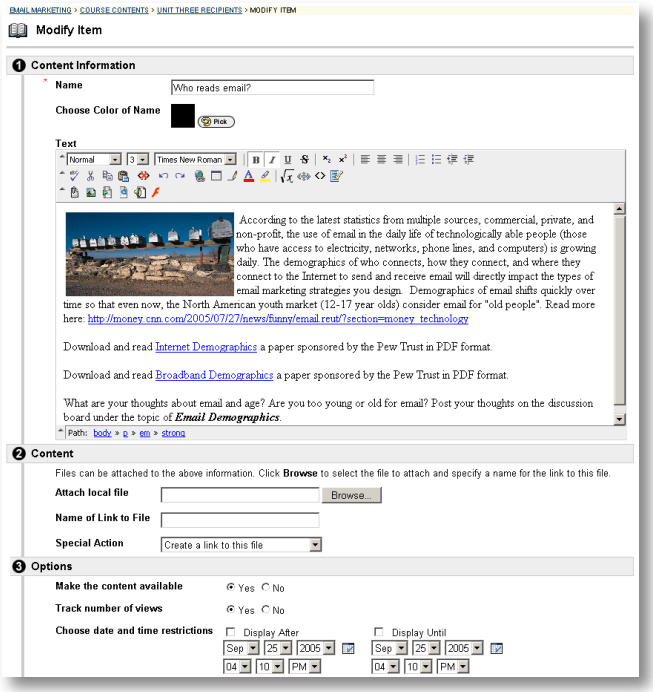
Visual Text Box Editor

Creating new content or editing existing content in Blackboard using the Visual Text Box Editor is easy and intuitive. Most formats of content added to a course, such as External Link or Tool include the Visual Text Box Editor. For example, to add a new page to the content, navigate to the point in the course where a new content page will be added. Click the Edit View link then Add Item to open the Visual Text Box Editor. Format text, add tables, links, and pictures to create a new page that will stimulate visual interest.

Bring your course alive by adding movies, animations, and sound using the Visual Text Box Editor. Blackboard supports MPEG, AVI and QuickTime videos, Flash and Shockwave, as well as many types of sound files. Simply click on the icon on the Visual Text Box Editor representing the multimedia type to add it to a page. Consider creating a link to plug-in download sites (such as Shockwave or QuickTime) from the same page.

Course content created or modified with the Visual Text Box Editor resides inside the course. This form of content is most useful for class specific materials such as unique documents, images, data tables, and introductory text for assignments, tests, surveys, attachments, multimedia and links. Keep the length of these pages short to cut down on scrolling. Add long documents as links or attachments.

Linking to documents that reside in the Content Collection allows the author to make changes to the document over time without having to recreate the link or reattach the file – course users will always see the latest version. If content will be shared across courses or sections of the same course, such as a mandatory departmental syllabus or reading list, a set of images, or project rubrics, add the items to the Content Collection. Files located on a local drive can easily be dragged into folders in the Content System so that they can be shared among users. Once stored in the Content Collection, file permissions can be set so different users can be granted rights to read, write, remove or manage the document.



Blackboard
Educate. Innovate. Everywhere.

Creating Course Content

ISSUES AND ANSWERS

Issue: Unlike removing Tools from a course, removing Content Areas deletes the content and it is not recoverable.

Answer: Tools function differently than Content Areas, so they can be removed and restored in a course without loosing anything. Use availability settings to hide specific content items, or make a Menu Item (such as Course Documents) unavailable instead of removing it.

Links

Course Cartridges Flash Tutorial

http://www.blackboard.com/corp/objects/images/quicktutorials/coursecartridge.swf

Learning Objects Catalog Flash Tutorial

http://www.blackboard.com/corp/objects/images/quicktutorials/learningobjectscatalog.swf

e-Reserves Flash Tutorial

http://www.blackboard.com/corp/objects/images/quicktutorials/ereserves.swf

Standards Flash Tutorial

http://www.blackboard.com/corp/objects/images/quicktutorials/standards.swf

Saving PowerPoint as a Web Page PDF Tip Sheet

http://behind.blackboard.com/docs/LearningServices/Other/BbPowerPoint_TipSheet.pdf

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LEVERAGING EXISTING CONTENT

External Links • Course Cartridges • Content System

There are many ways that content can be used in courses without having to create it from scratch. Mining the richness of the Internet for content to bring into a course is simple and direct. Linking to any external content using External Links will provide resources for your class to supplement your course materials. Links can be set to open in a new window or appear directly in the main frame. External Links can be managed within the course itself, or can be added to the Content System and managed from there.

Beginning with an existing course is another way to instantly have content that can be modified, edited or reorganized to fit your needs. Major textbook publishers create pre-packaged content and course materials in the Blackboard Course Cartridge format to supplement their course textbooks. Cartridges may contain multimedia, assessments, test question pools, and links to interactive learning applications. Cartridge materials can be customized once loaded into a course site. Material from a Course Cartridge can even be copied into a new course and used again. Students will have to have a valid key code to access any publisher material included in a course, which may require a fee. Some textbook publishers also offer "Companion Web Sites" that accompany a particular textbook. Companion Web Sites are open to instructors and students and there is usually no fee for using them as long as the textbook is being used for the course and the students and instructor are registered with the publisher.

The power and scope of digital library collections and e-Reserves can be another method of adding ready-made content to a course. Library content such as general reserve materials, image collections, periodicals and other material hosted by the library is administered within the Content Collection and is intended to be shared across the entire institution. A librarian or system administrator usually manages content stored in Library folders. e Reserves is a special function of the Content System that has to be enabled by a Blackboard administrator. Once enabled, a folder in the Content Collection for e-Reserve materials is automatically created for every course. Content in e-Reserve folders, such as assigned readings is specific to the individual course and is managed by the librarian. Setting permissions on the material in e-Reserve folders so it cannot be changed helps ensure copyright protection.

CATALOGING AND SHARING CONTENT ACROSS LEARNING PLATFORMS

Learning Objects • Learning Objects Catalog • Standards

A Learning Object can be any type of digital material, including Web pages, rubrics, documents, images, multimedia, or even an entire course. Learning Objects can be added to a Learning Objects Catalog by first submitting it for review. If approved by the institution's Catalog manager, the Learning Object becomes a discoverable entry in the institution's catalog. Items can then be selected from the catalog and used in a course. Adding Learning Objects from an institutional catalog to a course is one more method of bringing quality content into a course.

Learning Objects may be created in applications outside of Blackboard such as Macromedia Flash or ColdFusion. When creating Learning Objects for submittal to a Learning Objects Catalog, certain standards and specifications can be applied to them so that the items can be used by other systems that support those standards. These specifications allow other web-based learning systems to find, import, export, and reuse content in a standardized manner. SCORM (Sharable Content Object Reference Model), IMS, and NLN (National Learning Network) are standards and specifications for web-based learning objects and services. These types of Learning Objects can be added to Blackboard either through the Content Collection or directly to a course.

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