Blackboard®

Learn Release Process

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INTRODUCTION

Blackboard is continually improving how we deliver software to our clients. We do this through changes that better support the current state of the Learn product. These changes impact our SaaS, Self-Hosted (SH), and Managed-Hosted (MH) deployment schedules. In order to provide more timely updates, we have aligned our SH and MH releases with our SaaS releases. Currently, we release SH and MH updates monthly. We expect further changes in the futures to allow more frequent releases.

CURRENT PROCESS

Feature (Monthly) Releases (SaaS, SH, and MH)

- A Learn Feature Release will generally be deployed to SaaS Production sites on the first Thursday of each month. Feature releases will typically include new functionality and bug fixes.
- New features will be included in a Test/Stage release prior to being released to Production.
- Critical fixes may be included in a Production Feature release without going to Test/Stage first.
- Each release will be identified by a numeric identifier such as 3900.6.0.
- Two weeks after the SaaS Feature Release, the same version will be released to SH and MH.

Maintenance Releases (SaaS Only)

- Maintenance releases will generally be deployed on Thursdays subsequent to the Feature release. Maintenance releases may not be required every week.
- Maintenance releases will be made for critical (high impacting or security) fixes only. Non-critical fixes will be included in monthly releases.
- Critical fixes may be deployed directly to Production environments without going to Test/Stage first if Test/Stage environments have already been updated with a newer version than currently on Production.

Client Test/Stage Environments (SaaS Only)

- Prior to releasing a Feature release to Production environments, the release will be deployed to client Test/Stage environments. Test/Stage Feature releases occur approximately the second Tuesday of each month.
- Maintenance releases may also occur to Test/Stage environments if critical fixes are made to the latest Test/Stage release. Maintenance Test/Stage releases will be deployed as needed on Tuesdays subsequent to the Test/Stage Feature release.

Release Schedules

Learn SaaS Release Schedule

Learn Hosted Release Schedule

RELEASE PROCESS EXCEPTIONS

The Learn product includes some independent applications that may be updated differently from the above release structure. This includes, but is not limited to the following:

- Bb Annotate
- SafeAssign
- Ally

RELEASE NOTES

Clients can find Release Notes and Announcement information on Help at https://help.blackboard.com and Behind the Blackboard (BtBb) at http://behind.blackboard.com.

SaaS release notes are published on or about the same day a release reaches Test servers. Clients will see the list of new features and enhancements for Original and Ultra experiences. After the release has gone out, an announcement is posted on BtBb that includes a rollup of the enhancements as well as a list of bug fixes. Clients can see a full list of bug fixes by searching Known Issue articles and may also export the list to review. With maintenance releases, release notes are published on Help on the day of the release, and include information about bug fixes.

Self and Managed Hosting release notes are published on the day of the release and include information about bug fixes and enhancements. BtBb will have the full list of enhancements and bug fixes for the monthly releases.

STATUS PAGE

Clients can find the status of upcoming and active releases on Status at https://status.blackboard.com. Scheduled release information is published at least one day before a release. Updates about any delays, as well as notification that the release has begun and completed will be provided.

CLIENT RESPONSIBILITIES

SaaS

- Read the release notes, the list of resolved issues, and the list of known issues.

- Ensure customizations are compatible with the new release through testing on test or staging servers prior to release to production (i.e,. SIS, SSO, custom themes and locales, 3rd party B2s/integrations, customization, etc). This includes verifying that the correct Building Block versions are available.
- Review and verify functional areas that are critical to your institution and users on Test or Staging servers prior to release to production.
- Become familiar with the new features.
- Report issues via BtBb if there are any potential issues while reviewing upgrades within SaaS Test Environment.

MH

Blackboard Managed-Hosting Clients have the flexibility based on their academic calendar to decide when and what version they would like to upgrade to. Please contact the Client Support team to identify what may be the BEST version of Blackboard for you to target for your upgrade.

- Schedule upgrade with Client Support via BtBb.
- Read the release notes, the list of resolved issues and the list of known issues. Contact the Client Support team with questions.
- Review the available schedule and the length of time the upgrade will require.
- Upgrade Test Environment – This is not a full clone of Production but is recommended for testing integrations, new features, and new services.
- Upgrade your Staging Environment – This is a full data clone of your production environment and is also recommended to be used to train end-users on new target version.
- Ensure customizations are compatible with the new release (i.e, SIS, SSO, custom themes and locales, 3rd party B2s/integrations, customization, etc.). This includes verifying that the correct Building Block versions are available.
- Review and verify functional areas that are critical to your institution and users.
- Become familiar with the new features and allow time for training before releasing it to your users.

To stay up-to-date on communications regarding release information, deprecation notifications, and other important announcements, clients should subscribe to the Help Release Notes and Behind the Blackboard to receive updates by email.