Getting Started with Course Design in Blackboard Learn

A Quick Guide for Instructors

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Essentials of Best Practices in Course Design
In working with Blackboard, you will be using a standard template for course navigation, which will be used across the community college system for all new faculty to Blackboard.

Structure Learning Environments to Decrease Anxiety

Anxiety can...

- Trigger a “freezing” response, and learned helplessness.
- Decrease attention span.
- Decrease short-term memory capacity; causes specific visual memory deficits.
- Result in poor recall of previously mastered information.
- Diminishes expectations of success.
- Shift cognitive processing to the action-based “procedural” memory (habits, automatic processes), and reduce access to fact-based, language-based “declarative” memory. Declarative memory requires attention, and relates to forming long-term memories.

Establish Recognizable Patterns
When confronted with an unknown space or situation, people try to....

- Impose order on chaos to lessen anxiety: Strong link between anxiety, attention, concentration, and memory formation. (Our brain is 2% of our weight, uses 20% of our energy, 70% of our glucose!)
- Find patterns and predictability because it helps minimize cognitive effort.
- Avoid distractions: Our minds don’t like to be occupied with low-level details.
- Strive towards automaticity—the ability to perform even complex tasks (like driving) with minimal conscious effort.

Creating a predictable framework in your course that contains recognizable organizational patterns can decrease student anxiety, and there are very simple design and delivery principles that will help you create a more predictable, intuitive learning environment for students. This can also save instructors a
lot of time and aggravation because students will be able to figure out how to navigate your course more easily.

**Consistent Structure and Information Design**

**Make Use of Backward Design Principles**

**Backward Design** is a course planning and development method that is all about **ALIGNMENT**. The model is simple and logical:

**Stage 1:**
- Decide what you want students to know or be able to do.
- Link to actionable outcomes link based on “action verbs”

**Stage 2:**
- Determine how students can demonstrate their knowledge.
- Evidence of learning – simple guides for the development of your assessments.

**Stage 3:**
- Develop or identify activities and content; provide deliberate practice to prepare students for graded assessments.
Storyboard Your Course in Folders

There is no one “right way” to organize content and activities—the framework used will vary depending upon the goals and preferences of the instructor and (in some cases) the institution.

- **By units or modules** based upon subject-specific concepts or theories (i.e., Cognitive, Behavioral, Social, and Developmental Psychology)
- **By chapters** in the textbook being used
- **By Main topic** with subtopic folders
- **By Weeks**
  Note: Many faculty organize by Weeks but this can cause difficulties if:
  - There are weather-related closures and date adjustments (e.g. classes were cancelled the first three Wednesdays in a row the Spring term of 2018!)
  - You want to teach the course in the summer or winter terms

**Consistent Sequencing in Folders; Consistent Naming Conventions**
Logging into Blackboard

- **IMPORTANT!** Never use the INTERNET EXPLORER browser with Bb (faculty or students).
  - Microsoft is no longer doing IE updates, so it no longer supports Bb functionality.
- Students, faculty and staff all normally access the Blackboard learning management system by logging into the community college myCommNet website: [http://my.commnet.edu](http://my.commnet.edu). Enter your NetID and password to log in.
- Click the Bb icon at the top of the window, or the Blackboard link on the Home page.

![Blackboard Login](image)

“My Institution” and Other Tabs

- When you first enter Blackboard, you will be on the **My Institution** page. You can return to this default “landing page” at any time by simply clicking the **My Institution** tab.
- Note the **My HelpTraining** tab, which contains many useful training links.

![Blackboard Tabs](image)

- For future reference, if you are interested in learning how to create and upload videos into your courses, we have a built-in tool in Blackboard called Kaltura. You access Kaltura either from the subtab on the **My Institution** page (shown below) or from within your Blackboard course.
Global Navigation Panel & Logout

- The Global Navigation Panel, accessed by clicking the dropdown next to your name, provides quick access to all Posts, Updates, Retention Center, Calendar, plus Settings, Help.

- The Logout button is to the right of the panel dropdown.

Your Course List

- Click the small gear icon that displays when you mouse over the Course List title bar. This opens a form that enables you to hide/show courses in your Course List, group/ungroup courses by term, change display settings, and re-order your courses by dragging and dropping.

- If you use Announcements and a student has their settings set to have Announcements displayed in the Course List (this is controlled by each user), they may accidentally click the Announcement link instead of the Course Title link, and then they are confused because they don’t see the course menu or any content.
• Note that your **Course List** has two sections: *Courses where you are: Instructor* and *Courses where you are: Student*. Please note that all faculty are automatically enrolled into resources courses, as shown below.

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**Editing and Viewing the Course: Edit Mode and Student Preview**

**Edit Mode**

• You must turn the **Edit Mode** toggle to ON in order to modify the course. For example, in the screenshot below note that only with Edit Mode turned “ON” can you see the “Add Menu Item” button above the menu. This is NOT a true student view of the course. For that, see “Student Preview” below.

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**Student Preview: View and Interact with Your Course in a True Student View!**

When you click **Student Preview**, you can view and interact with a course just as your students do. In fact, you are in the course as an actual student named “[your last name]_Preview Student.”

All you need to do is SAVE your Preview Student data when you exit Student Preview mode, and your Preview Student—along with any submissions such as assignments, tests, or discussion posts—will display in Full Grade Center! It will look like this:

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Tobi Krutt, CSCU System Office, tkrutt@commnet.edu & Francine Skalicky, CSCU_BOR, fskalicky@commnet.edu – March 2019
• To enter Student Preview, just click the button to the left of Edit Mode. (It looks like a little eye with two arrows around it.)

• While you are navigating the course in Student Preview, you are experiencing the course exactly as a student would.

• You can post to discussions, submit quizzes or tests, submit assignments, etc. as “Preview Student.”

• When you exit Student Preview, you will see two radio button options, and a settings checkbox.

• We recommend that you select “Keep the preview user and all data.” This ensures that any data you submitted as Preview Student (such as submitted attempts, discussion posts, tests taken) will be saved and displayed in Grade Center and associated with a record in Grade Center for your Preview Student.
• Then click the checkbox for “Remember this choice and do not ask me again.”

![Image of Student Preview screen]

1. Keep the preview user and all data
   - If you are temporarily leaving the student preview to complete your task in your real account, keep the preview user and data. You can delete the user and data by returning to student preview and changing these settings.

2. Remember this choice and do not ask me again
   - This can be changed in Student Preview Settings, located in Student Preview control bar.

3. Continue

• Now if you go to Full Grade Center, a row for your "Preview User" appears with your own last name. If you made any grade submissions, you can now grade them.

| Krutt_PreviewUser | Tobi |

• NOTE: If you select the “Remember this choice” checkbox when you exit the preview, you can always change it back later by clicking the Student Preview Settings button, then deselecting the option that prevents Blackboard from asking about Preview User Preferences, as shown in the two screenshots below:

![Image of Student Preview Settings]

To be given a choice of keeping or deleting the Student Preview user and data each time you exit, **DESELECT** this setting checkbox.

Then click Save.
About the Course Entry Point

- The Course Entry Point is where students will land when they first enter the course. It can be any available content area or tool. It is also where participants will return to if they click the “Home” icon.
- By default, your Announcements tool is the default course entry point. This ensures that the first thing students will see is any current information, updates, or reminders.
- Faculty do not have access to change the course entry point--only Ed Tech Directors can make any changes. However, normally this entry point is not changed in order to make navigation consistent from course to course.

The Course Menu and Control Panel

- You must have Edit Mode ON to modify the Course Menu (or anything else in the course).
- Students can only access course content or tools if the instructor has added a menu button to it on the Course Menu. The menu button must also be Available to students.
- Students see just the Course Menu. Only Instructors can see or access functions/tools on the Control Panel below the menu.
• The Course Menu can be collapsed both horizontally (click the bar between the menu and the right-hand content frame) or vertically (click the dropdown to the left of the course title in the menu).

Add and Modify Buttons on the Course Menu

• As we move to a new standardized course template across 12 colleges (for faculty who are new to Blackboard or redesigning their courses), we ask the following of all faculty:

• **Do not ADD, RE-ORDER, or RE-NAME menu buttons.** To the greatest extent possible, we want the menu button labeling to be CONSISTENT for students from one course to another, and one college to another. For example, do not rename “Messages” to “Contact the Instructor” or “Email” (Messages and Email in Bb are NOT the same thing!). Do not rename “Discussions” to something like “Conversations” or “Ask the Instructor.”

• **If menu changes are needed please contact your local Ed Tech director or staff.** For example, you need to add a button for Publisher Content, ePortfolio, or a tool.

• Click the plus (+) sign for the dropdown that enables instructors to update their Course Menu.
• When new menu items are added they will always appear at the bottom of the menu. Use the drag and drop functionality in the course menu to re-order your menu items.

![Drag and Drop](image)

• The dropdown arrow to the right of each menu button enables you to: Delete, show/hide, or rename the menu item.

![Dropdown Action List](image)

• Icons showing in Edit Mode ON indicate the visibility of Course Menu buttons.

![Edit Mode ON](image)

• Do not add a new Content Area without discussing it with your local Ed Tech director. We are trying our best to keep the menu standards consistent from course to course.

• If you accidentally delete a Content Area that already contains content (folders, files, web links), everything on it gets deleted! This cannot be undone!!

• If you are not going to use a particular menu item or tool for a semester you can hide it on the menu.

Common Menu Items

• The most commonly used menu items are Content Area, Tool Link, and Divider. Items are also used but they should ONLY be used when there are just one or two lines of text.

• It is highly recommended that Web links not be put directly on the menu but onto a Content page.
• **A Content Area** is a kind of page on which an instructor can create folders and links to other types of content and activities. All the new templates inside the Blackboard course shells have a “Course Content” item already added to the menu.

![Course Content](image1.png)

• **A Tool Link** refers to menu items that you can add such as Announcements, Course Messages, Discussion Board, and My Grades. Tool links can also be placed on a Content Area.

![Add Tool Link](image2.png)

• **Dividers** are used in the new template to chunk the Course Menu into smaller, related groupings. For example:

![Dividers](image3.png)
Creating Announcements

- **Announcements** are very important in online and hybrid courses. They are automatically set as the Course Entry Point, so students see the most current announcement immediately.
- In web-enhanced on-ground courses announcements sets expectations of how the Blackboard course will correspond to what is happening in the classroom.
- The Announcement tool will already be on the standard template. Once you click on the tool name you will need to select Create Announcement.

To Edit an Announcement, click the arrow next to the announcement, and select Edit.

Date Restrictions can be set for each announcement. Normally, faculty set a “display after” date but NOT a “display until” date, so students can always review older announcements.

Upload a Syllabus

1. Click the **Syllabus** button on the course menu (all colleges have one on their template).
2. Click the **Build Content** button.
3. Click the **File or Item** link and browse to your Syllabus file on your PC. You can upload a Word doc (which requires the student to download the file and launch Word to open it) or a PDF.
(which opens directly in the browser).

- The File option will display like this on the Content page

- The Item option will allow you to upload a file but also add text that will appear underneath the file (i.e. directions for what to do with the Syllabus).

Organize Course Folders (Units, Lessons, Chapters, etc.)

- Course units can be organized using Content Folders. Simply create the folder then open it and add content, then sequence it. Content Folders should NOT contain more than one level of subfolders.

- First, click on the Content Area on your menu named “Course Content. Then click the Build Content button and then select a Content Folder.
- Name your new folder. Note the following:
- Description text does NOT display on a mobile device. We discourage faculty from using Description text or graphics. Put important information or instructions INSIDE the folder.
- Do not add graphics into the folder description (decorative graphics are a distraction, add to scrolling time, and do not display at all on mobile devices.

- Click on the folder title to open it and view content inside.
  (Do NOT select the dropdown arrow and then choose Edit.)

- To edit the title or properties or apply actions to a Content Folder click the dropdown arrow to the right of its title:

- Breadcrumbs that appear just above the content can be used to navigate in folders or learning modules.
Viewing Your Course in a Mobile Device in “Responsive Design” view

- Your students will be interacting with your course through mobile devices much of the time, so be sure to add a “Mobile Policy” in your syllabus.
- Instructors can download the Blackboard Instructor app, and students can download the Blackboard Mobile app either Google Play or the App Store.
- **After download, you must search on “Connecticut Community Colleges” in order to connect to your courses through the app. Do NOT search on “CSCU” or your college name. Agree to the Bb terms of use and then you will be prompted to log in using your NetID and Password.**
- Instructions related to the Bb Instructor app can be found here: [https://help.blackboard.com/Blackboard_Instructor/Quick_Start#install-app-and-log-in](https://help.blackboard.com/Blackboard_Instructor/Quick_Start#install-app-and-log-in)
- Blackboard Mobile apps for faculty (Blackboard Instructor app) and students (Blackboard Mobile app) display content in what is called “Responsive Design,” which looks quite different from the way it appears in a web browser on a computer.
- Use the Blackboard Instructor app to see how your course looks on a mobile device. This will help you recognize and remove elements that are causing a great deal of scrolling in mobile view, and it will also show what does and does not display in the Responsive Design view—how text formatting and fonts look, etc.
- To recreate (somewhat) the “Responsive Design” view on a PC web browser, simply use the Control key and the “+” key at the same time zoom in on your browser. The right pointing arrow at top left expands the course menu. It will look like this:

![image](image)

**Note:** In the Bb Mobile apps for instructors or students, **neither folder descriptions nor any graphics display below the folder or module title, as they do in Responsive Design display on a computer web browser shown here.**

Adding Additional Content or Activities to Folders

Additional training is available on how to use Assignments, Tests, Rubrics, Kaltura, the Discussion Board and Rubric.

- **Files** are generally just uploaded Word documents, PDFs, or PowerPoints.

- **Blank Pages:**
• You can enter text into a Blank Page with the Content Editor. You can also attach documents, or insert a URL in the text that describes what you want students to pay attention to when they visit a specific website. (Although if all you want them to do is OPEN the website or WATCH the video, it’s easier to create a Web Link.

• Users must click the icon for the Blank Page to open it. Be sure to use a Blank Page and NOT an Item if you need to enter more than a line or two of text.

• Items are somewhat like Blank Pages but all of the text appears on the page without the student needing to click. This makes courses look text-heavy, requires a lot of scrolling, and makes navigation inside folders extremely cumbersome on mobile devices. Avoid using them unless there is just a line or two of text that you want to affix to the top of a content area or folder.

• **Web links** can be created from create Content area.

• **YouTube Mashups** enable you to add a description or information related to a YouTube video. These create a nice video thumbnail that includes a text description. However, one downside of the YouTube Mashup is that you cannot simply paste in the link to the video when creating the mashup, as you would with a web link. Instead, you must search for it by title within the Mashup tool, and then select the correct video from the results.

• **Videos** – You will want to use Kaltura to upload videos (requires special training). You cannot simply upload video files—we have that feature turned off in Blackboard.

• **Assignments** can be created from the Assessments button. Creating an Assignment automatically creates an associated column in Grade Center.

• **Tests** can be also be created from the Assessments button.

• Alternatively, instructors can navigate to Control Panel>Course Tools>Assessments, Surveys, Pools and create their tests there, then from within a content folder or learning module, they can “deploy” the test.

• **Discussion** forums can be created from within a folder or if they were created from within the tool, they can be linked within a content folder. There are a number of different options in Blackboard for linking to tools that depend upon the instructor’s preferences. If these are designated as being gradable, they will have an associated column created in Grade Center.

### Modifying Blackboard Objects (Items, Files, Web Links, etc.)

• To modify the settings or properties (title, availability, display dates, etc.) of an object that you have added to a content area, content folder, or learning module, you use the same method as you did to modify Course Menu buttons; just mouse over it and click the dropdown arrow to the right of its title, and click Edit.
• Depending upon the type of object it is, you will see different options available, but in general you will usually see Edit, Adaptive Release, and Move, Copy, or Delete actions.

Moving/Ordering Content

• Ordering Content: Content such as Items, Blank Pages, Files, Web Links, Videos, etc. that have been added to Content Areas, Content Folder can be re-ordered by using drag and drop.

• Moving/Copying Content: If you need to put an object into a different location (for example, if you want to move a Web Link from a top level folder to a sub-folder), you will need to right click on the dropdown to the right of its title and select “Copy” or “Move” from the drop-down menu, and then browse to the location where you wish to place it.
**Term Project Assignment**

**Purpose:** This assignment will provide you with a comprehensive overview of the concepts taught in your course. You will apply these concepts to units of your course. You can use small-group WebEx with classmates to discuss how you might apply the concepts general to units of your course. You can also use the notes feature to keep track of your progress.

- **Using the resources in this course:**
  - Note: If you wish, you can add more content.

- **While you are developing:**
  - Discuss what the next steps might be.

**Move**

Many Content Items, including Links, Web Links, Content Folders, Learning Modules, Offline Content, etc., can be moved. Moving content simply copies the content to the destination location. It does not delete the content from the original location. More Help

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENT INFORMATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DESTINATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Destination Course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destination Folder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Note:** You cannot simply type in the text of the name of the move location. You must Browse to it.
Messages and Email

- **Email** and **Messages** are two separate tools in Bb Learn. They are not interchangeable. The buttons should not be renamed to anything else.
- **Messages** is completely INTERNAL. Students need to log into Blackboard, navigate to your course, and check Messages.
- **Email** is completely EXTERNAL—messages sent from you to students via Bb Learn’s Email tool are NOT archived/stored within your course!
- If you want to use the Messages tool, then remove the Email button from your course menu, and vice versa. Do NOT have both tools on the menu. YOU CAN ASK YOUR ED TECH DIRECTOR TO CHANGE THE BUTTONS ON YOUR MENU!!

**Messages**

- **Advantage of the Messages tool:** If there is a grade challenge (for sections within the last two academic years) we can easily obtain ALL of the messages sent to and from students in a given CRN, in order to provide back up what either the student or the instructor says occurred. So if an instructor did in fact reach out to a student to let them know they were failing or needed to submit something, it can be proven if the instructor sent the student a message with this tool.
- With Messages, there is no worry about students not receiving them, because it’s not possible for them to be forwarded or redirected, caught by spam filters or rules, or blocked (like Email).

**Email**

- **Email** sent to students from the Bb Email tool ALWAYS goes to the Student’s College Email Address. So if you use Bb Email, tell your students that they MUST check their college email.
• FACULTY MUST ALWAYS USE THEIR COLLEGE EMAIL ACCOUNT TO COMMUNICATE WITH STUDENTS. This is CSCU IT policy. Do not forward or redirect your college email account to a personal email address.

• To ensure that email sent to students from Blackboard comes from your COLLEGE EMAIL, check Banner Self-Service to ensure that your college email address is selected as your “Preferred Email”.

• To check and see if your college address is your Preferred Email, please watch this video. VIDEO: How to Update Preferred Email in Banner Self Service and Blackboard (2 minutes)

• Both faculty and students should watch the video: How to Access Your Office 365 Email.” It can be found in this playlist on Email Management.

• The downside or using Bb’s Email tool is that students sometimes flag email coming from Blackboard’s “do-not-reply” address to their college accounts as “junk mail”—so they will never see faculty messages sent from Blackboard! Students should be advised NOT to forward or redirect their email from their college accounts.

• Emails sent to and from students using the Bb Email tool has the CRN in the subject line. Best practice is to save emails to/from students into a folder in Office 365 for each section.

• There is a video on how to create and manage email folders in this playlist on Email Management.

What is the “Content Collection”?

• The Content Collection is where any files that you have uploaded for use in your course are stored. Students cannot directly access the course collection – it is where you, the instructor can find any files that you have made available in your course. You can change file names, download the files, overwrite the files, etc.

• How to find the Content Collection:

Using Publisher Content in your Blackboard Course

• If you want to use publisher provided content in your course, you must contact your Ed Tech director, who can assist you in ensuring that the course is linked up correctly.

Tobi Krutt, CSCU System Office, tkrutt@commnet.edu & Francine Skalicky, CSCU_BOR, fskalicky@commnet.edu – March 2019
• You must not wait until just before the semester starts. If the publisher tools (building blocks or LTIs) have not been used at your college or in our system, they must be tested in a non-production environment before they are moved to our Blackboard production system. This can take at least six weeks—more if there are problems. So don’t wait until two weeks before the semester begins!

Did You Know...Students Can Download a Full Version of Office 365?
• Any community college student can download and install free versions of Microsoft Office 365 (ProPlus) applications, and also use Office online (so if a students says they go not have Word, Excel, or PowerPoint, they can obtain it for free).
• Information is available at our [Office 365 service section](mailto:Office%20365%20service%20section) of the CSCU IT Support Center site.

Instructor Checklist
These recommendations are relevant for instructors in on-ground, online, and hybrid courses.

**Prior to course start**
• Syllabus:
  o Upload current syllabus and be sure old ones are deleted.
  o Be sure to include updated Contact information and Office Hours.
  o Confirm textbook/materials info is up to date.
• Announcements:
  o Delete or modify the default announcement create your own personalized “Welcome” announcement to tell students how to get started.
  o Use “Preview Student” to ensure that only announcements relevant to the current semester are displaying to students.
  o Make Announcement text, dates, etc. have been updated or deleted.
• Course menu:  Hide or unhide course menu buttons as needed, and be sure there are no duplicate menu buttons.
• Dates Update:  Use [Course Tools> Date Management](mailto:Course%20Tools> Date%20Management) to update Display Dates, Adaptive Release Dates, Due Dates for folders, discussions, tests, assignments, etc.
• Materials and activities:
  o Look at course using “Student View” to be sure students have (or do NOT have) access to the correct materials, assessments, activities, etc.
  o Make sure all documents and links to websites open correctly.
• Discussions:  Delete old discussion threads from regular discussion forums and any group discussion forums.
• Check “My Grades” and “Grade Center”: Using Student View, check “My Grades” to be sure grade columns are not showing that you do not want students to see. If there are redundant, old, or erroneous columns showing to students, hide them from students (Show/Hide to Users) or better yet delete them. See your local Ed Tech director for assistance if needed.

**First week of class**
• Get emergency contact information from students.

• For each student, check the “Last Access” date in Grade Center, or the Performance Dashboard, to be sure all students have logged into Blackboard. This helps ensure that all students know how to access materials or information that you will be sharing in Bb.

End of term

• Download the Bb Grade Center each term (this is required!) and save offline for five years.
  o Steps: Full Grade Center>Work Offline>Download

• Download Blackboard Grade History Report.
  o Steps: Full Grade Center>Reports>View Grade History>Download

• Enter Final Grades into Banner Faculty Self-Service.