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 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
  - You want to teach the course in the summer or winter terms

Consistent Sequencing in Folders; Consistent Naming Conventions

Gagne’s Nine Events of Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gain attention</td>
<td>Introduction with a scenario or sample problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe the goal</td>
<td>Intro with unit outcomes/objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stimulate prior knowledge</td>
<td>Connect prior content to new presented information (Bruner’s “spiral curriculum”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present the material to be learned</td>
<td>Strive for content-relevant multi-modal options (forget learning styles!)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide guidance for learning</td>
<td>Worked problems, discussions, reflective journals, group practice sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elicit performance</td>
<td>Self-tests, research, homework, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide feedback</td>
<td>Immediate, specific, and constructive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess performance</td>
<td>Assessed based on stated outcomes and rubrics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhance retention and transfer</td>
<td>Opportunities for self-reflection and self-assessment and guided practice</td>
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Logging into Blackboard

- 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.
What is on the My Institution page?

After logging into Blackboard you land on a page called the My Institution page. **Become familiar with the Tabs and Modules on this page. They are important to check for updates etc.**

Tabs include:

- My Institution
- MyHelp/Training – includes links to training calendar, training videos and the 24/7 Helpdesk
- WebEx/Microsoft Teams – Include training videos and links to documentation
- My Organizations – your college may put you in organizations for NEASC, Subject Matter etc.

Modules include (some of the modules may change throughout the year depending on need).

- Blackboard Updates – Information in this module changes frequently. Check it often.
- Course List – information in this module lists all the courses where you are an Instructor or a student – this will always be on the My Institution Page
- Blackboard Student Mobile
- Blackboard Instructor Mobile

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Modifying your Course List

Courses can be viewed by faculty for two years and one semester. After that, they are deleted from the Blackboard system. In order to manage the number of courses you are viewing in your Course List, move your mouse to the upper right corner your course list until you see a round gear like circle appear (as screenshot below). Select the circle.
All courses you are enrolled in will show in this list. To stop courses from showing in your Course List remove the check mark next to the course title and select submit.

Note: This does not unenroll you from your courses just stops them from viewing in the Course List.

You can also decide to stop showing an entire Term of courses. Remove the check mark next to the Term and select submit.

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.
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.

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**Student Preview: View Your Course in a True Student View!**
- In **Student Preview**, you can interact with a course just as your students do: Submit assignments and tests, post in your “Demo Student” role, post to discussions as a student, check My Grades, etc.

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- When you exit **Student Preview**, you will see three options.
- The first two provide you with the option to discard any Preview User data, or keep it.
- We recommend that you NEVER select the third option, because for most faculty there are times when they will want to discard their preview data and times when you may want to keep it. Best to have the choice each time you leave Student Preview.

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• If you select “Keep the preview user and all data” option, then your "Preview User" appears with your own last name, followed by “_PreviewUser” in a row in Full Grade Center and other places where students are listed. This enables you to grade your Preview User's submissions.

• 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.

About the Course Entry Point

• The Course Entry Point is where students will land when they first enter the course

• 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.

- Only Instructors can see or access functions/tools on the **Control Panel**.

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• 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), adding menu items should not be done unless there is important reason such as using Publisher Content or an ePortfolio link, or an additional tool such as Calendar. Tool links must not be renamed—tool naming should be the same in all course menus.

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

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

• 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.

• Leave the standard tool names as is—do not rename them. To the greatest extent possible, we want the menu button labeling to be CONSISTENT for students from one course to another. (For example, do not rename “Messages” to “Contact the Instructor” or “Email” (Messages and Email in Bb are NOT the same thing!)

For Videos that will review everything about the Course Menu, access the Blackboard Faculty Learn Resource Center and check out the Blackboard Basics/Getting Started area.
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.

- 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.

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

- Announcements are very important in online and hybrid courses. They are automatically set as the Course Entry Point and this cannot be changed by faculty. The weekly (or more often) announcements keep the students focused on what they should be doing in the course that week or day etc., and having the tool as the Course Entry Point ensure the first thing students will always see is the most current announcement.

- In web-enhanced on-ground courses the announcement 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.
  - You will see a prebuilt Announcement that is part of your College template. PLEASE EDIT this announcement to be your Welcome Announcement.
• After Editing the prebuilt Announcement in your College Template, you can then begin to Create New Announcements as needed. Once you click on the tool name you will need to select Create Announcement.

• To Edit an Announcement simply click the dropdown arrow next to the announcement title and select Edit.

• Date Restrictions can be set for each announcement. Normally, faculty set a “display after” date but NOT a “display until” date—this ensures that students can always go back and review older announcements if need be.
Upload a Syllabus

1. Click the **Syllabus** button on the course menu.
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 and enter a brief description (if you wish) and click **Submit.**
- **Note:** Description text and graphics added to Content folders do not display on mobile devices.
- **NOTE: DO NOT PUT DECORATIVE GRAPHICS INTO THE FOLDER DESCRIPTION.** They only make it a much longer process for the student to scroll through your folders.

- 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

• Keep in mind that most of your students will probably be interacting with your course primarily through mobile devices such as phones or tablets. We strongly recommend that you download the Bb Instructor app and look at your course on a mobile device.

• 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.

• Download and install 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:
• Students and instructors can download Blackboard Instructor or Blackboard Mobile from Google Play or the App Store. After download, search on “Connecticut Community Colleges” and then agree to Bb terms of use. You will be prompted to log in using your NetID and Password.
  
  o Instructions related to the Bb Instructor app can be found here: https://help.blackboard.com/Blackboard_Instructor/Quick_Start#install-app-and-log-in

Adding Additional Content or Activities to Folders
Additional training is available on how to use Assignments, Tests, Rubrics, Kaltura, the Discussion Board and Rubric.

• Blank Pages: You can enter text into a Blank Page with the Content Editor, and you can also attach documents. Users must click the icon for the Blank Page to open. 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.

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

• Web links can be created from create Content area.

• YouTube videos can be created to create links to websites (including YouTube videos).

• Videos – will want to use Kaltura (special training)

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

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

• Only when a test is deployed are the settings applied that determine how and when the test will be delivered to the student.

• Only when a Test is deployed will a Grade Center column be created for it.

• Rubrics can be created using the Rubrics tool (Control Panel>Course Tools>Rubrics) and then added to a gradable activity (Assignment, Discussion, Blog, Journal, etc.) or a Rubric can be created or edited “on the fly” when a gradable activity is created.

• 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.
Messages and Email

- **Email** and **Messages** are two separate tools in Bb Learn.
- **Messages** is completely INTERNAL.
- **Email** is completely EXTERNAL—messages sent from you to students via Bb Learn’s **Email** tool are NOT archived/stored within your course!
• **Email** sent to students from the Bb Email tool ALWAYS goes to the Student’s **College Email Address**. So if you use Bb Email, be sure to tell your students that they MUST check their college email.

• **Emails sent from you to students** look as if they were sent from your external email address (whatever comes over from Banner, as displayed in My Places).

• **Emails sent from students to you** from within a Bb Learn course can be replied to Do

• Tool-related **menu buttons** should ONLY be named with actual tool names: Messages, Email, Discussions, Calendar, etc. Students must learn the correct tool names so that when they use them in different courses, they are always named the same. It will contribute to confusion for students if every instructor comes up with their own unique names for menu buttons that point to tools.

**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:**

  ![Content Collection Diagram]

  The link just below “Content Collection” takes you to the content for the course in which you’re currently working.
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 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 Blackboard **Grade Center** for each term (this is required!) and save offline for five years.
  - Steps: Full Grade Center>Work Offline>Download

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

• Enter Final Grades into Banner Faculty Self-Service.