

Blackboard: Time to Reconsider



This time of year we're all spending a lot of time in Blackboard, yet seldom does one hear its praises sung within our hallowed halls. It may not be the shiniest tool in our toolbox, and some might even say its menus and structures are less than an inspiring home for the learning and cognitive transformations we expect it to facilitate. However, if you weigh the functionality and features that Blackboard contains, it is not easily discounted as a powerful one-platform-fits-all solution. Further, the Blackboard of a few years ago is not the Blackboard of today. If you haven't taken a look lately, you might serve yourself and your students well by reconsidering and even updating your Blackboard approach.

Blackboard is often overlooked or even maligned because it is easy to take for granted the basic convenience and effectiveness of a daily workhorse. It is sort of like a Chevy Caprice; not very exciting perhaps, but when you need a ride, what really matters is its underlying capacity to get you where you want to go. Further, Blackboard has a great depth of features and flexibility that few take full advantage of. Unless you're a Blackboard expert, it might be worth taking another look at what this basic platform has to offer:

CONVENIENCE

Integrated with UA Google Apps for Education:

Blackboard coupled with Google Apps has amazingly deep potential for embedding content and engaging communities.

Powerful gradebook: Just about any scheme you can imagine can be administered from this Grade Center, and a properly configured gradebook can be your best friend and save you a lot of time (even for face-to-face courses)!

In-line grading and feedback: Your students can demonstrate their understanding via a variety of document formats where you can provide direct formative feedback quickly and efficiently.

Assessment options: Accommodates anything you can conceive of from adaptive release homework and quizzing, to embedded rubrics and surveys.

Media sharing: Secure environment for students to demonstrate their understanding using modern web tools.

NEW(ER) FEATURES

Badges and achievements: Visual signifiers for innovative assessment and student engagement strategies.

Journal: Place for students to express their learning/inquiry/metacognitive experience within your learning community or in direct but private interaction with their instructor.

Social Media: Profile based community interactions in discussion forums.

Delegate grading: Allows you to assign grading of particular assignments to particular TAs, or students!

BbGrader iOS App: Allows you to quickly provide feedback, including audio feedback, for your students.

Bb Collaborate: Powerful synchronous meeting and virtual classroom tool.

These are just a few of the things that we frequently take for granted in Bb, and a few features you may not have heard about. You'll find that today's Blackboard, though visually similar to the LMS of yesterday, holds significant capacity for enriching your course, and creating a rich learning experience for your students. The opportunities may seem overwhelming. Pick one and give it a try. This is not the Blackboard of several years ago.

If you're interested in rethinking your course design, your student engagement strategies, or looking to craft the learning experience of your dreams, help is at hand. Drop us an email or consider stopping by one of eLearning's new Open Labs. Check out our new Faculty Resources Calendar for our Open Lab schedule and additional options at your disposal.

We're here to help.