

ITAC Faculty Support

Blackboard Tips and Tricks

Customizing & Cleaning Up the Main Page

- Upon logging into Blackboard, you are directed to the My Institution page, a starting point for the entire system. You can personalize both the content and layout of this page using the Content and Layout buttons available near the top-right.
- If you teach a large number of courses that use Blackboard, the My Courses module may become unwieldy. You can pare down the module to only the current classes for a given semester simply by clicking on the pencil in the top-right corner of the module. You can then choose whether to display announcements, tasks, calendar events, or course ID for a course, or even whether to display the course at all.
 - Note that hiding courses does not remove them from Blackboard; you can still access these hidden course sites through the Courses tab at the top of the page.

Customizing your Course

- You can alter both the appearance and content of your course sites, tailoring it to your class structure and preferences.
 - To change the site appearance, select Course Design from the course Control Panel. Here you can change the menu style from solid text to buttons and can change the text and background colors as well as button styles.
 - Course Menu Design – allows you to change your menu style from buttons to text or back
 - To change the course structure, select Manage Course Menu from the Control Panel. Here you can add, remove, or modify (rename) Content and Tool areas.

Working with Course Content

- When building a Blackboard site, you can add both individual content items and folders to contain them. Folders are helpful when you intend to upload large quantities of content – you and your students can more easily find items in the site.
- Tracking student access of individual documents is easy to set up when up when first adding an item to your site; simply select 'Yes' next to Track Number of Views. Like Course Statistics, tracking provides information on the number of times a file was accessed by each student, which can be used to evaluate course performance. If you decide later to track statistics, you can do so from the Manage button next to the item.
- If you intend to upload many content items to your site, the Document Package tool can save you time.

The Document Package Tool

- The Document Package tool is a quick way to upload more than one piece of content at a time, if you have the content available on your computer.
 - Collect your desired files and folders containing files and zip them together using the built-in compression software on your computer.
 - Using the pull-down menu at the right of a course content, select Document Package and click the "Go" button.
 - Search for the .zip file you have created, select it for the file to upload, and click submit.
 - Your content will appear in your site in the same organizational structure that you chose on your computer.

Assessment

- Question Pools are an overlooked but extremely useful section of Blackboard's assessment features.
 - Questions from pools can be reused
 - Pools can be imported and exported from the Pool manager of any Blackboard site
 - Pools can be used to generate random-question tests
 - Enter questions into a pool using the pool manager
 - Create the assessment, providing a name and instructions
 - Select Random Block from the drop-down menu on the Test Canvas and click Go.
 - Select the question pool, choose the types of question to include, specify a point value and select the number of questions for the test. Click submit, and the test will be generated.
- It is possible to import multiple assessment questions into Blackboard tests or question pools with a correctly formatted document containing the questions and answers. ITAC Faculty Support can assist you with this; if you are interested, please contact them at facultysupport@case.edu.

The Assignment Manager

- The Assignment Manager lets instructors add assignments to any content area of a Blackboard course and manage them easily through the gradebook. All completed assignments and submitted files are accessible through the gradebook, are organized by student name and can be downloaded individually or together for offline grading.
 - Using the pull-down menu at the right of a course content area, select Assignment. Click the "Go" button.
 - Name the assignment, provide instructions and upload any necessary files.
 - A Gradebook entry will be created. To access completed assignments, enter the gradebook and look for the Assignment column. All the submissions are accessible together through the column header.

Navigating Blackboard Courses

- Within each course and organization site, below the My Institution, Courses, and Community tabs, Blackboard offers a navigation tool that has been called the "breadcrumb trail." This collection of links allows you to return quickly to any point within your course site, without having to use the unreliable back button in your browser.

Groups

- Setting up Groups in Blackboard can provide students with a private discussion board, file-sharing area, and group email address that all make collaboration easier.
 - To Set up a group:
 - From the Control Panel, select Manage Groups, then click the "Add Group" button.
 - Give the group a name and description, then select the tools that will be available to it. (Discussion Board, Virtual Classroom, File Exchange, Email.) Click Submit.
 - To add students to the group:
 - Click the Modify button to the right of the group name and then select Add Users to Group. You can use the List All option to generate the list of all students, and then use the checkboxes to add them to the group.

Discussion Boards

- Managing the Discussion Board is facilitated by some of the included tools. Within a forum, you can choose either a Tree View or List View for viewing all threads. More management tools are available in the List View, including the ability to Lock, or Hide posts. Other useful tools for managing posts in either view are the Collect tool and the Search function:

- Lock – If a post is locked from List View (and the Change Status drop-down menu,) participants in the discussion can view but not reply to it. If a thread is locked, all of the posts within the thread are then locked.
- Hide – Hiding a post is equivalent to archiving it. It can be viewed if participants Display All posts, but is no longer an active thread.
- Collect – by selecting messages in the forum using the checkboxes to their left, you can display their contents simultaneously. This is particularly useful if you want to evaluate the work of a single student or read through a thread.
- Search – Instructors and students can use the Search function to locate specific posts or threads in any Discussion forum in the Blackboard course site.

Using a Blog or Wiki in Blackboard

- In order to facilitate communication and group projects within Blackboard, you can use blog or wiki tools. The course blogs allow students to post their thoughts on a topic much like the discussion board, but blogs can be made to be private for only the student and instructor to read, unlike discussion boards. The wiki sites are a good way for students to collaborate in creating either text or multimedia content. Like the blogs, this content can be restricted to only participating members of a group or can be made available to all members of a course

Blogs: Course blog and group blogs

- Course Blog
 - Settings – settings for the course blog are accessible through the Control Panel, under Configure Blog Tool. Here you can choose to allow students to create blog entries, view posts by other users, comment on entries, and limit the dates that the blog is available.
 - Accessing the Blog – From the main course menu (not the Control Panel!), select Tools and from there, Blog Tool. Here you can add entries or view existing entries in the blog (15, 25, or all at a time)
- Group Blog
 - Creating the blog – From the Control Panel, select a content area. From the drop-down menu at the top-right of the content area, select Blog and click “Go”. Give the blog a name and choose its members (either individuals or groups). You can then set the blog availability, whether users can see each other’s posts, select the date range and, if desired, create a related gradebook item.
 - Accessing the blog – From either the Control Panel or from the main course menu, enter the content area and click the “View” link for the blog.

Wikis: Course wiki and group wiki sites

- Course Wiki Site
 - Settings – settings are accessible through the Control Panel, under Configure Wiki Tool. Here you can choose whether to allow students to edit the site, comment on the site, and can select the available dates of the wiki.
 - Accessing the Wiki Site – From the main course menu, select Tools and then Wiki Tool. You can then edit the current page, add a new page, view the history of the current page, view a page list, or search the wiki.
- Group Wiki Sites
 - Creating the site – From the Control panel, select a content area. From the drop-down menu at the top-right of the content area, select Wiki and click “Go”. Give the site a name and description and choose its participants. You can then make the content visible, allow student comments and set the dates that group members can edit and non-group members can view the site. You can also create a related gradebook item.
 - Accessing the site – From either the Control Panel or the main course menu, enter the content area and click the “View” link for the site.
 - Evaluating sites – It is possible to evaluate student participation in the group wiki sites by going to the Control Panel and then Assess Wikis. Here you can view participation by the team members.