Blackboard Communications Guide

1. Introduction
E-mail, discussion forums, the digital drop box, and virtual classrooms are just a few of the useful communication tools offered by Blackboard. This guide provides an overview of the use of these tools.

Tools discussed in this guide:
• Announcements
• E-mail
• Discussion Board
• Group Pages
• Personal and Course Calendars
• Personal and Course Task Lists
• Digital Drop Box
• Student Roster
• Virtual Classroom/Chat
• Student Homepages

More assistance with Blackboard is available from the ITAC website: http://www.case.edu/its/itac/blackboard/ . Blackboard help is also available by calling 368-8600 to speak with a Student Technology Consultant, or by emailing facultysupport@case.edu .

2. Finding the Communication Tools
The communication tools are located under several different buttons on each course's Blackboard page. The default buttons containing the communication tools are Announcements, Communication, and Tools. The Calendar and Task List are located under Tools on each user's **My Institution** page. For each course, the instructor can change the names of some of the buttons.

Button Content:
Communication: Announcements, Collaboration (Virtual Classroom/Chat), Discussion Board, Group Pages, Messages, Roster, E-Mail
Tools: Calendar, Digital Drop Box, Homepage, Tasks, Electric Blackboard.

3. Activating the Communication Tools (for Instructors)
Instructors and students have access to a number of communication tools. Several of these are automatically activated and are available from each person's My Institution page: Tasks, Announcements, Calendar, and Send E-mail.

There are also tools associated with each class you teach: Send E-mail, Digital Drop Box, course Tasks and Calendar, Virtual Classroom/Chat, and Discussion Groups**.** To make specific selections for each course, go to the **Control Panel**, and under **Course Options,** click on **Manage Tools.** In **Tool Availability** you can make available or unavailable many of the course tools including the communication tools. Simply select the check box by your choice and click

Submit at the bottom of the page. ***Note***: *Because each course has its own* ***Control Panel****, you must make any communication specifications for each course separately*.

4. Announcements

Announcements are associated with a particular class. They will be displayed in the **My Institution** page of each user enrolled in the class as well as on the first page of the course site. If you wish to post the same message to several classes, you must log into each class separately to create announcements. Remember, you can always copy and paste the message from one class to another. To post an announcement:

1. Go to the **Control Panel**. From the **Course Tools** section, choose **Announcements**.
2. Click the **Add Announcement** button at the top of the screen.
3. Type in the subject of the announcement and then the content of the message. You can use HTML if you want to include a link to website in the message or to change the color of the text for emphasis -- just be sure to select the radio button by HTML. You can also include a link with the **Course Link** option below.
4. Enter the dates when you want the announcement displayed, or make the announcement permanent by clicking the appropriate radio button.
5. Click **Submit**. You will see a verification screen.

To edit announcements, return to the **Control Panel** and click **Announcements**. Click **Modify** to change the announcement. Click **Remove** to delete the announcement.

5. Send E-Mail

The e-mail function in Blackboard uses the standard CASE e-mail system. Blackboard allows you to send the same message to an individual, the entire class, or to selected members or groups within that class. The email system can be found in the **Control Panel**, or by clicking the **Communication** button.

Recipients can include:

All Users (students, instructors, TAs, etc.)
All Groups
All TAs
All Instructors
All Observers
Select Users (check the box by name(s) you want)
Select Groups (check the box by the group(s) you want)
Select Observers (check the box by the observer(s) you want)

1. Choose message recipient(s).
2. Type the subject and message.
3. You can also add attachments. Click the **Add** button and browse for the files to attach.
4. Click **Submit** to send, or **Cancel** to quit
5. After you send a message, you should receive a confirmation.
6. Retrieve messages in your regular e-mail program (e.g., Eudora, Outlook, Thunderbird)

6. Discussion Boards

Discussion boards allow for a forum of ideas on class topics. The Discussion Board system can be found under **Communications**, or by clicking the **Discussion Board** button.

Creating a Discussion Board

To create a discussion board, click on **Add Forum**. You will be asked to supply the title and a brief description of the forum as well as several settings. You can allow anonymous posts and grant the person who wrote the message the power to delete or edit the message after it has been posted. You can also let students create new threads or add attachments to their posts. You can also block users or give them administrative privileges. Click the **Submit** button at the bottom of the page when you have made your selections.

Using the Discussion Board

Choose a forum. It will show the threads submitted to the board and will have an indication of how many messages exist and how many are new or unread since your last visit.

The forum is organized like a table with several columns: a checkbox to select a particular message, the message topic, the sender, and the date the message was sent. Sort messages by selecting date, author, or subject in the **Sort By:** box below the messages.

Click on the message subject to read its contents. Click on the author's name to send that person a personal response via e-mail. ***Note:*** *Clicking on the author's address will launch your preferred e-mail program.*

In the upper right corner of the window is a tab labeled **Show Options** or **Hide Options**. Use this to display a number of functions for organizing and keeping track of the messages: **Select Al**l, **Invert**, **Unselect All**, **Mark Read**, and **Mark Unread**. *Instructors* will also see **Lock**, **Unlock**, and **Remove**; these will enable them to prevent the author from changing them or to delete them.

When reading a message, click the **Reply** button at the bottom to respond to a message. In the reply/new message window, simply type your response. It can be plain text or it can contain HTML. Users may be allowed to send an attachment along with the message. The original message will be displayed below. When you are done composing the message, click **Preview** to read through your message or **Submit** to post it to the message board.

Searching: When you first enter a discussion board, there is a **Search** button on the upper right hand side of the screen (just above the **Show/Hide Options** tab, with **Expand All** and **Collapse All**). Click **Search** to look through all message fields to look for your keywords. The search will generate a list of messages that contain the criteria you specified. Click on the link to read the message in which you are interested.

Archived Messages

The instructor may archive a discussion board and all of its postings by clicking on the **Archives** link. Once messages are archived, they do not show up with the rest of the messages. Click on

Archives and the archived messages will appear. If none exist, a message will say so. The instructor may create an archive by clicking **Add Archive**. Give the Archive a title and description and click **Submit**. ***Note***: *If you want the messages to remain available to the students, make sure to check the box by* "**The archive and its messages are available to students**" *at the bottom of the screen.* Once you submit, you may select the archive. You will see that there are no messages. Scroll to the bottom of the page and select the threads you want included in the archive; click **Submit**.

7. Group Pages

The Blackboard Group Pages provide space for assigned groups of students to work together on and communicate about course projects. Instructors must create each group through the course **Control Panel**; see the Faculty Quickstart for specific details.

Note: *Students can only enter the Group Page of which they are a member*.

Each Group Pages can be found in **Communications** under the link **Group Pages**. You will see all of the groups that exist for the course, with the name of the group as a link, and a description of the group.

Tools available to the group will be listed at the top of the screen. The names of the members and their e-mail addresses will appear below. The instructor must enable each tool through **Manage Groups** under **User Management** in the **Control Panel**. Four tools are potentially available. Each tool works like the one available to the entire class but is separate from it and the only group members may participate.

Discussion Board – the instructor must create a forum for the group to participate in a discussion.
Collaboration – Virtual Classroom and Virtual Chat capabilities
File Exchange – this works just like the Digital Drop Box so that group members can send each other files
Send Email – facilitates email communication within the group

8. Calendars

Blackboard contains two calendars, the personal calendar and the course calendar. The Personal Calendar is under **Tools** on the **My Institution** page. This calendar will show events from any courses that the user is enrolled in or teaching and also any other events the user has added. The Course Calendars are built into each course site, and therefore unique to each site. They are accessible through the **Control Panel** of each site. Use the Course Calendar to post information and events relevant to each class. The events posted here will appear in each enrolled user's Personal Calendar as well. Students cannot add or edit events on the Course Calendar.

The Personal Calendar appears for each user as **My Calendar** on the **My Institution** page, showing events for today and the next few days. The Personal Calendar is also visible under **Tools** on the same page. This displays the full calendar, viewable by day, week, month, and year; click the appropriate tab to display each timeframe.

To add an event to the Calendar, click the **Add Event** button at the top of the screen. Enter an event name and description. Set the time and date for the event and click **Submit**. Click the **Modify** button to change details of the event, or click the **Remove** button to delete the event from the calendar.

The Course Calendar is accessible to all users from the **Tools** button in the course site. **Calendar** will be a link in the list, and the calendar displayed will be view-only. To add or edit events, go to the **Control Panel** and select **Course Calendar** from **Course Tools**. Adding or modifying events is the same as in the Personal Calendar, but events will be displayed in both the Course Calendar and the Personal Calendar of all enrolled users.

9. Tasks

Blackboard contains a tool called **Tasks** that lets you create a list of dated, prioritized tasks that you want to remember. Tasks are available under the **Tools** menu on the **My Institution** page. Instructors also have access to **Course Tasks** where they can designate tasks for each of their classes. Tasks for classes user-created tasks are both displayed on **My Institution** under **My Tasks.**

To add a new personal task, click **Tasks** under the **Tools** menu on the **My Institution** page, then click **Add Task** at the top of the page. Create a task name and description, and set a due date, priority (low, normal, high), and status (Not Started, In Progress, Completed) for the task. Click **Submit** to add the task to your task list.

Changing the status and priority of the task is accomplished by clicking on the icon representing the tasks priority or clicking the status of the task. To modify the due date, description, or name of the task, click the **Modify** button next to the task in the task list. Delete the task with the **Remove** button.

Course Tasks are visible in **My Tasks** or can be viewed from each course site by clicking the **Tools** button and selecting **Tasks**. Adding course tasks must be done from the **Control Panel**, however. **Tasks** is listed under **Course Tools**. Adding and modifying tasks is the same as for personal tasks.

10. Digital Drop Box

The Digital Drop Box provides a way for students to send files to their instructors and for you to share files with students. Instructors must enter the Drop Box by going to the **Control Panel** and choosing **Digital Drop Box** from the **Course Tools**. View files sent by students by clicking on the name of the file. Click **Send a File** to return a file to a student. Choose the student’s name from the list provided (hold the **Ctrl** (Windows) or **Apple** (Macintosh) key and click on more than one name to send the same file to multiple recipients). Choose from files in your Drop Box or select one from among the files on your hard drive, give the file a title, fill in any comments, and click **Submit**.

Students may share files with each other only if they are in the same student group. Then they may use the **File Exchange** function within the **Group Pages** area from the **Communication** button.

11. Student Roster

Find your class roster by clicking on the **Communication** button and choosing **Roster** from among the communication tools. You can view the class list or search by last name. If you click on a student's name, you can view his/her Blackboard webpage for the current course. Student e-mail addresses may or may not be listed depending on how they have their personal information set up. However, you will be able to send e-mail to them via the **Send E-mail** function.

12. Synchronous Communication: Virtual Classroom & Chat

Virtual Classroom and Virtual Chat run on a Java applet that can be slow to load, but once it's running, speed is not an issue. Start a virtual classroom session for a particular course by clicking **Communication**, and selecting **Collaboration**. Click **Join** next to a collaboration session to open a new virtual classroom or chat.

The Virtual Classroom window is similar to the window of many instant messaging clients, but with many more features included. Each element of the interface is discussed below.

Menu Bar

The buttons on the menu bar control the global aspects of the discussion.

The **View** button controls how private messages are displayed: either in-line with the rest of the chat, or in a separate window next to the main chat.

The **Control** button defines what features users have access to within the Virtual Classroom. All users will be able to see what happens within the classroom, but only users with access to a feature will be able to make changes. The two classes of users are active and passive. Instructors are active by default, and students are passive by default. Students can be made active if they request it by raising their hand.

The **Clear** button allows you to either clear only the whiteboard currently displayed or the whiteboards of all users.

The **End** button ends the session and expels all of the users from the session.

The **Breakouts** button defines a new session of the virtual classroom with whatever users you assign to it.

Recording controls are located to the far right of the menu bar. The **Record**, **Pause**, and **Stop** buttons function like on any VCR, and the **Folder** button creates a bookmark within the recording. The recording will contain a record of all chat window activity, changes made to the whiteboard, and questions asked within the session. The recordings will be accessible from the Collaboration area in Blackboard.

Classroom Tools/Whiteboard

On the upper left of each Virtual Classroom window is a list of classroom tools. Course Map, Whiteboard, and Group Browser control what is displayed in the whiteboard, and Ask Question and Question Inbox are class interaction tools.

The Course Map allows you to display any content area within your Blackboard site on the Whiteboard. You can also preview the page in a separate window outside the Virtual Classroom. A permanent link to any site displayed is shown in the chat area.

The Whiteboard function is a simple drawing toolkit, like Paint in Windows or a very primitive Photoshop. It’s possible to draw lines, circles, and rectangles, or you can free draw with the pen tool. You can lay down text and equations with the “T” button and the “Sigma” buttons, respectively. Controls for the draw and text functions are below. Under the Controls tab, you can create and switch between multiple Whiteboards. To clear the whiteboard, click the eraser icon above the whiteboard.

The Group Browser works like the Course Map function. It allows you to display any website in the whiteboard space, though space is rather limited.

The Ask Question and Question Inbox functions are two linked elements of the same function. By default, Ask Question is the only tool that passive users (students) may access. Students enter questions there and submit them to the Question Inbox. The number next to the Question Inbox entry in Classroom Tools is the number of questions in the inbox. Clicking on the student’s name in the Question Inbox displays the student’s question, and by clicking on the arrow above the list of student’s names, instructors may respond to questions. When the response is submitted, both the question and the response will appear in the chat area.

Participant List
Each person within the session is listed here, along with an icon showing the person’s role in the classroom. Double-clicking on a participant’s name will open a window for sending a private message to that participant. You can also select a name and display some basic **User Info** using the button at the bottom of the window.

Students can “raise their hands” to ask for “the floor” of the Virtual Classroom. A hand icon will appear next to the participant’s name, and the number at the top of the column will show how many students have their hands raised. To give the floor to the student, in other words, to make the student active, click on the colored head icon at the lower right. The participant will now be able to chat publicly, send private messages, answer questions, and use any other tool available to active users. When the student has finished, click the grayed head icon to make the user passive again.

Chat Area
To send text to all users, use the text box below the chat area and hit send. For longer messages, use the compose tool at the left of the text box. Everything that appears in the chat area except private messages appears to all users. Changes made to the whiteboard along with questions asked and answered will appear here as well.

13. Student Home Pages

Through Blackboard, students in a course have the capacity to create personal webpages to tell a little about themselves and their interests. There is space for personal information – even a photo – and a few links. Instructors must enable the Homepage Tool through the course Control Panel.

Viewing Student Homepages

To view a Student Page, go to the course's **Communication** button and then click on **Roster**. Search for a name or choose **List All**. View the student's page by clicking on the person's name.

Editing a Student Page

To edit a Student Page, the student must enter your course, click on the **Tools** button, and choose **Homepage**. There is no need to know any HTML to create and edit a student page. However, knowledge of HTML can spruce up a page with different fonts or different colors or even for adding other images or links. Instructors will also see the **Homepage** button, but the link goes nowhere.

1. To get to the page editor, click on **Tools** and choose **Homepage**.
2. In the **Introduction** space, type in some text to welcome visitors to your page.
3. Under **Personal Information**, add details about yourself. You can even include a picture in the **Upload Image** section. Click **Browse**... to select a file to upload. If you want to delete the picture at some later date, check the box by Remove This Image.
4. Scroll down to **Favorite Web Sites**. You have space to put in three different links to other webpages. Fill in the name of the link, the URL (it must contain the http:// part too), and a description of the site.
5. Next click **Submit** at the bottom of the Editor screen.
6. You should receive a success message.
7. Click **Back** to return to the **Tools**, or go to **Communication** then **Roster** and click on your name to view your page.
8. Any time you want to change your page, just go back to **Homepage**.