

# The Blackboard Learning System

Overview of Product Capabilities



# INSTRUCTION, COMMUNICATION AND ASSESSMENT

The **Blackboard Learning System™** is an industry-leading software application used to power virtual learning environments, supplement classroom education and as a platform for distance learning programs. Featuring a robust core set of capabilities that enable instructors to efficiently manage courses, author content, create assignments, and foster collaboration, among other key functions, the Blackboard Learning System help institutions accomplish mission-critical objectives related to instruction, communication and assessment. These key capabilities include:



## **Course Management:**

Addresses activities involving managing the course site or major components of the course site. Course Management capabilities focus on effective creation and set-up of courses (Course Creation Wizard, Course Templates) as well as tools for semester-to-semester migration (Course Copy, Course Recycle) and archiving (Course Import/Export, Course Archive, Course Backup).



## **Content Authoring:**

The Visual Text Box Editor provides a rich text editing interface, including WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) and Spell Check, to create effective learning content. QuickEdit allows an instructor to quickly switch between the student view of a course content area and the instructor view. Instructors can also import e-learning content created in external authoring tools such as Macromedia® Dreamweaver®, Microsoft® Frontpage®, or any SCORM-compliant authoring tool.



## **Adaptive Release:**

Provides the ability for an instructor to create custom learning paths through course content and activities. Content items, discussions, assessments, assignments, or other activities can be released to students based on a set of criteria including: date/time, username, group membership, institution role, grade on a particular test or assignment, or whether the user has previously reviewed another piece of content.



## **Syllabus Builder:**

Provides the ability for instructors to easily create a course syllabus by uploading an existing syllabus or by using the built-in syllabus creation functionality to design and develop their own course syllabus and lesson plans.



## **Learning Units:**

Allows instructors to create sequenced lessons and control whether students must progress through the Learning Unit according to the sequence or have the ability to select individual lessons from the table of contents. Students can save their place in a Learning Unit and return later.



## **Online Textbook Content (Course Cartridges):**

All major education publishers create pre-packaged content and course materials in the Blackboard Course Cartridge format to supplement their course textbooks. The course content may contain multimedia, assessments, Question Pools, and links to additional resources, such as interactive learning applications, that supplement the textbook reading. Cartridge materials can be customized once downloaded into a course site.



## **Teaching and Learning Tools:**

A variety of tools designed for support of specific teaching or learning activities. Examples include the Glossary, a tool to create sharable, customizable term-definition lists; the Electric Blackboard, an online note-taking tool students can use to take and save notes online as they work through their course materials; and Staff Information, the detailed contact information and office hours for the course instructors and teaching assistants.



## **Personal Information Management:**

The Calendar allows a user to manage and view course-specific events, populated by a course's instructor, as well as personal and institutional events. The Tasks tool allows instructors to assign tasks with Priority and Due Dates to students (individuals or groups) and track their progress. Blackboard Messages facilitates email-like communication within a course without relying on external email systems or addresses.



## **Discussion Board:**

The Discussion Board enables threaded, asynchronous discussions. Instructors can set up multiple forums around different topics and embed those forums in appropriate content areas or lessons. Instructors can determine whether students can modify, delete, post anonymously, include attachments, and other options. Forums can be sorted/viewed by thread, author, date, or subject and are completely searchable.



## **Virtual Classroom / Collaboration Tool:**

The Collaboration Tool, designed for live, synchronous interaction, supports a text-based Chat environment, as well as a full Virtual Classroom. Instructors can schedule collaboration sessions using either environment. In addition to text-based chat, the Virtual Classroom provides a collaborative whiteboard, group web browsing (web touring), private question-and-answer, and breakout room capability. It can be run in a Lecture Mode or an Open Participation Mode. Users can "raise their hand" to be called on or given full participation control. All chat sessions can be logged and archived.



### Group Projects:

To support peer collaboration, instructors can use the Groups tool to form multiple groups of students. Each group can be given its own file exchange area, Discussion Board, Virtual Classroom and a Group Email tool to send messages to all group members. Students can belong to multiple groups simultaneously, so an instructor might assign different groups for different assignments or projects.



### Assessments and Surveys:

Instructors can deliver online, automatically-scored assessments and surveys. They can create such assessments from scratch or draw upon personal, institutional, or commercially-available “test banks” of questions. Question types include Calculated Formula, Calculated Numeric, Hotspot, Jumbled Sentence, Likert Scale, True/False, Multiple Choice, Multiple Answer, Ordering, Matching, Fill-in-the-Blank, Short Answer, Essay, File Upload, and Binary Choice. Assessment questions can be given all at once or one at a time, can be timed or un-timed, and assessments can be taken multiple times or only once.



### Assignments:

Allows instructors to create assignment items through which students can submit their response to the assignment. Instructors can track the students’ assignments and download the submissions from an entire class simultaneously through the Gradebook. They can grade the assignments and provide feedback for each student which may be viewed online when checking their grades.



### Gradebook:

Instructors can store student performance results in the course Gradebook. Scores from assessments delivered through Blackboard are automatically recorded in the Gradebook. The Gradebook supports custom grading scales, grade weighting, item analysis, and multiple gradebook views. With the instructor’s permission, students can view their own grades (but no one else’s) in the course Gradebook.



### Reporting and Performance Dashboard:

The Performance Dashboard provides a view of student progress and indicates whether students have reviewed specific content items. Content Tracking provides usage statistics (filterable by user or date range) for individual content items. Similarly, Course Statistics provides usage data for an entire course. Advanced System Reporting maintains a parallel database to allow System Administrators to run comprehensive reports without impacting system performance.



### Enterprise Scalability:

Based on robust, industry standard web servers, application servers, and databases, the Blackboard system has a proven ability to scale to hundreds of thousands of active users. Out-of-the-box load balancing supports easy configuration of additional application servers to allow the implementation to grow with adoption. Likewise, multiple database fail-over support assures a reliable, high-availability enterprise environment.



### Multi-Language Support:

Enables institutions to run multiple languages on the same system. Instructors can even set the language of the course independently from the language setting of the overall system. In addition to supporting most European languages, Blackboard supports multi-byte character sets such as Japanese and Chinese.



### Standards:

Compliance and interoperability with industry standards is a fundamental capability of Blackboard’s software products. Blackboard is a strong advocate for open industry standards in the areas of system interoperability (IMS, SIF, OKI, etc.); content specifications (IMS, SCORM, NLN, etc.), privacy (FERPA), accessibility (Section 508), and metadata (IMS, Dublin Core, etc.).



### Blackboard Building Blocks (Open APIs):

Our open architecture initiative, **Blackboard Building Blocks®**, provides a public, free software development kit (SDK) that documents application programming interfaces (APIs). Clients and independent software vendors use the Blackboard Building Blocks technology to create new functionality on top of the Blackboard platform or integrate external systems with Blackboard products.



### System Integration:

Blackboard’s data and system integration capabilities, enabled through the Blackboard Building Blocks architecture, allow institutions to integrate student information systems, campus authentications systems (LDAP, Kerberos, Active Directory, etc.), and other campus back-office systems with the Blackboard platform.



**Blackboard**

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