

Understanding the Changes in Blackboard NG

System Wide Improvements

All users will enjoy a number of changes in Blackboard which impact the entire system.

Features Gained

+ Accessibility Improvements

Improvements to accessibility ensure that all users, including those with assistive technologies, find the product easy to use. These changes are, for the most part, under-the-covers and utilize a combination of CSS (Cascading Style Sheets) and semantic markup, such as well formed HTML. There are also a few features that appear to users, such as keyboard re-ordering and accepted personal styles

+ Embedded Help

Embedded help throughout Blackboard helps users with and without disabilities access the features of Blackboard easily. The personal setting to hide or show help until the user chooses to call upon it again helps users from both perspectives: it removes text from the application that may be distracting, or it adds text to the application that helps them without forcing them to leave what they are doing. Institutions also have the option to customize this help text to meet their specific needs.

+ New User Interface Design

Users will enjoy not only a new look, but advanced user interface functionality such as drag and drop, inline edit capabilities and consolidated page layouts.

+ Inline Confirmations Everywhere

Instead of separate receipt pages, inline confirmations are used throughout the system for more seamless workflows.

+ Fewer Clicks Everywhere

Users will enjoy using fewer clicks to navigate the system and complete tasks.

Understanding Announcements

The features in the Announcements tool are very similar to those in previous releases of Blackboard Learn. While the announcements filter has been removed, faculty and administrators will enjoy a number of new flexible options for displaying announcements.

Features Gained

+ Multiple Display Options

Announcements can be displayed on both a Course Announcements page, a portal Announcements module and in a course specific Announcements module giving the instructors added flexibility over how the information is presented.

+ Priority Ordering

Instructors have the ability to re-order the display of announcements so the most important information will appear first.

+ Options to only Display Course Announcements

Instructors may select to only display course announcements in their course, and not display system announcements. This enables Instructors to reserve course announcements for pertinent information and reduces the noise level of announcements within the course.

+ Login Page Announcements

Administrators can communicate critical information to users before they login by placing Announcements directly on the login page. Institutions should develop and communicate business rules for displaying announcements prior to login.

+ Advanced Filtering Options

Advanced filtering options to display All, Course only, and System only announcements enable users to easily find important announcements and recover critical details.

+ Notifications

Notifications of new Course Announcements will appear on users' dashboards and may be sent via email according to the users personal preferences.

Features

Assignments

Users will enjoy a number of new enhancements to the Assignments feature, such as the ability for students to submit multiple attempts of an assignment when the Instructor would like to see iterative progress. Instructors can also allow students to turn in additional attempts of an assignment for exceptional cases or submissions.

Additionally, faculty has more flexibility when it comes to submitting grades for their students.

Features Gained

+ Multiple Attempts

Instructors can allow students Multiple Attempts at the same assignment. The instructor can grade each attempt individually. This promotes the learning process and allows instructors to track progress.

+ Additional Attempts

Instructors have the ability to give specific students an additional attempt at an assignment in order to accommodate extenuating circumstances.

+ Submission Field

Students have access to a submission field in addition to attachments to provide text and links to online documents and websites.

+ Submission History

The Submission History provides a quick recap of the submission content, feedback, comments, grades and participants of each submission. This allows students to see what they have completed and allows instructors to view the progress made throughout the lifecycle of the assignment.

+ Release Assignments to Groups

The Assignments feature has been expanded to Groups so that a set of students can work together on one deliverable.

+ Group Grades

If a Group completes an Assignment, the instructor can grade one student's submission and submit the same grade to all students within the Group. The instructor also has the ability to provide each student an individual grade overriding the group grade.

Calendar

The function of the Calendar is the same as the previous release of the product; all users will enjoy an improved user experience.

Features Gained

+ Duration of Activity Displayed on Calendar

The duration of activities is displayed on the Calendar, which allows for easier planning and enables users to view overlaps and conflicts between entries.

Course Navigation and Learning Content

All users will enjoy a number of new enhancements and a new user experience in Course Navigation and Learning Content. Before using the new course environment, faculty might need to be educated on the functions and best practices of the following features.

Features Gained

+ Easily Accessible Control Panel

All options in the Control Panel are now available from the main course menu. Instructors no longer have to navigate to a separate area of the course to access these options.

+ In-line Add, Edit, and Drag and Drop

In-line actions and drag and drop results in quicker Course Menu set up and management; instructors no longer have to navigate to multiple areas of the course to access these controls and they can complete each action with fewer clicks.

+ Display of Tool Links is not dependent on Tool Availability

Tool availability is no longer linked to the display of tool links in course content areas, on tools page or in the course menu. Available tools can be displayed in a content area, on the tools page, in the course menu or in any combination of the three options. The display of the link to Instructors (in the Edit – ON view) is independent of the availability of the tool.

+ Presentation Options

Items in specific content areas can be displayed in “Icon View”, “Icon with Text” or “Text Only” for increased flexibility in course creation. This increased flexibility for content presentation allows Instructors to build course content areas that suit their unique pedagogical needs.

+ Course Module Pages

Course module pages provide the instructor with another way to present course related information to students. When building or updating a course Instructors should keep in mind this new page type, the kind of material that can be added to it and the personalization options available for students if they enable it.

+ Reorganization of Course Management Actions

Course Management features, such as the Control Panel and action bars, have been re-organized to align with the day-to-day tasks performed by instructors, increasing efficiency and becoming more task-appropriate.

+ Edit Mode for Additional Tools

Edit Mode now provides the instructor with access to management capabilities for additional tools such as the discussion board, calendar and announcements rather than requiring them to go to the control panel.

+ Hidden Content Areas

Empty content areas will be hidden from the student view of a course, which allows the instructor to build out the course content while only displaying areas that contain information pertinent to students. Students will not waste time clicking on empty folders to see if it contains content.

+ Dividers and Sub-Headers

Instructors now have additional organizational elements in the course menu that enable easy restructuring of the menu in a way that matches the presentation of the course material.

+ Notifications

Personal notifications provide direct navigation to specific content from within the course, Community Engagement, and/or users’ email.

+ Tools Panel

There is no longer a separate Tools panel in the Course Menu. “Course Tools” and “Communication Tools” have been combined into a single Tools area that appears within the default Course Menu. This enables faculty to have more flexibility over tool management and presentation of tools in the course menu than previously available.

+ Tool Management

Tool management for content tools, communication tools, and building block tools has been combined into a single interface. This will improve Instructor efficiency because all the tools can be managed from a single, easy to use area.

Groups

Users will enjoy a new Groups tool which includes robust, flexible features and an improved user interface. Instructors should be educated about the new features and best practices for using them in their courses.

Features Gained

+ Group Creation Options

There are more ways to create groups with Blackboard Learn, Release 9. Students can sign up for groups they would like to join. Alternatively, Instructors can create sets of related groups and manually enroll users or randomly distribute all students amongst the groups.

+ Student Created Groups

Students have the ability to create their own groups that other students can sign up for without any involvement by the instructor.

+ Bulk Management of Groups

Instructors can manage groups and their properties in bulk upon group creation.

+ Quick Access to Group Areas

Students will have access to their group area from the Groups palette in the Course Menu and the Notifications module.

+ Group Module Page

The group area is a module page that provides access to new and existing group modules. The page also allows group members to add any additional modules that will help with group work.

+ Customizable Group Area

Groups can customize their group area to create their own space with its own look and feel.

+ Group Assignments

Instructors can create Assignments to be completed by an entire group and then give one grade for the group while still allowing individual grades to be overwritten. (See the Assignment feature for additional details).

+ Group Blogs and Journals

Groups can have their own Blog for the rest of the course to view and comment on, or a Journal for private communication within the group.

+ Group Tasks

Groups can create tasks to track progress of the group deliverables.

+ What's New Group Modules

Groups will have access to modules that provide group specific data about new material and due dates.

My Places

My Places is a new feature in Blackboard Learn, Release 9 that will provide users with quick access to frequently visited links and personal settings management. All users should be educated about the following new features.

Features Gained

+ One Click Access to Common Links and Preferences

Users can navigate to commonly accessed places within the system, such as courses they teach or participate in, without having to return to a common starting point.

+ Customizable List of Commonly Accessed Links

Users can define which links are displayed in My Places. These may include: Courses, Organizations, Bookmarks, and Outcomes Places. The types of links available depend on the institution's Blackboard licenses.

+ Quick Access to Personal Settings

Users can access personal settings such as email and privacy settings in one click, no matter where they are in the system.

+ Personal Avatar Image

Users can upload or select an approved personal image to display within My Places, Blogs and Journals. If avatars are enabled by the System Administrator, the additional function will include policies for image selection and upload.

Grade Center – formally Grade book

This tool has been completely redesigned from our current Blackboard version.

Features Gained

+With the redesigned toolbar, the Action bar, you can quickly perform multiple functions that formerly required multiple clicks and subsequent navigation to other pages. It is now possible to enter results, such as scores, percentages, or other forms of grading, into the spreadsheet itself (inline editing).

+Create Reports: Reports can display various grade and Student information. A Report could be used, for example, as a final grade Report or a mid-term progress report. The Instructor can control what grades are displayed in the Report as well as what student information appears. A signature line and any comments can

be added. Reports can then be printed from the screen and distributed.

+View Grade History – Displays selected student grade history

+ Notifications of New Grades

Students will receive notifications of new or changed grades posted by the Instructor.

Tests, Surveys and Questions

The function of the Tests, Surveys and Questions feature is the same as the previous release of the product. All users will enjoy an improved user experience.

Features Gained

+ Question Reordering

Instructors can re-order questions in a test or survey using the new drag and drop feature.

+ Fewer Clicks in All Workflows

Instructors will enjoy more efficient workflows with fewer clicks for creating, managing, and deploying tests and surveys.

What's New

The What's New module in Blackboard Learn, Release 9 has been enhanced to provide users with easier access to notifications and new content.

Features Gained

🔗🔗 Course and Organization Info

In previous releases the module displayed new content that had been added to courses in which the user was enrolled. In Blackboard Learn, Release 9 the What's New Module shows new Course and Organization content, providing links directly to the item; performance has also been enhanced for this feature.

Tracking Reports

The usability of the Tracking Reports feature has been greatly improved in Blackboard Learn, Release 9. Please note that this feature was formerly referred to as Course Statistics.