Blackboard NG
New Features
Overview of the New Features Available in Blackboard Next Generation (Release 9.1)

Northern Illinois University

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Listed below is an overview of the primary new features that faculty and TAs will find in Blackboard Next Generation (NG), version 9.1. Blackboard is currently scheduled to be upgraded from version 8.0 to 9.1 in May 2011.

The written documentation on this page comes from the Blackboard Learn 9.1 Release Notes, Enhancements, and Guides provided by Blackboard. Additional manuals, quick guides, and tutorials developed by Blackboard are also available in addition to workshops and podcasts from the Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center.

For more details on Blackboard NG, visit www.niu.edu/blackboard/ng

ACCESSIBILITY

• **Keyboard Accessible Reordering:** The Keyboard-Accessible Reordering component provides the user with an alternate method to reorder content groupings in columns and rows that would otherwise be completed using Drag and Drop. This component is positioned as a secondary emphasis page-level action.

• **Personal styles accepted:** Users can adjust the font size and other style elements in their browser regardless of the style sheet that is in place. These adjustments will remain as long as the user is logged into the system.

• **Embedded and optional help:** The embedded help throughout the application helps users with and without disabilities easily access the features of Blackboard. 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. The personal setting is found in My Places, and the on-the-fly change can be executed using the help icon in the top right corner of any page with help available.

ADAPTIVE RELEASE

• **Content Notifications:** Students are notified when content is made available via Adaptive Release. Notifications are displayed in modules within Blackboard Learn and can be delivered by email, based on the Notification settings.

• **Fewer Clicks to Create and Manage Adaptive Release Rules:** Managing Adaptive Release rules is immediately visible in the contextual menu.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

• **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 faculty added flexibility over how the information is presented.

• **Priority Ordering:** Faculty have the ability to re-order the display of announcements so the most important information will appear first.
• **Notifications**: New Course Announcements will appear on users’ dashboards and may be sent via email according to the user’s personal preferences.

**Feature Loss**

• **Announcement Filter**: Users are no longer able to view just the announcements posted from the current day.

• **Announcement Text in Email**: Email notifications for announcements include a link to the announcement, but do not include the full body of the announcement text.

**ASSIGNMENTS**

Faculty can deploy assignments to all students individually or to groups of students.

• **Additional Attempts**: Faculty have the ability to give specific students an additional attempt at an assignment in order to accommodate extenuating circumstances.

• **Group Assignments**: Only one student within the group has to submit the assignment for the whole group and similarly the faculty member has to submit only one grade for the group, which is given automatically to all of the members in the group.

• **Multiple Attempts**: Faculty can allow students multiple attempts at the same assignment. The faculty member can provide feedback and grade each attempt individually, rather than simply grading the individual submission for an assignment. This promotes the learning process and allows faculty to track progress.

• **Submission Field**: Students have access to a submission field in addition to attachments to provide text and links to online documents and websites. Students can attach a file and include additional information and hyperlinks in their assignments attempt using a submission field instead of simply attaching a file.

• **Submission History**: This provides a quick recap of the submission content, feedback, comments, grades and participants of each submission. Faculty can provide a grade and feedback for each attempt of a single assignment.

**Feature Loss**

• **Digital Drop Box**: - The functions of the new Assignment tool made the Digital Drop Box obsolete.

**BLOGS AND JOURNALS**

Blogs and Journals are new features providing students and faculty with a social learning tool for expressing their thoughts and reflecting on their learning, either privately with the faculty or publicly with others in the course. Blogs and Journals will be gradable as a single grade per student as opposed to an individual grade for each entry.

**CALENDAR**
• **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.

**CONTENT FROM VERSION 8.0**

Release 9.1 provides tools to move files from the old, hidden file system to Course Files. If faculty will be recreating their course content, the content does not need to be moved. If faculty will be reusing their course content from the earlier version, the content should be moved. Administrators and faculty will be able to move content for an individual course using the user interface.

**COURSE CUSTOMIZATION**

• **Control Panel:** The Control Panel is now available to faculty and other course users on any course page as a menu below the navigation area rather than as a standalone page.

• **Course Module Page(s):** Course Module pages can now be added to a course to provide easy access to a variety of information.

• **Menus:** Menus will now support dividers and subheadings

• **Page Banner:** Faculty will now be able to create a customized page banner using the Text Editor.

• **Tool Management:** Faculty will now be able to manage the availability of all course tools in a single interface.

• **User Management:** User management (previously controlled from multiple pages) has been simplified into a single, easy to use interface allowing faculty to quickly and efficiently enroll users, manage their course permissions and remove users from the course list.

**COURSE FILES**

The new Course Files feature provides basic content management features and functions within a course as a core part of the course delivery capabilities. There is also a new Course Files area that allows faculty or any user with an appropriate course-authoring role to view and manage all files related to their course content.

**COURSE NAVIGATION AND CONTENT**

• **Building Content:** As in Course Files, faculty can upload multiple files or entire folders from the local computer into the Content Collection by browsing for items or by dragging the items directly from the desktop to the interface.

• **Course Links:** When Course Links are created, the link and the location are automatically populated, providing consistency across the link name and location.

• **Course Module Pages:** Course module pages provide the faculty member with another way to present course related information to students.
• **Copying and Moving Items**: Move and Copy are now two distinct options for content items. This allows items that cannot be copied such as Tests, Surveys, and Assignments to be moved to another location.

• **Display of Tool Links is not dependent on Tool Availability**: The display of the link to faculty (in the Edit – ON view) is independent of the availability of the tool.

• **Dividers and Sub-Headers**: Faculty now have additional organizational elements in the Course menu.

• **Easily Accessible Control Panel**: All options in the Control Panel are now available from the main Course menu.

• **Edit Mode for Additional Tools**: Edit Mode now provides the faculty member with access to management capabilities for additional tools.

• **Hidden Content Areas**: Empty content areas will be hidden from the student view of a course, which allows the faculty member to build out the course content while only displaying areas that contain information pertinent to students.

• **In-line Add, Edit, and Drag and Drop**: In-line actions and drag and drop results in quicker Course Menu set up and management.

• **Notifications**: Notifications enable users to access content that is new or that they need to take action on.

• **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.

• **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.

• **Upload Content Using New Content Types**: Multiple content types provide faculty with extended flexibility when building and structuring content within a course.

**DISCUSSIONS**

• **Clearly identify and grade users**: Faculty can clearly identify and grade users who are members of groups participating in group discussions.

• **Enter grades, comments, and feedback when viewing Discussions**: Faculty can enter grades, comments, and feedback when viewing discussions similar to the experience in Wikis, Blogs, and Journals.

• **Notifications**: Users may receive notifications of new Discussion Board posting activity. In-system notifications, such as in the What’s New module, include links directly to the forum.

**EXTERNAL LINKS**
• **Add External Links to the Course Menu:** Faculty can manage External Links that appear in the Course Menu using inline options.

**GLOSSARY**

• **Easier Glossary Entry:** An improved workflow enables faculty to add entries to the Glossary with more ease and fewer mouse clicks.

**GRADE CENTER - INSTRUCTOR VIEW**

• **Anonymous Grading:** Faculty can grade assignments and test attempts while information identifying the student remains concealed.

• **Color Coding:** Faculty can color code Grade Center cells that meet certain criteria such as grade threshold, exempted grade and so on. This new feature helps faculty spot trends and action areas in large Grade Centers.

• **Grade Blogs and Journals:** Journals and Blogs can now be graded for individuals and for groups. For more information, see Blogs and Journals.

• **Grade by Question Attempt:** Question-by-question grading accommodates faculty whose preferred workflow for assignments and assessments is to enter grades by question for all students as opposed to by all questions by student.

• **Grade Center Row Display:** The Grade Center structures itself automatically to the available browser space but the user can define a minimum number of rows to display regardless of browser size or screen resolution.

• **Rubrics for Grading and Completing Assignments:** Faculty can create a Rubric to provide guidelines for grading an item. Faculty can associate the Rubric to a grading column and view the Rubric while assigning a grade.

• **Smart Views:** Faculty can designate any system or custom Smart View as a favorite, which will result in it displaying in the Control Panel.

**GRADE CENTER – STUDENT VIEW**

• **Notifications of New Grades:** Students will receive notifications of new or changed grades posted by the faculty member.

**GROUPS**

• **Create Groups:** Faculty can create any number of Groups at once and provide default settings and description for each Group. Students can then be automatically enrolled in those Groups, manually enrolled at a later date, or asked to sign-up up for a Group themselves. These Groups then can be managed collectively (in bulk) or individually. Alternatively, faculty can create sets of related Groups and manually enroll users or randomly distribute all Students amongst the Groups.
• **Group Assignments:** Faculty 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.

• **Group Management:** Group Members can access a customizable Group area where they will communicate and collaborate with their Group members using the Group tools available on the page. Group assignments and notifications will be listed within the modules provided, and Group material can be saved and authored collectively from this location. The Group area provides a one stop shop for Group work. 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. Groups will have access to modules that provide Group specific data about new material and due dates.

• **Group Sets:** A Group is a collection of students. A Group Set is a collection of Groups. Originally, all of the Groups within the Group Set will contain the same default settings and description. Groups within a Group Set can then be managed in bulk or modified individually to customize the settings or description for a specific Group.

• **Student Group Creation:** Students can create their own Groups in the absence of faculty participation to take advantage of the robust Group communication and collaboration tools provided. Students can provide a description of the group and limit the number of students able to enroll in the group. Faculty members always have the option of modifying or restricting access to groups created by students. Students can sign up for groups they would like to join.

**Group Tools:**

• **Blogs and Journals** - Group members are able to Blog thoughts and ideas for the rest of the bourse to comment on or add Journal entries for private reflection within the Group.

• **Customization** - Groups can customize their Group area to create their own space with its own look and feel.

• **Discussion Board** - Group members can create their own Discussion Board forums that allow them to conduct ongoing conversations.

• **Tasks** - Group members can create Tasks to track the progress of their deliverables. These tasks can be conducted and completed by any of the members in the Group.

**Learning Modules**

Faculty and Instructional Designers will use Learning Modules to organize and present content to students in their Blackboard Learn courses. Students will use Learning Modules to access course content and navigate Learning Module content using the Table of Contents.
• **Drag and Drop Reordering**: Faculty can easily re-order content items and folders in a Learning Module using the drag and drop feature.

• **Table of Contents View**: The faculty member can choose whether to present the content contained in the Learning Module in a hierarchical, outline-style format. Faculty members may create folders and sub-folders within Learning Modules and populate them with content. The Table of Contents can be manipulated by faculty and students to accommodate individual viewing preferences. It can be minimized and oriented on the left side or along the bottom of the screen.

• **Content Folder Structure**: Faculty may create folders and sub-folders within Learning Modules and populate them with content.

**LESSON PLANS**

The Lesson Plan feature enables faculty and course designers to create a structured unit plan with distinct and customizable sections that provide a means of documenting information such as description, learning level, delivery instructions, and so on. Lesson Plans also include content designed for an individual unit using any type of content or tool enabled in the course. This feature will meet the challenge of developing unit plans and incorporating content in blended environments where classroom faculty use Blackboard Learn as an instructional tool in the classroom as well as for online teaching. Another challenge that faculty have is reducing the time spent planning and creating materials to focus on instructional activities. As a planning tool, the Lesson Plan feature will benefit faculty who can centrally plan and consolidate materials and resources. Faculty will also have a streamlined means of selectively exposing information and resources to students as part of the planning process.

**MASHUPS**

• **Uploading Mashups Content**: This release supports the uploading of Mashups content from the following third-party services:
  - **YouTube** - enables users to share videos
  - **Flickr** - enables users to share photos
  - **SlideShare** - enables users to share presentations

**MY PLACES**

My Places provides the user with quick and easy navigation to a variety of places within Blackboard Learn. It is always one click away in the top frame, and contains a customizable set of links to frequently accessed information as well as tools to personalize a user's own experience.

• **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.
• **Manage Notifications Settings:** From My Places, users will be able to manage notification settings for all courses and organizations they are enrolled in as well as other personal and privacy settings including updating their name, address and contact information, determining what information is public, who can view it, and who can email them.

**NOTIFICATIONS**

Blackboard Learn provides timely and actionable Notifications of faculty’s course information, including when new content becomes available, when students meet Early Warning System rules criteria and when student submitted assignments and tests are available for grading. Notifications are displayed in modules within Blackboard Learn and are delivered by email, either as individual email notes or as a daily Notifications digest.

• **Faculty Notifications:** Recognizing that faculty do not live in Blackboard, Notifications delivers course information to instructors via email in a format that draws them back into Blackboard to view or act upon the Notification.

• **Student Notifications:** Blackboard Learn provides timely and actionable Notifications of student's course information, including when new content becomes available and due dates of assignments and tests. Notifications are displayed in modules within Blackboard Learn and are delivered by email, either as individual email notes or as a daily Notifications digest.

• **Creating New Notifications:** Faculty can control the delivery of Notifications in several ways:

  • **Display As-Of date range:** Content Availability Notifications will be sent to students based on these dates. If there are no Display As Of dates on the item, Notifications will be delivered immediately.

  • **Adaptive Release Rules:** Any content that is subject to Adaptive Release rules will send Notifications to the appropriate students if and when they meet the criteria of the Adaptive Release rules.

  • **Announcements:** When creating Announcements, email Notifications can be forced to students by email, regardless of what personalization settings the student may have. This is an excellent way to send emergency Notifications, such as when a class is canceled.

Some Notifications are created by the actions of students, as when a student submits an Assignment or Survey, or when posts are made to Discussion Board forums, Blogs, and Journals.

**Feature Loss**

• **Announcement Text in Email** – Email notifications for announcements include a link to the announcement, but do not include the full body of the announcement text.
• **Announcement Filter** - Users are no longer able to view just the announcements posted from the current day.

• **Digital Dropbox** - The more robust Assignments tool and the Group File Exchange feature meets the needs of individual users and groups for completing and managing course work. These functions made the Digital Drop Box obsolete. For more information, see Assignments.

• **Electric Blackboard** - Now students can use Journals to complete these same tasks, making it much more fully featured than the Electric Blackboard tool. For more information, see Blogs and Journals.

• **Student Homepages** - Student homepages are no longer needed because the new Blogs tool enables students to express their thoughts and reflect on learning within a course and the My Places tool allows student to post their avatar system-wide (instead of limited to the Course environment) and includes additional functionality and a customizable set of links to frequently accessed information as well as tools to personalize a user’s own experience.

**Tests, Surveys, and Question Pools**

Faculty and Course Builders have expanded question management capabilities available for use when creating Tests, Surveys, and Question Pools. These changes allow for more centralized control over question content and reduce the amount of time required to make global edits.

• **Copy Test, Surveys, and Pools:** Faculty and course builders can now copy a Test, Survey, or Pool directly from the List page.

• **Link to Questions:** Faculty and course builders can choose to link to or copy questions from any Test, Survey, or Pool within a Course.

• **Question Finder:** Faculty and course builders have a new interface from which to discover questions. Faculty and course builders can create Tests, Surveys, and Pools by reusing questions that have been collected in the Question Finder repository.

• **Question Sets:** In addition to Random Blocks, faculty can use Question Sets to randomly select a set number of questions to appear on a Test that are pulled from a specific group of questions selected by the faculty member. Faculty can select to include questions from one or more existing Tests and Pools. From this set, the faculty member specifies how many questions to display on the Test. The specific questions displayed are chosen randomly each time the Test is taken.

• **Random Blocks:** Random Blocks pull questions into a test from a pool based on certain criteria. They are dynamic and reflect changes to the question pool. Question Sets are static and are made up of specific questions selected to be in the Question Set used in the Test.

• **Response Statistics:** Question and response statistics are displayed for each question on the Tests Statistics page.
• **Reorder Questions:** Faculty and course builders can change the order of questions in a test or survey using the new drag and drop feature.

**WHAT'S NEW MODULE**

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.

**WIKIS**

The new Wiki tool allows faculty to create Wikis for Courses, organizations, and groups to host collaborative content and group projects.

• **Grading Wikis:** Faculty can grade Wikis without having to leave the Wiki and go to the Grade Center. Students can be given group or individual grades to allow grading based on individual contribution.

• **Viewing Participating Summaries:** Faculty are provided with a summary of student participation in a Wiki that allows them to drill down to detailed views to help assess each student’s contribution.

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