**Overview of Communication Tools and What They Do**

Blackboard includes many tools for communicating with and allowing collaboration between your students.

The asynchronous tools in this tutorial include: Announcements, Blogs, Discussion Board, Journals, Email, and Wikis.

Announcements are an ideal tool for communicating time-sensitive material to students, such as reminders about upcoming due dates or changes to the syllabus. Announcements can be accessed from the Course Menu. The Announcements link is included as a default menu item when the course is originally created.

Announcements are automatically posted in reverse chronological order so that the most recent posting appears at the top of the list.

Faculty can select date restrictions to control when the individual announcements are initially displayed and removed from student view. An email copy can also be sent out to students. In addition, announcements may include a course link, a shortcut to a location or tool within a course. This can be beneficial when faculty want to remind students to take a quiz or complete an assignment.

It should be noted that course links will only work when viewed from an announcement within a course and not from an email copy.

While email is another Blackboard tool designed to help faculty communicate with their students, fellow staff members and TAs, there are some notable differences from the Announcements tool. In contrast to the Announcements tool where the intention is for everyone in the course to view a common message, the Email tool can target individual students, students who have been assigned to groups, TAs, or everyone if need be.

Faculty can contact students to discuss a course-related issue of concern requiring privacy and discretion.

For example, when viewing grades in the Grade Center, faculty may identify a student whose performance is subpar, and can immediately send an email to that student expressing concern and possibly proposing an intervention. Students can contact faculty by responding through email as well.

A discussion board is an asynchronous communication tool that allows students to collaborate with others through posting or answering questions. Discussion Boards are sometimes referred to as a forum, message board, or bulletin board.

Discussion boards are typically used to promote a threaded discussion, which is an online discussion about a topic. Students respond to a discussion board forum topic by creating a thread, or relying to an existing thread. This back and forth dynamic encourages a continued discussion among students.

This type of activity can promote active learning by encouraging students to engage in reflection, investigation, and application of core course concepts, as well as interaction with fellow students.
Faculty can also create a ‘Help’ Forum, a place where students can post questions or comments about the course. Both faculty and students can respond to these questions, encouraging a sense of community and mutual support.

Faculty have considerable flexibility when creating discussion board forums through establishing settings and parameters.

Faculty can create a ‘Course’ discussion board forum where all students can participate and contribute to a discussion, or a ‘Group’ discussion board where only members of a particular group can access it.

Faculty also have the option to enable grading for each discussion board forum. Discussion boards can only be viewed from within Blackboard and are not publicly accessible.

A Blog is a personal online journal that is frequently updated and intended for general public consumption.

In Blackboard, however, only enrolled users can view and author Blogs.

Blogs are an effective way to gain insight into students’ understanding of course concepts and provide a way to share the knowledge, current thoughts, reflections, and materials collected.

Blogs are organized as a series of posted entries in reverse chronological order, and can include text, images, links, multimedia, Mashups and attached files. Students can post one comment (that is, a remark or response) at a time to a blog post.

Faculty can enable grading for a Blog, which would entail grading the original blog post of students, but not the comments made by fellow students.

A faculty member can choose to allow students to participate in blogs in three ways: course blogs, individual blogs, and group blogs.

Only the faculty member can create a course Blog and determines the topic to be addressed. All course members can add Blog entries and also add comments to Blog entries.

Only the faculty member can create a Blog for individual course members to use. Only the owner of the Blog is able to add blog entries. All other course members can view and add comments.

If the faculty member enables the Blogs tool for a group, all group members can add Blog entries and make comments on Blog entries, building upon one another’s work. Any course member can view Group Blogs, but can only add comments. A Group Blog is different from a threaded discussion as each entry does not need to continue the discussion of the previous entry, but can be a complete thought on its own.

Wikis are used to create a collaborative space within the course where all students can view, contribute, and edit content. In Blackboard Learn, the Wiki tool allows students to contribute and modify one or more pages of course related materials, providing a means of sharing and collaborating. Pages can be created and edited quickly, while tracking changes and additions, allowing for effective collaboration between multiple contributors. The faculty member can create one or more Wikis for all group members to contribute to and Wikis for specific groups to use to collaborate.
Faculty can also assign a grade to students' contributions to a Course or Group Wiki. After a Wiki is set to be graded, a grade column is created automatically in the Grade Center. Individual student and group contributions then can be graded inside the Wiki tool, where all pages and edits can be referenced as the grade is determined.

A journal allows students to post personal reflections on course topics and experiences. Only individual students can post entries. Posted journal entries are in reverse chronological order, and they remain private within a Blackboard course.

When a faculty member creates a Journal, he or she has the option to allow students to be able to edit or delete entries. If the journal is to be graded, a column is automatically created in the Grade Center.

This type of reflective activity provides an opportunity for students to reflect on their progress in the course, including changes in knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs.

By sharing this information in a safe manner (as contents are only viewable by the student and faculty), students may be more willing to be honest in discussing how they have grown intellectually from the start of the semester. Only faculty can make comments and grade posts.

This tutorial provided a brief overview of the communication tools available in Blackboard Learn.