Using the Course Interface

Every new course you teach in Blackboard will have the same default structure. Let’s take a look at how you work with the course interface.

Click on the title of one of your courses in the My Courses module to access it. This is what a standard course looks like. The red panel on the left is the Course Menu. This lists links to content and tools that you make available to your students.

By default, your course includes a Home Page. This page automatically updates when you make changes to your course and is based on user role in the course. For example, when you create assessments with due dates, students will be able to see them listed in the To Do module. Since you are not a student, and thus do not have to complete the assessments, you will not see them in the To Do module.

The rest of the course menu includes links to several course tools, like Announcements, Discussions, My Grades, and Tools, or content areas, like Information, Content, and Assessments. Content areas are spaces where you can add files, links, or assessments for your students.

This is only the default setup. As you’ll see in the segment on customizing your menu, you can rename, reorder, add more or remove any of these links to suit your course.

Below the course menu is the Control Panel. You can open and close sections of the Control Panel by clicking on the name of the section. Click again to close it.

The Course Tools menu lists all of the tools that are currently enabled in your course.

Evaluation includes reports about student activity in the course. This area also includes the Retention Center, which helps you track students who may be at risk in your course, based on activity level, grade, or missed deadlines.
The Grade Center allows you to record and calculate student grades. When you enter grades in the Grade Center, students can view them in My Grades, so it is a great communication tool, too.

You can use the links in the Grade Center section of the Control Panel to access specific views, or you can use the arrow to the right to jump straight to the Full Grade Center.

Users and Groups lets you view the list of students currently enrolled in your course, add others (like a teaching assistant), and create groups for student collaboration.

The Customization menu gives you the ability to change the settings of your course. You will use Properties to make your course visible to students, and Teaching Style to change the look of your course, including adding a banner or changing the color of your menu.

Finally, the Packages and Utilities menu includes Course Copy, which lets you copy the settings and content from one course to another. This is particularly useful if you teach the same course multiple times. You don’t have to rebuild it each semester.

Both the Course menu and the Control Panel can be collapsed if you want to focus on one of them. Click on the course name to collapse the course menu, and click it again to open it.

You can also collapse the entire left column. This lets you focus on course content or gives you more space when working in the Grade Center.

Notice that when I move my mouse over the gray bar next to the menu, an arrow appears. If you click that bar, the left panel closes. This will stay closed, even if you log out of Blackboard. To re-open the menu again, click the bar at the left of the window.

When you want to edit your course, like adding content or modifying the menu, you will need to have Edit Mode On. If you turn Edit Mode off, you will not be able to edit the course. Click it again to turn Edit Mode back on.

Throughout Blackboard, you can access settings or edit items by using the contextual edit menus. These are not visible normally. You need to move your mouse over the item you want to edit so
that the round drop down arrow appears. Click this arrow to open the edit menu. You will see this drop down arrow throughout Blackboard. The menu will have different options, though, based on where you are in the course.

For example, here is the drop down arrow for modifying a column in the Grade Center. The arrow is the same, but the menu options are different.

The final tip for navigating within courses in Blackboard is the Course to Course Navigation. This option is just below the header bar. If you click on the drop down arrow to the right of the house icon, you will see a list of all of the courses you are a part of in Blackboard.

Using the Course to Course Navigation, you can move from one area of a course to the same area of another course, provided that it exists in both courses and you have access to it in both courses. For example, I can move from the Grade Center of this course directly to the Grade Center of another course.

Because the tools and settings are in the same place in all of your courses, you should be able to master navigating Blackboard quickly and easily.