

The Course Menu

The “Course Menu” in Blackboard is where students access a course’s content and tools. One way to help students succeed is to logically structure the Course Menu, following the course design you have already planned out. Let’s look at the Course Menu, and how to modify it.

Every newly-requested Blackboard course starts with the same set of items in the Course Menu: “Home Page” (which helps students stay on top of due dates and tasks), “Announcements” (where you post announcements for your students, which may also be sent as email), “Information” (a “Content Area,” intended for posting high-level course information, such as a syllabus), “Content” (another Content Area, for posting instructional materials), “Assessments” (for posting gradable items, such as assignments, quizzes, or tests), “Discussions” (a list of discussion boards in your course), “My Grades” (where students can check their grades), “Contacts” (a tool where you can post contact information for yourself, a teaching assistant, or other instructional staff you add to your course), and “Tools” (a list of all Blackboard tools your students may use). These menu items, and the order in which they appear, are fully customizable. Only people who are teaching or building a course can edit the Course Menu, and Edit Mode must be set to “ON” to make any changes.

At the top of the Course Menu are its controls: in the upper left-hand corner is a small plus sign icon, which allows you to add items to the menu; and in the upper right-hand corner is a pair of arrows (pointing up and down), which opens a keyboard-accessible window for reordering the menu’s items.

Let’s add a new Content Area to the Course Menu. Content Areas are where you add text, files, web links, assignments, tests, and other kinds of content and assessments, for students to interact with. Place your mouse cursor over the plus sign icon at the top of the Course Menu. A dropdown menu will list the items you can add to the Menu. The most commonly used items are Content Area, Tool Link, Web Link, Course Link (allowing you to link directly to a content item, contained in a Content Area), and Divider (a horizontal line, allowing you to visually separate groups of related items in the Course Menu).

For this example, let’s add a Content Area where we can later post information to welcome students to this course. With your mouse on the plus sign icon, click the “Content Area” link in the dropdown menu. A small popup box will appear on the screen, allowing us to name this Content Area, and decide whether to make it available to students now or later. In the “Name” field, let’s type “Welcome – Start Here,” setting up an area where we could post a welcoming message to our students, along with materials to help them get started in the course. After typing a name, you can check the box next to “Available to Users” if you wish to allow students to access this Content Area right away; otherwise, if you prefer to hide it until you’ve added all relevant content, you can leave the box unchecked, then make it available later. When you’re done, click the Submit button; our new Content Area will appear at the bottom of the Course Menu. If you did not make it available to students, you’ll see a small grey icon following the name, letting you know it’s hidden.

Next, let’s add a “Tool Link.” “Tools” are built-in features of Blackboard, such as Announcements or Discussions which already exist on the menu. Other tools include Blogs or Journals, as well as the Calendar or Send Email tool. For this example, let’s add a link to the Calendar tool, to help our students plan their semester. Hover over the plus sign icon again, and then click “Tool Link”; another popup box

will appear. Once again, give the item a name, such as “Course Calendar.” Then, from the “Type” dropdown box, select the “Calendar” tool. Finally, decide whether to make the link available to students, and then click the Submit button. The new link should appear at the bottom of the Course Menu.

There are a couple ways to reorder Course Menu items in case you don’t want a newly-added item to remain at the bottom. If you place your mouse cursor over the item, a small grey box with an up and down arrow will appear, to its left. Place your mouse cursor over the arrow icon. You can click the icon to drag and drop it to a new location in the Course Menu. Alternatively, you can click on the Reorder button in the upper right-hand corner of the Course Menu, to open the keyboard-accessible reordering menu, which may be easier to use, especially for those who rely on assistive technologies. To do so, find the item in the menu you would like to move, select it, click the up or down arrow buttons, to move it to the desired position, then click the Submit button.

You may have noticed a second icon appear when you placed your mouse cursor over the Course Menu item. On the far right is the icon for its contextual dropdown menu. Opening the item’s menu will reveal options for renaming it, hiding (or showing) it, or deleting it from the Course Menu (and, in the case of Content Areas, removing it and all of its contents from the course).

Let’s make the “Welcome-Start Here” Content Area we created earlier available to our students. Place your mouse cursor over it, click its dropdown menu icon, and then select “Show Link.” The grey icon indicating it was hidden will be removed, and your students will now be able to access any content you post within that Content Area.

This tutorial introduced the Blackboard Course Menu and demonstrated how to edit it.