

Using Blackboard as a Supplement to your courses: How I learned to stop worrying and love Blackboard

Introduction: My love/hate relationship with BB.

How to make use of your BB shell: minimal to maximal use

1. an excellent repository for the syllabus, bibliography, and any other first day handouts.
2. Add study/review guides, supplemental readings and other documents as the semester progresses
3. Post announcements of upcoming exams, etc. and check off the notification option for automatic emails to students
4. If you need to cancel class, post and send an announcement
5. Use the email function to email your entire class or individual students
6. Add video clips, urls, etc. for enrichment
7. Depending on the level of online activity you wish to encourage, you can activate the discussion forums and/or blogs.

Reasons why using BB can be helpful for you and your students:

1. Huge photocopying budget saving! In most of our dept. the photocopying budget is one, if not the, largest line items. This pushes the act of printing to the student. But it also allows students to avoid printing if they choose and have ready access anywhere they have online access to your course information.
2. If a student misses a class, they can still get the handouts in a timely fashion and can be prepared for the next class. This also alleviates the problem for the faculty member having to bring old handouts to class for absent students.
3. If a student loses a paper, it can be readily accessed.
4. Using BB encourages creative sources for course information: Youtube or TED videos, internet sites, other online tools can be added for visual and aural learners. You can record your lectures and post them if you wish.
5. If you create discussion forums, students can also add content to the course. This encourages sharing among students and might spark enthusiasm for those who enjoy using internet resources. You can also create a course blog. Discussion and blogs can also be designed as graded options if you choose.
6. **Grading:** if you set up your grade center, you can enter all your grades and define a weighted column that will do your calculations for you. Students can also view these grades so that they can track their own performances. At the end of the semester, if you have entered grades, you can download your grades into an Excel file for keeping.
7. **Missing classes:** when the snow season hits, you can use your BB shell as a stand-in class meeting place to avoid missing too many class sessions. You would need to specify this upfront but it can be helpful in a bad winter.
8. **Assignments:** wondering if that amazing essay which compares Foucault and Merleau-Ponty on aesthetic theory is actually written by your freshman? Hmm... Create a safe-assignment through which students can submit an electronic copy of their paper. You may choose to require a paper copy as well or if you are really hardcore, you can read their papers online, adding comments and returning them via the assignments section. Safeassign will review the submitted paper, indicating any potential plagiarism which you can then check. The students can also see the

- results of the check which helps them become aware of citation protocol. Grades entered through this section are automatically posted in the grade center.
9. **Course copy:** if you teach the same course the next term, you can copy all your documents and settings over. However, if you do this, you must run the following checks:
- a. do all the links still work?
 - b. If you have date specific content, these must be updated (syllabus for example!)
 - c. If you do not want the entire semester to show, you must go in and mark as “unavailable” each entry and either turn them on when that unit arrives in the new semester or set a date after which that item should be seen.
 - d. If you copy a discussion board, any entries will come over but as “anonymous.” You must clean all these up or recreate your discussion board.
 - e. If you used grade book, beware that it is very quirky and grading schemas as well as categories may need a careful review to be sure they are still accurate. My motto: never trust BB.

Concerns and Warnings

1. To be successful, give a tour of your BB site on the first day of class. Do not assume that students are tech-savvy and know how to sign in or navigate. It might be a good idea to have a little online project that encourages them to visit the site and do something (send you an email or post a comment on the discussion board) so that you know they are comfortable using BB. However, this can also be their responsibility.
2. Be careful what files you post. Word files may not be accessible to students who do not have or use Word. Saving docs as a pdf and posting those may be a good idea. HTML files work very nicely as well.
3. Test your links to be sure they work. If you have copied documents from previous terms, be sure that you reviewed everything carefully for updating needs.
4. Keep in mind that if you are teaching a face-to-face class, it should be that. You do not want to use BB to the extent that it morphs into an online or hybrid class. Be clear on these distinctions so that the students are likewise clear as to their responsibilities in making use of BB.
5. Remember that undergraduates need to master looking at real people and interacting in a personable community. While BB offers us enormous resources for communication, it cannot replace the personal touch of you in your class room, directly engaging your students in a community of learning which is direct encounter with one another in the “real world.”

Comments, Suggestions, Questions: