

Significant Changes, Fixes, and Improvements in Blackboard Learn version 9

Coming to JSU: Spring 2010

Completely redesigned grade book [now called “Grade Center”]

- Instructors can enter results, scores, percentages, and other forms of grading directly into the Grade Center spreadsheet. This inline editing process is similar to entering grades into a spreadsheet, such as Microsoft Excel. Each grade entered into the Grade Center is automatically saved.
- The Grade Center automatically records each grade’s history. If an instructor or Teaching Assistant (TA) changes a student’s grade, Blackboard’s grade history will show the new grade, the old grade(s), when the grade(s) changed, and who made the change(s).
- Instructors can easily exempt a grade(s) for individual student(s).
- Instructors can create “Smart Views” that categorize students based on selected criteria. This is helpful for instructors who have merged multiple course rosters into one large course but who wish to still view and enter student grades based on the students’ original course sections. This is also helpful for instructors who have multiple TAs and who want to divide the management of student grades between those TAs.
- Instructors have the ability to create and print grade reports—such as final grades—to hand to students or add to the instructors’ portfolios.
- The Weight Grades feature now allows the instructor to select some or all columns and some or all categories to include in the weighted calculation.
- All courses come with a Weighted Grade Column by default, but instructors are not limited to one Weighted Grade Column. Several Weighted Grade Columns can be created and used in other Calculated Columns.
- The instructor can drop a specified number of highest and/or lowest grades or choose to consider only the lowest or highest value when calculating the weighted grade.
- The Grade Center now supports average grade and minimum/maximum grade calculations.
- The Grade Center now supports primary and secondary grade display options (secondary display options shown only in instructor’s Grade Center tool).
- The Grade Center now supports drag-and-drop column organization.

New private blog and journal creation tools

- Blackboard Learn version 9 has built in private Blog and Journal tools that let students create and share ideas with their instructors or other students enrolled in a particular class. To respect the privacy of the students’ work, Blackboard Learn version 9’s blogs and journals are private and cannot be viewed outside of the course in which they are created.
- Individual journals allow students in a course to record their course experiences and what they are learning. These thoughts can be a private communication between a student and the

instructor or shared with everyone in the course. The journal author or the instructor can then add comments.

- Group journals allow groups of students to reflect collaboratively and comment on their fellow group members' findings. To maintain privacy, group members may add journal entries anonymously.
- Individual blogs provide each student in a course with his or her own area to share thoughts and work with others in the course and to receive comments and feedback on entries.
- Course blogs allow all users in a course to share their thoughts and work in one common area that everyone in the course can read and add comments.
- Group blogs allow groups of students in a course to collaboratively post thoughts and comments on each others' work while everyone else in the course can view and comment on the group's entries.

New self and peer assessments tools

- Blackboard Learn version 9 supports the creation of self and peer assessments of text, images, and digital-based information. Instructors can create an exercise with a list of questions for the assessor as well as a variety of grading or marking criteria. The instructor then distributes the assessment and chooses if students will assess their own work or the works of other students. In turn, the students submit the work to be reviewed by the instructors.

Easier group creation

- Instructors can now create any number of groups at once.
- Students can be randomly assigned to groups, manually assigned by the instructor, or asked to sign-up for a group themselves.
- Students can create their own self-enrollment groups, although instructors have the option of modifying or restricting access to these student-created groups.
- Any groups of which the student is a member are listed by default under the course menu.

Respondus LockDown Browser

- Students now receive an informational error message if attempting to use any browser other than the Respondus LockDown Browser to take a test.
- The Respondus LockDown Browser continues to protect the integrity of tests even after the test has been completed. If a student accesses My Grades and attempts to review a test submission using any browser other than the Respondus LockDown Browser the student is not able to see the test (questions, submitted answers, correct answers, or feedback) and will receive an informational error message.

Improved course management workflow

- The instructor Control Panel functions are directly available on the same page with the main course menu. Additionally, instructors can click on the Edit Mode switch in the top right corner of any Blackboard course page and create or edit content for any content area or course tool.
- Instructors have direct access to edit and organize their Course Menu and can, in Edit Mode, even drag-and-drop the Course Menu items to change their order.
- The default Course Menu, which is now subdivided into sections, now includes a Course Information section containing Home Page, Syllabus, and Your Instructor(s) menu options; a Course Content section containing Course Documents, Assignments, Exams, and Discussion Board menu options; and a Supplementary Materials section containing Tools and Ask a Librarian menu options.
- Course Menu items that do not contain any content are automatically hidden from the students' view but are always visible to the instructors in Edit Mode. Once content is added to a Course Menu item [e.g., once a syllabus is uploaded to Syllabus or once an assignment is added to Assignments], Blackboard automatically makes that menu item visible to students.
- Course Tools and Communications are combined into a single Tools area on the Course Menu. This provides instructors easier control over the tools that they want to enable and disable.

New course home page and automatic update notifications

- Each course opens to a course home page that contains modules such as “My Announcements,” “What’s New,” and “To Do.” This automatically updated home page provides students with information on what has changed in the course since the student last visited, what items require the students' attention, and what items are past due or are due in the near future.
- Students and instructors may opt in for email notifications if practically anything changes or is updated in a course. Students and instructors can choose, on a course-by-course basis, which types of notifications they want to receive and if they want to receive notifications by email.
- Examples of notifications for instructors include when new content becomes available, when students meet Early Warning System rules criteria, and when student submitted assignments and tests are available for grading. Examples of notifications for students include when new content becomes available and due dates of assignments and tests.
- Students and instructors can modify the home page, and add/remove/reposition the home page modules. Instructors may select a different course entry point [the first page students see when entering the course].

Inline confirmations

- Instead of displaying a separate receipt page every time a user successfully does something in Blackboard, Blackboard Learn version 9's confirmations display on the same page in which the user was working.

Minor Updates and Improvements

Announcements

- Instructors can now priority order announcements.

Assignments

- As in our current version of Blackboard (7.3), instructors can download all of a particular assignment's student files in a single zip file. Blackboard Learn version 9 automatically renames each student's file to include the assignment's name, the student's username, and the filename the student originally submitted. For example, if Gabby Gamecock [ggamecock] submitted a paper for Assignment 1 with the file name of ourfriendthewalrus.doc, Blackboard would automatically rename the file assignment_1_ggamecock_ourfriendthewalrus.doc.
- Instructors can now choose to deploy assignments to all students individually or to groups of students. This allows instructors to assign a single grade to all of the students in a group and also to override that group grade and assign a student a different grade.
- Instructors can allow students to submit multiple attempts for the same assignment. Each attempt can be graded and commented on individually.
- Instructors have the ability to give specific students an additional attempt at an assignment in order to accommodate extenuating circumstances.

Calendar

- Instructors can now add a start time and stop time for each Calendar event.

Tools

- The Student Homepages tool has been replaced by the new Blog tool that lets students better express their thoughts and reflect on learning within a course. A new My Places tool allows the instructor(s) and students to post a personalized avatar system-wide (instead of limited to the individual course as with homepages). This avatar is displayed in various modules and on blogs and journals.

Modern, JSU-based interface

- Blackboard Learn version 9 uses a customized JSU red and white color scheme.
- On many pages—such as the newly renamed My Blackboard tab—Blackboard Learn version 9 uses a web 2.0 interface that allows users to drag-and-drop items that appear on the screen, select drop-down menus, and even access contextual help.