What’s New in Blackboard Learn?

An introduction to three new features in Blackboard Learn: the interface, course structures, and course themes

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the new look and feel

Blackboard Learn has a new look and feel. The new interface is no longer “boxy and pointy.” Instead, it offers a cleaner, more attractive design.

While the interface has changed, everything is still easy to locate! Most course elements can still be found in the same location, as the following comparison of Blackboard environments shows.

1. In previous environments, users navigate using the horizontal list of links (or ‘bread crumbs’). These horizontal links are located at the top of the screen (number 1 in the image below). In addition, users can navigate using the course menu and control panel (number 2 in the image). These are located on the left-hand side of the screen. On the right-hand side of the screen is the content area (number 3).
2. In the current Blackboard Learn environment, these features are still located in their respective places on the screen.

3. Then what has changed? In the current environment, most controls are now hidden and appear only when needed. How do you make the controls appear? Hover the cursor over the apposite area. Here is an example:

   a. On the Blackboard Welcome page, the *My Courses* module lists all the courses in which you are enrolled. Notice in the image below that there are no visible controls.
b. In the image below, the user has hovered the cursor over the My Courses module. This simple action makes two controls visible to the user: (1) the down arrow next to My Courses label and (2) the gear icon. Both these controls give you access to options that allow you to make changes to the My Courses module.

What does this accomplish? Why hide the controls? Hiding the controls until they are needed gives the interface a clean, uncluttered appearance.

To learn more about the new interface theme, view this video tutorial:

http://ondemand.blackboard.com/r91/movies/bb91_tools_2012_theme.htm
course structures

Instructors will have the ability to choose a distinctive course structure for each course. This is an optional feature. You can ignore this feature and build your course any way you like.

This section explains the ‘what’ and the ‘why’ of course structures. To see steps on how to build one, refer to Appendix Two.

What are Course Structures?

Course structures are templates that order the content in your course. A Quick Setup wizard (pictured below) walks you through the steps of choosing and implementing a distinct course structure. Once you have chosen a structure and applied it to your course, the content is rearranged to align with a particular pedagogical approach.

In the following example, a science instructor wants her Blackboard course to focus on course activity. This flows out of the nature of her course: a series of group lab assignments with intermittent lectures. While using the Quick Setup wizard, the instructor notices a structure that appears to align perfectly with this course goal: the lab format.

The instructor applies the structure to the course and notices the addition of new content areas in the course menu:
The new content areas (and the terms used to label those areas) are designed to help our instructor reach her distinctive course goals. To see a table containing all the other available course structures, go to appendix one.

**Why use Course Structures?**

1. They help instructors who are new to Blackboard. They constitute a ‘launching pad’ for building a new course.

2. Actually, course structures are valuable for instructors of all levels of experience. **They can provide advanced instructors fresh ideas for organizing course content, introduce new tools, and suggest new approaches to teaching online.**

3. They are based on pedagogically-sound principles.
   a. Course structures are based on theories and models that instructors use to build courses.
   b. Yet the structures are open and flexible. Instructors can add to, delete, or modify any part of a course structure.
   c. Instructors can choose a structure based on one or all of the following:
      i. An understanding of his/her teaching role
      ii. The course’s subject matter
      iii. The tools needed to help students meet course objectives

4. **Course structures provide students the following:**
   a. Easy navigation
   b. A well-ordered course
   c. An environment that may be familiar from other courses they have taken (course structures thus provide a way for institutions to implement consistency across courses)

5. **Course structures are divided into 5 categories (see appendix one):**
a. **Focus on Activity** – for courses that focus on activities such as the following:
   i. Lab work
   ii. Field studies
   iii. Experiments
   iv. Projects
b. **Focus on Community** – for courses that involve students in collaborative and interactive dialogue and group work
c. **Focus on Content** – for courses that are organized logically based on units, lessons, the chapters of a textbook, etc.
d. **Focus on System** – for schools that want to remain consistent with past versions of Blackboard (Angel, WebCT, etc.)
e. **Focus on Time** – for courses that focus on a daily or weekly schedule

6. Course structures utilize terminology consistent with the model on which it is based. As an example, the lab format utilizes the following terms:
   a. Hypotheses: This links to the Blackboard Discussion Tool.
   b. My Conclusions: This links to the Blog Tool.
   c. Lab Supplies: Main content area.

7. Do course structures replace existing content?
   a. Adding a course structure does not replace existing Course Menu items.
   b. Adding a course structure does not replace corresponding content.

8. Course structure menu links appear at the top of your Course Menu. (See image below. The outlined area comprises the added course structure menu links. Notice that the pre-existing links have not been removed but now reside beneath the new menu links.)
9. When you choose a course structure, you also have the opportunity to include content examples. These examples serve as guidelines for creating your own material. The content examples include the following:
   a. Pedagogical information
   b. Step-by-step instructions
   c. Teaching tips
   d. Links to video tutorial and help topics
   e. Course material (content, tools, assignments, etc.)

10. Would you like more information on course structures? The table in Appendix One provides a link to more information about each course structure. To learn more about how to deploy a course structure, see Appendix Two.
course themes

Instructors now have the ability to choose a distinctive course theme. The instructor can choose from among various course colors and designs.

1. Themes can be set up using the course setup wizard:
2. Or they can be set up from a menu within the course:

3. Blackboard is looking at adding the ability to create customized themes in the future. Institutions will then be able to create themes that instructors can choose in addition to the default themes that come with the product.

4. Students cannot change a course theme.
APPENDIX ONE

TABLE OF COURSE STRUCTURES

The table below lists the course structures according to five pedagogical categories. You can learn more about these structures at:

http://help.blackboard.com/instructor/Content/_instructor_course/instructor_course_structures_select.htm

On the web page, select each course structure to learn more about the pedagogy, tools, and content types associated with that structure.

The Five Categories of Course Structures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus on Activity</th>
<th>Focus on Communication</th>
<th>Focus on Content</th>
<th>Focus on Systems*</th>
<th>Focus on Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Cooperative Learning</td>
<td>By Chapter</td>
<td>ANGEL</td>
<td>Daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study</td>
<td>Guided Discussion</td>
<td>By Lecture</td>
<td>Blackboard Classic</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference Session</td>
<td>Social Learning</td>
<td>By Lesson</td>
<td>Blackboard Learn - Default</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructivism</td>
<td>Web 2.0</td>
<td>By Module</td>
<td>CourseInfo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expedition-Based</td>
<td></td>
<td>By Subject</td>
<td>eCollegial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiential Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>By Topic</td>
<td>Open Source 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab Format</td>
<td></td>
<td>By Unit</td>
<td>Open Source 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Format</td>
<td>Science-Focused</td>
<td></td>
<td>WebCT 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td></td>
<td>WebCT 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Focus on Systems category: This category is helpful if you want to set up a course according to how courses are set up by default in another learning management system. For example, if you were teaching in a school that used WebCT as the learning management system, you might feel comfortable using one of the WebCT course structures to build your course.
APPENDIX TWO

HOW TO CHOOSE AND APPLY A COURSE STRUCTURE

1. Open the Quick Setup Guide (Control Panel -> Customization -> Quick Setup Guide). You can also open the Teaching Style page and choose a course structure there. However, these directions will guide you through choosing course structure using the Quick Setup Guide.

2. Choose the Choose a Course Structure option.
3. Use the scrollbar to view all the course structures.

4. Choose the course structure you would like to use. You can click the *Learn more* link to learn more about this particular course structure. When you are ready, click the *Use This Structure* button.
5. You can choose to include content examples. These serve as guidelines for building your own content.

6. You also get a preview of what the menu links will look like.

7. When you are ready, click the *Apply Changes* button.
8. The course structure links are added to the top of the course menu:

9. If you chose to include content examples, you can use them as guidelines for building your course. In the image below, the instructor clicks the link to the “SAMPLE: Day 1” folder...
This opens a content area that contains (1) guidelines for creating course content and (2) course content examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>SAMPLE: Day 1</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABOUT CREATING COURSE CONTENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Availability:</strong> Item is not available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content Items</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assignments</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tests</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Links to Tools</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX THREE

CHOOSING MULTIPLE COURSE STRUCTURES

This section can help troubleshoot scenarios in which you overwrite a course structure with another course structure:

You cannot remove a course structure in toto once you have applied it to your course. However, you can modify it, delete individual elements, and add to it. You can also apply another course structure on top of it.

What exactly happens to the existing links and content when you apply another new course structure?

1. The process leaves any links that it does not know how to reconcile. Instructors will need to assess any links that remain from the previous course structure.
2. Links that are usually left are links to tools that are not included in the new course structure. For example:
   a. An instructor applies a course structure that includes a tools link.
   b. The instructor later applies a new course structure. This new course structure also includes a tools link.
   c. The original tools link is overwritten.
   d. If the new course structure did not include a tools link, it would have left the link and shifted it in the course menu beneath the new course structure links.
3. If there is a pre-existing link to a tool, Grade Center, the Discussion Board area, etc. that is also included in the new course structure, the pre-existing link will be overwritten.
4. If a content area is empty or it contains nothing but Blackboard sample content, it will be removed.
5. A content area that contains content will never be deleted.

There is no risk of losing content by applying a course structure.