Communicating
With Students

Blackboard Learn 9.1
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Workshop Overview

Researchers have found when instructors use communication tools in online courses, student motivation and participation increase\(^1\). Each student can view other students' comments and learn through the exposure to different perspectives. Students benefit because they can combine new opinions with their own, and develop a solid foundation for learning. Frequent communication and information from the instructor can also enhance student success and retention.

Blackboard Learn™ offers a wide variety of communication tools allowing you and your students to share information and communicate, either synchronously—in real-time—or asynchronously—not at the same time. This workshop provides a hands-on introduction to many of these tools, offering you ways to extend a sense of community beyond the traditional classroom.

In this workshop, you learn how to use the Syllabus, Announcements, Calendar, and Tasks tools to provide students with critical course information. You, as an instructor, can share information about yourself using the Contacts page. You also learn to use the Email and Messages tools to send messages to course members. For times when real-time communication is required, such as a brainstorming session, you learn to use the Chat tool.

First, you experience the tools as a student to familiarize yourself with how they appear to your students. Then, you move to an instructor perspective and learn how to create and manage content in each tool.

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Roadmap

Student Experience

- The syllabus and announcements tools provide critical course information, updates, and due dates.

- Access the calendar tool for important dates and reminders, and the tasks tool for a prioritized list of tasks to be completed.

- Use the Contacts page to learn about an instructor and access the roster to view course members.

- Learn to use the email and the course messages tools.

- From the My Institution tab, students can access tools for all their courses, as well as create personal calendar and task entries.

Real-Time Communication

- Send messages, view and manage chat recordings, and learn about the participant roles.

- Learn to create new sessions, edit roles, record and end sessions, and explore tips for using chat for academic purposes.

Keeping Students Informed

- Learn how to create announcements, as well as how to order announcements.

- Upload or build a syllabus and customize it to fit the online environment.

- Keep students on track by posting due dates and reminders.

- Learn how to add your instructor profile and folders for guest lecturers.
Student Experience

In this section, you explore course information and communication tools from the student perspective.

Students need to keep track of a large amount of dates and information, including course requirements and resources, instructor information, group and course meeting times, and due dates. Blackboard Learn offers a number of tools to help students stay informed as the course progresses.

After we cover the course information tools, we turn our focus to tools allowing asynchronous communication between student and instructor.

Experiencing each of these tools from the student perspective provides some context for the decisions you make for your course and the discussions you have with your students. After the tools are presented from the student perspective, you learn how to use them as an instructor.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this section, you will be able to:

• View course announcements.
• Access the course syllabus.
• Consult the course calendar.
• Access a list of prioritized tasks.
• View the list of course members.
• View information about the instructor.
• Send messages to course members using the email and course messages tools.
• Identify the differences between the email and course messages tools.
• Use tools and access information for all courses from the My Institution tab.
Viewing Announcements

Use the announcements tool to communicate important, time-sensitive information. For example, you can use announcements to provide the following:

- Corrections and clarifications of materials
- Assignment due dates or exam schedules
- Reminders or helpful tips for success

As a default module on the Home Page, announcements are typically one of the first things students see when accessing your course. When students click an announcement link on the Home Page, they are taken to the main Announcements page. Instructors can control the order of the announcements and how long they appear.
Viewing the Syllabus

Students can use the online syllabus as a one-stop spot to find the most important information they need to succeed in their courses.

The syllabus typically includes the following:

- Course description and learning objectives
- Instructor contact information and office hours
- A course outline, which may include important dates
- Course and institution policies
- A list of required texts and recommended readings
- Class participation requirements and grading criteria

Students access the syllabus from a course area, such as in a content area.

You can create a syllabus in two ways:

- Uploaded to your course, such as a PDF or Microsoft® Word file
- Created within Blackboard Learn, as shown in the following image
Viewing the Calendar

Course calendar events appear to all members of the course. Common entries include upcoming tests, due dates for assignments, or special lectures. Course items with due dates automatically appear in the course calendar. Only instructors may create additional course calendar events.

Students can access the calendar from the Tools panel on the My Institution tab or from My Blackboard. They can also access the calendar from the Tools page in your course or a customized link on the course menu.

NOTE: You can rename links on the course menu.

The calendar displays a consolidated view of all institution, course, organization, and personal calendar events for a user. You can view events by day, week, or month. You can also view and organize upcoming and past events into categories.
Calendar events appear in the proper time order for the given day and are color-coded to differentiate courses and personal events. You can filter your view to show only the desired mix of class and personal events.

Use the right- and left-pointing arrows to navigate to previous or upcoming views.

In the left panel, you can change the calendar colors by clicking the down-pointing arrow adjacent to the calendar’s name. You can clear a calendar’s check box if you do not want to view that calendar’s events in the right panel.
Viewing Course Tasks

Use the tasks tool to keep track of work that must be completed. Each task has a status and a due date. An instructor identifies the course tasks and adds them to the list. You can create a list of tasks for the entire term or just for a project.

Students can use this list to keep themselves on track and may be required to report their status for each task.

By default, students access tasks from the course Home Page. They can also access the tasks tool from the Tools page or a customized link on the course menu.

A. Click a task link to view the description.

B. You can assign a level of priority for tasks:
   - High priority icon – exclamation mark ( ! )
   - Normal priority – no icon
   - Low priority icon – an arrow pointing down ( ↓ )

C. Sort any column by clicking the heading title.

D. In a task's contextual menu, select the status of the task:
   - Not Started
   - In Progress
   - Completed
Accessing the Roster

On the Roster page, students can view a list of the students enrolled in their course.

Click Go on the action bar to display all students or use the drop-down lists to narrow your search to specific students. Users can sort the list by the First and Last Name columns.

If users add avatar images -OR- profile images, they will appear on this page. Profile images will always supersede avatar images.

NOTE: Your school determines if the profile feature is enabled at your school.
Finding Staff Information

On the **Contacts** page, students can view an instructor’s contact details, office hours, photo, and other personal data. They can also learn about teaching assistants and upcoming guest speakers.

Students access this information by clicking the **Tools** link on the course menu and selecting **Contacts**.
Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Student Course.

**Use the tools**

- Access **Announcements** from your course and note how you can choose to view **Institution**, **Course**, or **View All** announcements. System announcements will include any institution-wide information posted by your school.

- Access the **Calendar** and view an event’s description.

- Review the **Tasks** list and change the status of two tasks to **Completed**. **TIP**: You can change the status of more than one task by selecting multiple check boxes and pointing to **Status** on the action bar.

- Access the **Roster** and view the list of students.

- Access the **Contacts** page and review the contents of the **Guest Lecturers** folder.
Sending Email

In your Blackboard Learn course, you can send email messages to other course members’ external email addresses.

**QUICK STEPS: Sending an Email**

1. Access **Tools** and select **Send Email**.
2. On the **Send Email** page, select the link for the intended recipient group. A new page appears.
3. For **Select Users** or **Select Groups**, select the recipients in the **Available to Select** box and click the right-pointing arrow to move them into the **Selected** box.
4. Type the **Subject** and **Message**.
5. Optionally, browse for a file from your computer. You can attach multiple files.
6. Click **Submit**.
You cannot send email from a Blackboard Learn course to anyone who is not a member of the course.

**Tip:** For Windows, to select multiple users in a list, press the SHIFT key and click the first and last user. To select users out of sequence, press the CTRL key and click each user needed. For Macs, press the COMMAND key instead of the CTRL key. You can also select all course members with the **Select All** function.

**Important Tips**

- Blackboard Learn keeps no record of sent emails. You receive a copy of your email in the Inbox of your external email account. Keep a copy of important messages in case you need them at a later date.

- Blackboard Learn does NOT recognize files or email addresses with spaces or special characters, such as #, &, %, and $. In general, use only alphanumeric file names and addresses in Blackboard Learn.

- Do not send email through Blackboard Learn without content in the subject line. Leaving the subject line blank can prevent the message from being delivered.
# Frequently Asked Questions

In the following table, learn more about the email tool.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When I send someone an email using the email tool, I cannot see the other person’s actual email address. Why?</td>
<td>Students’ email addresses are not visible unless they choose to make them visible to course members. Find this setting in the page header in the My Blackboard menu &gt; <strong>Settings</strong> &gt; <strong>Personal Information</strong> &gt; <strong>Set Privacy Options</strong>. On this page, they can choose the information they want course members to see. <strong>NOTE:</strong> <strong>Personal Information</strong> is also listed on the <strong>My Institution</strong> tab under Tools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are students able to change their email addresses used in their courses?</td>
<td>Yes. Students can make a change in the My Blackboard menu &gt; <strong>Settings</strong> &gt; <strong>Personal Information</strong> &gt; <strong>Edit Personal Information</strong>. Type the preferred email address and click <strong>Submit</strong>. <strong>TIP:</strong> If you do not see the option to edit personal information, check with your school’s computing help desk to learn the procedures for you and your students to update information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why am I not receiving any emails? Other students have received several from the instructor and I have not.</td>
<td>Many popular email clients, such as Gmail and Yahoo may identify email from Blackboard Learn as junk mail and either automatically delete the email or move it to a junk mail folder. If you have problems, check your user preferences or options for settings regarding the handling of junk email. You can also change your email address.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Student Course.

**Use the email tool**

- First, add your email address to your personal information.
- Send an email to **All Users**.
- Send an email to three members of the course.
Sending Course Messages

You can also send messages to course members using the course messages tool. The course messages tool sends secure electronic messages within the course without relying on external email addresses or clients. This means that external factors do not affect course communication.

Students are not notified if they receive a new message so advise them to make routine checks for new messages. Both incoming and outgoing messages are saved in the course messages tool.

A. Create Message: Create new messages.

B. Create Folder: Add a new folder. You can use folders to organize course messages.

   NOTE: You may not see a Create Folder function. Your school must enable this function.

C. Inbox: Opens with a list of course messages received.

D. Sent: Opens with a list of course messages that you sent.

E. Delete Folder/Delete: The Delete Folder or Delete function in the folder's contextual menu removes the folder. To delete personal folders, select the check box next to each folder to delete. Then, click Delete Folder on the action bar. The folders, and all course messages in the folders, are deleted.

F. Edit: Change the name of a personal folder. You cannot modify the name of the Inbox folder or Sent folder.
QUICK STEPS: Sending Course Messages

1. Access Tools and select Course Messages.

2. On the Course Messages page, click Create Message on the action bar.

3. On the Compose Message page, click To, and a list of course members appears.

4. In the Select Recipients box, make your selections and click the right-pointing arrow to move them to the Recipients box.

5. Type a Subject and Body. You can use the content editor functions to format the text and include files, images, external links, multimedia, and mashups.

6. Optionally, add an attachment. You may not see this function. Your school must enable this function.

7. Click Submit.

Tip: For Windows, to select multiple users in a list, press the SHIFT key and click the first and last user. To select users out of sequence, press the CTRL key and click each user needed. For Macs, press the COMMAND key instead of the CTRL key. You can also select all course members with the Select All function.

Viewing Messages

Click the Inbox link to view received messages.

The Status column icons represent if the message has been read. An opened envelope (✉️) means read and a sealed envelope (✉️️) means unread.

Use a message’s contextual menu to mark a message read or unread, or delete it.

When you have finished reading the message, you can do any of the following:

• Reply to the sender or reply to all recipients.
• Forward the message to another user.
• Move the message to a different folder.
• Delete the message.
• Print the message.

NOTE: The Move function does not appear on the action bar as an option until a user creates a folder.
### Sorting Messages

Click the column heading to sort the contents in that column. For example, to sort messages by read and unread, click the **Status** title.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Sender</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bruce Lopez</td>
<td>Project Resource</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Alyssa Dubois</td>
<td>Chat on Tuesday</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tony Brown</td>
<td>Would like a copy</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sarah Spooner</td>
<td>Have that in my notes also</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Frequently Asked Questions

In the following table, learn more about the course messages tool.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the advantages of using the course messages tool rather than the email tool?</td>
<td>The course messages tool provides a familiar, email-like environment that you can use for course communication. Accounts are automatically created for each member of the course, and messages are sent and received using that account. This provides additional privacy because external email addresses are not used. Using the course messages tool instead of the email tool can also be more reliable. Problems with incorrect or out-of-date student email addresses will not affect course communication. Using the course messages tool also encourages students to log in to their courses frequently. On the other hand, some students and instructors prefer the convenience of checking their course email along with their personal email messages in one location. Many schools have policies on the use of the email and course messages tools. Check with your school to learn more about their communication policies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Student Course.

**Read and send messages**

- Send a message to all members.
- Reply to one of the messages you received.
- View the sent message.
Using Tools Across Courses

Up to this point, we have focused on the student experience within the course itself. Many of the tools we have covered can also be accessed from the *My Institution* tab.

Since you are not logged in to a course, you can access information for all your courses from one access point. You can delete or rearrange the modules shown using the drag-and-drop function.

A. Global navigation and My Blackboard are available everywhere in Blackboard Learn. They present a personalized view of the learning environment. Click the arrow next to your name at the top of the screen to access the global navigation panel. It contains the user and My Blackboard menus.

- The **user menu** provides access to your courses, as well as the Home and Help links. Users can change their personal settings, such as text size and personal information. The logout (!) function is nearby.

- **My Blackboard** displays course communication, due dates, grades, and more. A number indicates how many new items are available.

B. **Tools**: View announcements and grades for all courses a user is enrolled in. Send email to course members. View course calendar dates and tasks added by
instructors. Add private personal calendar events and tasks. Access and edit personal information.

C. **Modules**: Use links to view information and navigate to courses. **My Institution** tab modules collect information from all the courses you are enrolled in or teaching, giving you a total picture of news and activity for your courses. Your school determines which modules appear. The following list includes some of the modules you may find:

- **My Courses**: Displays links to course you are enrolled in or teaching.

- **My Announcements**: Displays announcements for courses and from your school. Announcements communicate important, time-sensitive information.

- **My Tasks**: Displays tasks added by instructors. You can add personal tasks when accessing tasks from **Tools**.

- You can collapse individual windows and change the position of modules. To move a module, point to the title bar to access the four arrows, press and drag the module into its new location, and release.

D. **Add Module**: Click to view the list of available modules, such as dictionary, report card, and notes. Descriptions are provided in the list so you can choose the most significant. Your school determines if you are allowed to add modules.

E. **Personalize Page**: Change the color scheme of the page. Your school determines if you are allowed to personalize the page.
Real-time Communication

You have learned about some of the course information and communication tools you can use to keep students informed and exchange messages with them. Now we look at how you can communicate with your students in real-time, using the chat tool. We first explore the chat tool from the student perspective.

Chat is a virtual meeting space, where you and your students can gather to communicate with each other using instant messaging. You can use chat for a variety of applications:

- Online office hours
- Exam reviews and study groups
- Guest speakers or question and answer sessions
- Small group collaboration and brainstorming sessions

Together, the virtual classroom tool and the chat tool form the Blackboard Learn collaboration tool. The virtual classroom tool includes a whiteboard, chat panel, web browser, course map, and a question and answer area. It is ideal for course lectures, especially those in which you present visual material.

We do not explore the virtual classroom tool in this workshop, but we will take a close look at the chat tool.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this section, you will be able to:

- Participate in a chat session.
- Send private messages.
- View session recordings.
- Create new sessions.
- Modify participant roles.
- Manage sessions.
- Create session recordings.
Participating in Chat Sessions

Chat within the collaboration tool is a slimmed down version of the virtual classroom tool where only the chat room facility is available. This provides a large screen for the chat room.

Use the chat tool when real-time discussion is required. Most students are familiar with using some form of chat and comfortable using this form of communication.

The chat tool is designed to be ideal for low bandwidth situations, such as when your students are connecting to the course using a dial-up connection.

A. A list of participants and their roles appear in the first column.
B. The title of the chat room appears at the top of the chat display panel.
C. All messages are shown in the chat display panel.
D. Type your message in the Compose box and click Send. Alternatively, click the Compose icon to open a new window, allowing for a bigger area for typing.
QUICK STEPS: Participating in a Chat Session

1. Access Tools and select Collaboration.
2. On the Collaboration Sessions page, click the Session Name link for the available chat session you want to join.
3. On the chat screen, compose a message.
4. Click Send.

NOTE: A Launching Chat Tool page appears. Do not leave this page until you are finished chatting. The chat session opens in a new browser window and may take a moment to load. Chat does not work if pop-up blockers are enabled. Either turn off your pop-up blocker or make your course site a trusted site.
The following table describes the icons assigned to each participant role.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Icon</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>![Globe Icon]</td>
<td>A globe icon represents the moderator. The moderator is typically an instructor. The moderator can modify participant roles, grant passive users permission to participate, expel users, and record and end the session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Full Color Icon]</td>
<td>A full color icon represents the active user. An active user is typically a student. By default, active users can send messages as often as they want during a chat session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Gray Toned Icon]</td>
<td>A gray toned icon represents the passive user. A passive user is typically a student. Passive users can observe the chat exchange, but must raise their hands to request permission to send messages. If more than one student raises their hands, numbers are assigned to the handraise icons to represent the order they raised their hands.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sending Private Messages

Chat participants, including an instructor, can send private messages to one or more participants.

Private messages are not included in chat recordings, and you can disallow them.

**QUICK STEPS: Sending Private Messages**

1. On the **Participants** list, select the recipient or recipients of your private message.
2. Click **Private Message**.
3. In the **Compose Private Message** pop-up window, type your message.
4. Click **Send**.

**TIP:** To send a private message to a single participant, double-click the participant’s name.

Private messages can appear with all your other messages in the chat display panel, or you can choose to display them in a separate panel. “Private Message from” always precedes private messages.
On the action bar, click **View** and select where private messages appear.
Viewing Chat Recordings

If you recorded any portion of a chat session, students can access the recording. For example, students can access recordings if they missed the session or if they want to review the ideas discussed.

Be sure to title recordings with meaningful names so students can locate them easily. For example, use either the topic discussed or the date of the session as the name. You can make multiple recordings within one chat session.

QUICK STEPS: Viewing a Recorded Chat Session

1. Access the Collaboration Sessions page.
2. Access a session’s contextual menu and select Recordings.
3. On the Session Recordings page, click the name of the recording.

NOTE: In the Recording Duration column, the length of the session is listed. If several recordings exist, use the Search function on the action bar.
Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Student Course.

Send chat messages

- Join the Student Lounge session and send a message to the participants.
- Choose to view private messages in a separate frame.
- Choose a participant and send a private message.

View a session recording

- View the Culture and Identity session recording. NOTE: You may see anonymous instead of an instructor name in the transcript, which can happen when a course is archived and restored.
About the Instructor Interface

Now we turn to an instructor perspective. In this section, you create and manage chat sessions in the Practice Course. Ensure **Edit Mode** is **ON** to access the instructor functions.

As an instructor, you have access to the same features as students. In addition, you can do the following:

- Create sessions
- Modify participant roles
- Manage sessions
- Record sessions
Creating Chat Sessions

As an instructor, you can create chat sessions for real-time communication. You can create sessions that are available:

- For the duration of the course. Students can schedule meetings and use the session at any time.
- At a specific time. Student attendance at these sessions may be mandatory.
- To group members only. Students in a group can schedule sessions to discuss projects, divide up tasks, and brainstorm.

QUICK STEPS: Creating a Chat Session

1. On the Control Panel, expand the Course Tools section and select Collaboration.
2. On the Collaboration Sessions page, click Create Collaboration Session on the action bar.
3. On the Create Collaboration Session page, type a Session Name.
4. In the Schedule Availability section, you can set a chat session to display on a specific date and time and to stop displaying on a specific date and time. Select the Display After and Display Until check boxes to enable the date and time selections. Type dates and times in the boxes or use the pop-up Date Selection Calendar and Time Selection Menu to select dates and times. Display restrictions do not affect the chat session’s availability, only when it appears.
5. Next to Available, select the Yes option.
6. For Collaboration Tool, select Chat from the drop-down list.
7. Click Submit.
Each course contains a default chat session titled **Office Hours**. You can rename or delete this default session.
Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Practice Course.

Create chat sessions

- Create a chat session students can enter at any time to discuss questions and concerns, or socialize.
- Create a chat session where students meet for a specific time period about a specific topic.
Modifying Participant Roles

Certain communication rules are adhered to in a face-to-face classroom. For example, students must raise their hands before speaking. Likewise, in online chats, you must monitor communication so everyone has the chance to speak.

Become familiar with the Moderator Panel and use it to promote chat etiquette and run the session smoothly. By default, participants are active users when they enter a chat session. At any time, you can change a member's role to passive. Passive users can view the chat exchange, but cannot contribute unless they raise their hands and are granted permission by the moderator.

When users are passive, you can control chat sessions to a greater degree. For example, if each student must first ask for permission to participate, you are less likely to have 15 questions to respond to at one time. You can also change certain users to passive if they are dominating the conversation or responding inappropriately.

1. Chris can click the hand in the Participants row to ask for permission to speak. A hand icon appears next to his name so the moderator knows he is ready to contribute.

2. The moderator changes roles at the bottom of the Participants panel. Chris's icon is grayed out showing he is a passive user.
Managing Sessions

As an instructor, you can use the functions on the action bar to manage the chat session.

The following table explains the functions on the left side of the action bar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you want to</th>
<th>Function on action bar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Select which features each role can use</td>
<td>Click Controls. By default, only active users can send messages and private messages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear the screen</td>
<td>Click Clear. You can choose to clear your chat panel or the chat panel of all session participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End a session</td>
<td>Click End. The session is ended and all users are expelled. If you are recording the session, the recording is also ended and it is no longer possible to add bookmarks to the recording.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recording Sessions

Create a transcript of a chat session by recording a session using the recording functions on the right side of the action bar.

Session recordings can be beneficial if student participation is graded. Students can use the recordings for review purposes, or if a chat session was missed.

You can type a name for the recording or use the default name of the start date and time of the recording. You can create single or multiple recordings for a session.

**QUICK STEPS: Recording a Session**

1. After joining a chat session, click the **Begins recording** function ( ).
2. Type a name for the chat recording or use the default.
3. Click **OK**.
The following table explains the recording functions on the right side of the action bar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>▼ Icon</th>
<th>▼ Function on action bar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>⏰</td>
<td>Click <strong>Begins recording</strong> to create the transcript. Information is recorded as participants exchange messages. You can create multiple recordings per session. <strong>NOTE:</strong> Clicking the <strong>Begins recording</strong> function again when recording is already in progress will stop the recording.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❌</td>
<td>Click <strong>Pauses Recording</strong> to temporarily stop the recording. The chat display panel and the transcript indicate the recording has been paused. Click it again to resume recording.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✉️</td>
<td>Click <strong>Stops Recording</strong> to end the recording. Once you stop a chat session, it is not possible to add to the recording. <strong>TIP:</strong> If you end a recording in error, simply click the <strong>Begins recording</strong> function to start another transcript. Title the next recording &quot;Part Two&quot; or &quot;Continued.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>📀</td>
<td>Click <strong>Bookmark</strong> to add comments to the recording. For example, make a note that you are about to introduce a new topic. When adding bookmark comments, remember students can view recordings. Bookmarks will appear in a different color than the chat text.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Frequently Asked Questions

In the following table, learn more about recording chat sessions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why are chat logs important?</td>
<td>Making chat recordings available allow students to review the discussions that transpired and gives those who were not present a chance to find out what took place. It also means students become active participants in creating the course content. This personal contribution can create greater interest in the course, which may lead to more active participation and a greater sense of community among learners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can students record a group chat session? If so, how?</td>
<td>Yes. Within group collaboration sessions, students have the same abilities to start and stop the recording of the session as an instructor does. All group members have the moderator role. One of the group members can start recording the session at any time by clicking the <strong>Begins recording</strong> function.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Practice Course.

Chat recordings

- Access the Group Saturn recording, change the name of the recording, and permit participants to view it. **Reminder:** You cannot edit the recording properties if you did not access the Collaboration tool through the Control Panel. You may see anonymous instead of the instructor name in the transcript, which can happen when a course is archived and restored.

- Delete one of the recordings in the Group Jupiter session.
Best Practice: Chat for Academic Purposes

Students are often familiar with real-time chat tools, but are accustomed to using them for social correspondence. In the social setting, users can compose messages quickly and without reflection.

Using chat for academic purposes requires planning, structure, and moderation of the discussion. Here are some tips for effectively using chat for academic purposes:

- Decide what your objectives are for using chat. How can it assist learners in achieving the overall goals of the course?
- Inform learners of your expectations for how to use the tool.
- Outline the rules in your syllabus, such as use of appropriate language, respect for their fellow classmates, and comments relevant to the topic.
- Consider the number of students who can be meaningfully involved in the chat session. You can break the class into smaller groups to meet separately.
- Prepare a focused topic in advance for each chat session.
- Monitor the dialogue to keep it on topic.
- Establish a protocol so users know when another has completed a message. For example, ask users to add an asterisk (*) to the end of their last sentences.
- Be aware of users who tend not to participate. Is it due to a technological problem or lack of experience? Some users can type quickly while others type quite slowly. This may affect the frequency of a user’s participation. Is there a way to draw a student into the discussion?
- Summarize the major points at the end of the chat session.
Keeping Students Informed

Now we return to the course information tools. In this section, you learn to add information to the tools students rely on to stay on track.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this section, you will be able to:

- Create announcements.
- Manage announcements.
- Add a course syllabus.
- Add lessons to the syllabus.
- Add calendar events.
- Add tasks.
- Add staff information.
Adding Announcements

Use the announcements tool to provide students with course reminders and updates. In your announcements, you can add text, images, and multimedia, as well as links to course content. For example, in an announcement reminding students of a chat session, you can provide a link to the session.

New announcements appear directly below the repositionable bar entitled "New announcements appear below this line." To pin an announcement to the top of the list, drag it above the repositionable bar. This keeps the announcement at the top of the list and prevents new announcements from superseding it.

**NOTE:** When performing the instructor functions, ensure **Edit Mode** is **ON**.

**QUICK STEPS: Creating an Announcement**

1. On the **Control Panel**, expand the **Course Tools** section and select **Announcements**.
2. On the **Announcements** page, click **Create Announcement** on the action bar.
3. On the **Create Announcement** page, type a **Subject** and **Message**. You can use the content editor functions to format the text and include files, images, external links, multimedia, and mashups. Any files you upload from your computer are saved in Course Files or the Content Collection in the top-level folder.
4. Under **Web Announcement Options**, select
   - **Not Date Restricted** to keep the announcement visible until you remove it.
   - OR-
   - **Date Restricted** to limit the announcement's visibility by date and time.
5. For **Enter Date and Time Restrictions**, you can set announcements to display on a specific date and time and to stop displaying on a specific date and time. Select the **Display After** and **Display Until** check boxes to enable the date and time selections. Type dates and times in the boxes or use the pop-up **Date Selection Calendar** and **Time Selection Menu** to select dates and times. Display restrictions do not affect the announcement availability, only when it appears.
6. Select the **Email Announcement** check box to send students an email containing the announcement. The email is sent to all students, even those who choose not to receive announcement notifications through email. Your school determines if this option is available.
7. Optionally, in the **Course Link** section, click **Browse** to create a link from the announcement to a course area, tool, or item. Select the course item from the pop-up course map.

8. Click **Submit**.
Reordering Announcements

Announcements appear directly below the repositionable bar. Reorder announcements by dragging the bar or announcements to new positions.

Move priority announcements above the repositionable bar to pin them to the top of the list and prevent new announcements from superseding them.

The order shown is the order presented to students. Students do not see the bar and cannot reorder announcements.
Managing the Announcements Page

There are four methods for managing announcements.

1. All announcements are visible all of the time, with the most recent on top.
2. Announcements are visible for a specified period of time.
3. Announcements are emailed to students in the course.
4. You customize the display order by dragging announcements to the positions you choose.

Option 1: All announcements are visible all of the time, with the most recent on top.
While creating the announcement, select Not Date Restricted and make no changes to the display dates.
All announcements show in the order created, with the most recent on top, for the duration of the course.

Option 2: Announcements are visible for a specified period of time.
While creating the announcement, select Date Restricted and select the Display After and Display Until check boxes and type the dates.

Option 3: Announcements are emailed to students in the course.
While creating the announcement, select the Email Announcement check box.
Students in the course receive an email containing the announcement, which ensures they receive the information even if they do not log in to your course.

Option 4: You customize the display order.
After creating announcements and specifying their settings, move announcements to create the display order students see. Use the drag-and-drop function—the double-tipped arrows next to announcements—to reposition them. You can also use the keyboard accessible reordering tool on the action bar to reorder announcements.

Drag announcements above the repositionable bar for them to always appear at the top of the list.
Frequently Asked Questions

In the following table, learn more about the announcements tool.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| I added an announcement with a course link, but the link does not appear in my announcement. | If the link points to a content item that is not available, the link will not appear in the announcement. For example, if the content has date restrictions, the link does not show until the content is available.  
You can apply the same date restrictions to the announcement as are applied to the content item. |
Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Practice Course.

Use the announcements tool

- Create an announcement that appears for the duration of the course.
- Create an announcement to remind students of the upcoming test this week.
- Edit an existing announcement's title and change an option.
- Create an announcement and select a date a few days in the future for the Date After setting. What happens to this announcement on the main Announcements page when viewing with Edit Mode ON and OFF?
- Reorder the announcements by dragging them to new positions. Place at least one above the repositionable bar.
- Create another new announcement and note where it appears.
Adding the Syllabus

The syllabus is an important reference students routinely consult throughout a course.

You can add a syllabus in two ways. You can upload an existing file or use the Blackboard Learn syllabus builder. For both options, you add the syllabus to a course area, such as a content area, learning module, lesson plan, or folder.

Uploading Syllabus Files

You can upload an existing file, such as a syllabus created in Microsoft® Word, PDF, or HTML format. For example, upload your own course syllabus file, as well as department or institution policy documents. The uploaded files appear as links in the course area. In our example, we use a content area.

QUICK STEPS: Adding an Existing Syllabus File

1. Access a content area.
2. On the action bar, point to Build Content to access the drop-down list and select Syllabus.
3. On the Add Syllabus page, type a Syllabus Name.
4. Select the Use Existing File option.
   - To upload a file from your computer, click Browse My Computer.
   - To upload a file from the course’s storage repository:
     - If Course Files is the course’s storage repository, click Browse Course.
If your school licenses content management, click **Browse Content Collection**.

5. Click **Submit**.

6. On the **Edit Item** page, select a color for the **Syllabus Name**, if you want.

7. Optionally, in the **Text** box, type a description or instructions to appear with the syllabus file link. You can use the content editor functions to format the text and include files, images, external links, multimedia, and mashups. Any files uploaded from your computer are saved in Course Files or the Content Collection in the top-level folder.

8. Optionally, in the **Attachments** section, attach additional files. Type names for the attached files. If you do not provide link names, the file names are used.

9. To make the syllabus available, select the **Yes** option for **Permit Users to View this Content**.

10. Click **Submit**.

**NOTE:** For **Select Date and Time Restrictions**, you can set your syllabus to display on a specific date and time and to stop displaying on a specific date and time. Select the **Display After** and **Display Until** check boxes to enable the date and time selections. Type dates and times in the boxes or use the pop-up **Date Selection Calendar** and **Time Selection Menu** to select dates and times. Display restrictions do not affect your syllabus’s availability, only when it appears.
If you add a description or instructions in the Text box, the text appears in the content area following the link to the syllabus file.

Access the syllabus’s contextual menu to upload more files, make changes, or delete the syllabus item.

**Using the Syllabus Builder**

You can use the syllabus builder to create a comprehensive syllabus in a modular format. The syllabus builder contains three sections by default: **Description**, **Learning Objectives**, and **Required Materials**. You can edit these section headings to fit your needs. Further customize the syllabus by adding lesson sections and specifying design information.

**QUICK STEPS: Using the Syllabus Builder**

1. Access a content area.
2. On the action bar, point to Build Content to access the drop-down list and select Syllabus.
3. On the Add Syllabus page, type a Syllabus Name.
4. Select the Create New Syllabus option.
5. Click Submit.
6. On the **Syllabus Builder** page, type instructions or a description in the default body text boxes. You can use the content editor functions to format the text and include files, images, web links, multimedia, and mashups. Any files you upload from your computer are saved in Course Files or the Content Collection in the top-level folder.

7. Optionally, in the **Syllabus Design** section, select the styles and colors for the syllabus.

8. In the **Build Lessons** section, select the **Create Specified Number of Lesson Shells** option and type a number. You provide lesson information in later steps. Alternatively, you can select the **Do Not Create Lesson Shells** option.

9. Select the **Yes** option for **Make the Syllabus Available**.

10. Click **Submit**.

**NOTE**: For **Select Date and Time Restrictions**, you can set your syllabus to display on a specific date and time and to stop displaying on a specific date and time. Select the **Display After** and **Display Until** check boxes to enable the date and time selections. Type dates and times in the boxes or use the pop-up **Date Selection Calendar** and **Time Selection Menu** to select dates and times. Display restrictions do not affect your syllabus’s availability, only when it appears.
Adding Syllabus Lesson Details

Using the syllabus builder, you can add lesson details to the syllabus, such as information about each unit or weekly lesson. Lesson details appear at the end of the syllabus.

QUICK STEPS: Adding Syllabus Lesson Details

1. Access the syllabus and click its contextual menu.
2. Select Edit.
3. On the syllabus page, access a lesson’s contextual menu.
4. Select Edit.
5. On the Edit Lesson page, type the lesson title.
6. If applicable, select a date and time when the lesson appears in the syllabus.
7. In the Lesson Description text box, type information. You can use the content editor functions to format the text and include files, images, external links, multimedia, and mashups. Any files uploaded from your computer are saved in Course Files or the Content Collection in the top-level folder.
8. Click Submit.

At any time, you can edit the syllabus information and add lessons.
Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Practice Course.

Add a syllabus using the syllabus builder

• Select an existing content area or create one for your syllabus.
• Create a new syllabus. Complete the default sections and select a design.
• Add three lesson shells.
• Make the syllabus available.
• View your completed syllabus from the content area.
• Edit the syllabus to change its availability and add lesson details.
Best Practice: Customize the Online Syllabus

Students in online courses often feel disoriented without the familiar face-to-face introductory explanations during the first day of class. Besides including the basics in your syllabus about grading criteria, course objectives, and department policies, consider adding procedures distinctive to the online environment. For example, include sections for the schedule, an online map, and a participation contract.

The Schedule

- List start and end times for units and provide a weekly overview.
- Specify due dates; consider repeating important due dates on the calendar, in announcements, or by making the notification modules available on the Home Page.
- Provide students with your real-time office hours in chat.
- Make expectations clear about how often students are to attend class.

The Map

- Help students use the syllabus as a map or guide to the course. Provide a description of the course layout and where to find each area of the course.
- List special online course procedures, such as where to access lesson material and how to label and submit assignments.
- List where tests are located, and offer practice tests to familiarize students with the interface.

The Contract

Make participation expectations clear:

- Set a minimum number for discussion board posts or chat attendance.
- Let students know you intend to grade on quality, as well as quantity.

Let students know what they can expect from you:

- List your schedule for returning graded work and providing feedback for questions, emails, and discussion posts.
- Let students know how to handle technical difficulties.
Adding Events to the Calendar

Use the calendar to provide students with dates for important events. Course calendar events appear to all members of a course. Common events include upcoming tests, due dates for assignments, or special lectures.

Due date notifications also show in the What's New and To Do modules. However, students can turn off due date notifications. Be sure to let them know if you are relying on those modules to remind them of due dates.

Calendars are color-coded, and you can change the colors by clicking the down-pointing arrow adjacent to the calendar’s name. In the left panel, you can clear a calendar’s check box if you do not want to view that calendar’s events in the right panel.

Use the right- and left-pointing arrows to navigate to previous or upcoming views.

**QUICK STEPS: Creating a Calendar Event**

1. On the calendar, click the plus (+) to create a new event. You can also click inside a date to create an event.
2. Type the **New Event Name**.
3. Select a calendar to associate the event to, such as your personal calendar.
   
   **NOTE:** Only instructors and administrators can add events to the course and institution calendars.

4. Select the **Start** and **End** times.
5. Type the **Event Description.** There is a 4,000-character limit for event descriptions.
6. Click **Save.**
Frequently Asked Questions

In the following table, learn about students’ personal calendars.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| My students sometimes complain their personal calendar entries have disappeared. How can I help them with this problem? | If students access the calendar while in your course, they will only see the entries you have added. If they access the calendar from the My Institution tab, it includes the following:  
  • Their personal entries  
  • Entries for all courses they are enrolled in  
  • Entries for any organizations they are enrolled in  
  • Institution-wide events |
Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Practice Course.

Add the following events to the calendar

• Add one event to this month’s calendar. Include an Event Description.
• Add one event to next month’s calendar.
• View the calendar by month and year.
• Click a calendar event and edit it.
• Drag a calendar event to a new date.
Adding Tasks

Use the tasks tool to create a list of tasks students must complete. For example, for larger projects or assignments, create a task list to help keep students on track throughout the process.

You can assign tasks a priority of low, normal, or high.

QUICK STEPS: Adding a Task

1. On the Control Panel, expand the Course Tools section and select Tasks.
2. On the Tasks page, click Create Course Task on the action bar.
3. On the Create Course Task page, type the Task Name and Description. You can use the content editor functions to format the text and include files, images, external links, multimedia, and mashups. Any files uploaded from your computer are saved in Course Files or the Content Collection in the top-level folder.
4. Type the Due Date, or click the Date Selection Calendar to select the date.
5. In the Task Options section, use the Priority drop-down list to select the task priority.
6. Click Submit.
Viewing Tasks

By default, tasks are listed from highest priority to lowest—not by date. To view tasks listed by due date click the Due Date heading. Use the status columns to view how many students have reported their progress or completed a task.

QUICK STEPS: Viewing Tasks

1. Access the Tasks page.
2. Click a task title to access the View Task page. The View Task page displays all students’ progress for that task.

Use a task’s contextual menu to edit or delete the task.
### Tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Term Paper Topic</td>
<td></td>
<td>Friday, April 8, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign up for Group Project</td>
<td></td>
<td>Monday, April 25, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optional Chat Review Session</td>
<td></td>
<td>Friday, April 22, 2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### View Task

#### 1. Task Information

- **Task Name**: Term Paper Topic
- **Description**: Select your term paper topic. See the syllabus for the due date and specific instructions.
- **Due Date**: Friday, April 8, 2011
- **Priority**: High

#### 2. Task Status

- Andy Farrell: Not Started
- Bruce Lopez: Completed
- Cathy Chu: Not Started
- Chris Casper: Completed
- Dwight Paul: In Progress
- Juan Hernandez: Not Started
- Mark Taylor: Not Started
- Mei Wong: Not Started
- Monica Gonzales: Not Started
- Sarah Sooner: Not Started
- Tony Brown: In Progress
Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Practice Course.

**Use the tasks tool**

- Add a task and assign it a **Priority** of **Normal**.
- Check student progress for the **Submit Planet Paper Ideas** task. Each student is listed twice because two attempts are allowed for this assignment.
Adding Staff Information

Use the contacts tool to create a profile providing students with your contact information, as well as some personal details and a photo.

You can also create folders to organize profiles for your teaching assistants and guest lecturers. You add their contact information following the same steps. You can organize the items on the Contacts page using the drag-and-drop function. Edit or delete information using each item’s contextual menu.

**TIP:** The recommended image size is 150 by 150 pixels. If you submit a larger image, some distortion may occur.

**QUICK STEPS:** Adding a Profile

1. On the **Control Panel**, expand the **Course Tools** section and select **Contacts**.
2. On the **Contacts** page, click **Create Contact** on the action bar.
3. On the **Create Contact** page, type your **Profile Information**.
4. In the **Options** section, select the **Yes** to **Make the Profile Available** to students.
5. Optionally, attach an image and add a personal website.
6. Click **Submit**.
Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Practice Course.

Use the contacts tool

- Create a profile for yourself.
- In the Notes section, include some personal information.
- Create a folder for guest lecturers.
**Workshop Wrap Up**

In the following table, the communication and course tools presented in this workshop are listed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Announcements</td>
<td>Provides students with course-related news, updates, and reminders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syllabus</td>
<td>Provides a resource students can consult throughout the course for an outline, objectives, policies, participation, and grading criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calendar</td>
<td>Provides students with course events and reminders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasks</td>
<td>Provides students with a list of tasks they must complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roster</td>
<td>View a list of course members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacts</td>
<td>Provides students with profiles of course staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>Send email to course members' external email addresses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Messages</td>
<td>Send messages that students access within their courses, and ensure privacy for all course members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Institution</td>
<td>Allows students to view information and use tools across courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chat</td>
<td>For real-time communication that is simple to use and ideal for students with slower connections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Spotlight on Your Course

We have explored some of the course tools Blackboard Learn offers for course information and communication, either asynchronously or in real-time. Take a few moments to consider how you can use these tools in your course.

Which course information tools will you use?

- Will you post regular, timely announcements to keep your students updated?
- Will you use an existing syllabus or create one with the syllabus builder?
- Will you add all due dates to the calendar? Have you considered making the calendar the course timeline? Alternatively, will you use the notification modules to inform students of important dates and deadlines?
- Will you add tasks for your students to complete? Will you require students to report their progress?
- Will you add some personal information to your course Contacts page?

Which course communication tools will you use?

- Will you use the Blackboard Learn email tool?
- Or is the course messages tool and its additional privacy a better fit for your course?

Will you use the real-time communication tools to increase participation?

- Will you offer real-time office hours in chat?
- Will you use small group activities in your course and recommend that groups meet in chat sessions? Will you attend these sessions?
- Will you offer chat sessions for questions and concerns?
- Will you offer general chat sessions with no date restrictions so students can meet whenever they like?
- Will you record chat sessions?