Advanced Blackboard 9.1 Features

- Asynchronous Communication Tools
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- Assessment
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Asynchronous Communication Tools (Discussion Board, Blogs, Journals & Wikis)

Discussion Board

The Discussion Board is a useful place to have an online, asynchronous conversation with your class. Discussion Boards work best when there is a specific focus to the discussion, such as a question or prompt, and then students are urged to both contribute and comment on other’s contributions. Discussion Boards are Forum and Thread driven. A Forum is a place where discussions take place while threads are specific conversations. Think of a forum as a corkboard and threads as messages on the board. You need to create a forum first and then create a thread to tell your students what to discuss.

To Create a Discussion Forum

- Select Course Tools then Discussion Board from the Control Panel Menu. Your Course Discussion Board will be listed under the Course ID of your course (examp. CTRL-900-001-210XN).
- Click the name of your course to go into the Discussion Board. The next page is a listing of all the forums in the Discussion Board you have selected.
- To create a new Forum, click the blue Create Forum button at the top of the page. Type a name for your forum (examp. “Weekly Reading Questions”) and any other instructions you have for your students for the discussion.
- Once you create your Forum, you need to create a Thread to start the conversation on a specific topic (examp. “Week One: Google and Web Applications”).
- When you are in a Forum, click the blue Create Thread button to create a “Seed Thread.” We always suggest that you start the discussion with a very specific question or prompt that will get your students engaged in the topic rather than a general topic.
- Once your thread is created, tell your students to “Reply” to the question with their posts. This keeps things organized and easier to read. To “Reply” to a thread click the blue “Reply” button that is found above and below the initial post, and type your response in the box provided.
**Blogs**

Blogs are great for getting your students to be creative and really say what they think about a topic. Blogs are usually more open-ended and longer in length than a Discussion Board post, and they allow your students more flexibility in what they choose to talk about. While the Blog tool can be used in the same ways as the Discussion Board, it is best used as open forum for students to write about topics and themes that related to the course, carefully guided by the instructor.

You can create two different types of Blogs in Blackboard, **Individual** or **Course**. Individual blogs allow students to have their own blog pages where only their entries appear. A Course blog is a place where each student can contribute to a single page of entries from all their classmates. Individual blogs tend to look more like a public journal while Course blogs can take on more of a discussion board feel.

**Create a Blog for your Students**

- Select **Course Tools** then **Blogs** from the Control Panel Menu.
- Click **Create Blog** on the blog list page. Give the blog a title and write any instructions you have for your students in the space provided.
- Scroll through to Section 4: Blog Participation to select whether you would like a **Course Blog** or an **Individual Blog**. If you would like to grade the blog you can change the options under Section 5: Blog Settings.
- Click **Submit** to create the Blog.

Once you’ve created the blog, all you have to do is select the blog from the blog list page and click the **Create Blog Entry** button. Students can write their entries, include YouTube videos or pictures and attach files to their entries.

Readers can comment on entries by clicking on the **Comment** button below the entry.

**Journals**

Journals are private reflections that are kept on the actual Blackboard site. Just like a physical journal that a student keeps and then turns in to their professor, only the student and the professor can read the entries. The benefits of using the Journal function in Blackboard versus a physical journal is that you can read and comment on entries without having students turn anything in. The Journal is nearly identical to the Blog tool except for Journals are private, only the student and the instructor can read the entries.
To create individual Journals for your students, go to Course Tools then Journals. On the Journal list page click Create Journal then title the journal (e.g. “Weekly Reflections”). If you would like to grade the journals, make changes in Section 4: Journal Settings. Click Submit to create the Journal.

To write a Journal entry the student just has to click on the name of the Journal and then select Create Journal Entry from the Journal page.

Wikis

A Wiki is a collaborative page where both you and your students can add and edit the page content. For some great ideas about how you can use Wikis in your class, visit http://www.teachersfirst.com/content/wiki/wikiideas1.cfm. Blackboard Wikis are like websites within a website. The instructor creates the wiki then students are able to build and elaborate on their own. You might find a Wiki the best place to past the text of your syllabus for your students to quickly refer back to. Because a Wiki is text and image based rather than file based, it is easier for students to read than having to download and open a file. Remember, the Wiki will have a “Home Page” and then sub-pages, just like a website.

Create a Wiki for your Students

- Select Course Tools then Wikis
- On the Wiki list page click Create Wiki to start
- Give your Wiki a name (e.g. “Course Wiki”)
- If you would like to grade the Wiki, change the settings in Section 4: Wiki Settings
- Click Submit to create the wiki
- You will next need to create the “Home Page” for your wiki. Select the wiki you just created from the Wiki list and it will prompt you to create the “Home Page.” Once you have the Home Page, you and your students can create more pages in your Wiki by clicking the Create Wiki Page button at the top of the page. When you create a new page, you will notice that it appears in the Wiki navigation box at the right of your Wiki page.

![Create Wiki Page](image)

**Syllabus**

*Faculty Training for Teaching an Online Learning Course*

*Spring 2010*

**Training Coordinators**

Jim Lee (x2285), Paul Prokop (x3833), and Jim McCabe (x2553)
Center for Teaching, Research and Learning
American University

**Class Times and Meeting Places**

The class will run from Monday, January 25 to Monday, March 29, 2010.

This is a hybrid course that mixes asynchronous and synchronous teaching modes. The class will meet twice a week, once online and once in-person. The online meetings will occur about Monday and the in-person meetings will occur on Thursdays and Fridays.
Assessment

Assignments

In Blackboard 9, the Digital Dropbox feature has been eliminated. Instead, you can use Assignments to have your students submit their work online rather than having to turn in paper copies in class or email in an assignment. This cuts down on paper waste, and keeps your inbox from getting cluttered with thirty paper submissions that could get lost. Assignments are linked to the Grade Center, so when a student turns in their assignment, the file is collected in the Grade Center for you to download individually, or all at once.

Create an Assignment

- Click into a Content Area such as “Information” or “Content” or you can create your own by click the blue button at the top of the Course Menu and selecting Create Content Area.

- At the top of the Content Area, hover over the Create Assessment button, then click Assignment.

- Type in the name of the Assignment in the box provided. Remember, the name of the Assignment is also the name of the assignment’s column in the Grade Center.

- In Section 3: Grading you need to decide whether the assignment is going to be graded as a Letter/Percentage or on point values. If it will be a Letter or Percentage, type 100. If you are grading on points, type the number of points possible in the assignment (e.g. 25).

- Select the due date and time in Section 5: Due Dates.

- In Assignments there is the option to create Group Assignments (examp. Group papers where only one of the students from the group will be submitting the paper). You can create a Group Assignment by selecting Groups of Students in Section 6: Recipients section. Remember, you will need to create Groups before creating Group Assignments.

- Select Submit to create the Assignment. Remember, when you create the Assignment in the Content Area, a corresponding column is created in the Grade Center, so you don’t have to create the Assignment twice.

- Students can now go to the Assignment and click “View/Complete Assignment” to submit their homework or exams.

View Students’ Submitted Assignments

Once students have completed the assignment, you can go to the Grade Center to view their “Attempts.”

- Select Grade Center then Assignments. The Assignment will be listed under the name you gave it when you created it initially. A green exclamation mark will appear next to each student’s name that has completed the assignment.

Did you know? The easiest way to tell the difference between an item an assignment and a test is to check the icons.

Item  Assignment  Test
• You can download the attempts individually by selecting the **Menu Arrow** next to the student’s Attempt and selecting **Attempt mm/dd/yy**. The submitted file will be listed in the attempt and you can click on the [link](#) to download it.

### 2. Review Current Attempt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Submission</th>
<th>Attached Files</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Erin's list.doc</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bulk Download**

- If you would like to download all the Attempts at once, select the **Menu Arrow** at the top of the Assignment column and select **Assignment File Download**.
- On the next page you can select the individual attempts to download, or click the box at the very top of the list to select all the users. Click **Submit** and Blackboard will create a combined file for you to download on the next page.
- Click the [link](#) provided to download the assignment files.

### Grade Center

The Grade Center in Blackboard is a robust tool for managing assignments, communicating grading and evaluation information to students and calculating complicated weights and percentages in a concise manner. As with any other powerful resource it is important to ensure that you understand how the Grade Center works and best practices for using it with your class before you choose to use it to calculate your grades. Below are some simple instructions and tips that you may find helpful. We encourage you to come to our workshops where we deal with the Grade Center or have a one-on-one tutorial with one of our consultants to ensure that your Grade Center is an accurate reflection of your syllabus.

The Grade Center uses **Columns**, which represent assignments, tests, attendance records or any other calculation you might make with a grade. Anything you want to factor into a final grade **must** be represented by a column.

There are three types of columns in the Grade Center: Linked Assignments, Simple Columns and Calculated Columns. **Linked Assignment Columns** are created when you create an Assignment using the Assignment Maker feature (see the **Assignments** section). **Simple Columns** are created in the Grade Center, are not linked with an assignment, and are used for grades that are not associated with something submitted through Blackboard (examp. Class participation). **Calculated Columns** are columns where the Grade Center uses mathematical calculations and multiple columns to calculate a score or grade. The “Weighted Total” and “Total” columns are Calculated Columns. Unless you are creating a complicated, custom grading scheme, you will not need to create any additional Calculated Columns, you can use the preset “Weighted Total” and “Total” columns to do your calculations.
Create a Column

- To create a Simple Column in the Grade Center, click the Create Column button at the top of the Grade Center page.

- Title the column and choose whether it will display as a score, letter, percentage or incomplete/complete in the Primary Display section. If you will be weighting your grades by categories select the category that the item will be under (See Weighted Grades for more information).

- For Points Possible the point value is the scale associate with an item. Items with letter or percentages are on a 100 point scale, so you should always enter 100 as the point value for these items. For items with a different scale you should always enter the total number of points possible as the point value. A quiz with 15 points possible has a point value of 15. Because the Grade Center is a calculation program, you may not always be able to switch from one scale to another without some difficulty. A good rule to remember is that you can change the point value system at any time until grades are actually entered for the item, after that time, you risk miscalculations. Remember, the points possible is not the weight of the grade.

- In Section 3: Options you can decide whether you want the column to be calculated into the final grade, and whether you want students to be able to see the information for that column. Click Submit to create the column.

Weighting by Points vs Percentages

There are very different ways to organize your Grade Center, determined by how you choose to organize the assignments/exams in your course. First, get out your syllabus and turn to the section where you tell your students how you will be distributing the assignments and exams throughout the course.

Weighting by Points

If your grading system is based on a calculated number of points, you do not need to weight your grades in the Grade Center. The number of points serves as the weighting system. So, because there are more points available for the Final than for Attendance, we can see that there will be more emphasis placed on the Final without having to calculate anything additional. In a class where grades are point based, your weighting system might look like the following:

- Attendance: 125 pts.
- Quizzes (5 total): 15 pts. each
- Exam One: 160 pts.
- Exam Two: 215 pts.
- Midterm: 250 pts.
- Reflection Papers (2 total): 125 pts. each
- Final: 250 pts.

Total points possible: 1,350
The Grade Center automatically totals the number of points possible, so you will not have to create any weights in the Grade Center. However, you need to remember when you create columns or assignments to put the appropriate points possible, and to never use percentages or letter grades for assignments. Percentages and letter grades are on a 100 point scale automatically and they could easily skew your point total if you accidentally use them.

If you are weighting your grades by **points**, you can skip the following section titled “Weighting Your Grades by Percentages”. You cannot weight your grades by both points and percentages.

### Weighting by Percentages

In a class where grades are weighted by percentages, your weighting system might look like the following:

- **Attendance/Participation** 10%
- **Quizzes** 15%
- **Paper One** 15%
- **Midterm** 20%
- **Final Paper** 20%
- **Final Exam** 20%

Individual items or categories account for a specific portion of the student’s final grade. More important items or categories account for more of the grade, so their weights are higher. So even though the Final exam is just one test, it is worth more than all of the quizzes in the course combined, for example. What this means in the Grade Center is that the point value of an assignment or test is different than the weight of an assignment of test, and they are designated in different places.

Weights determine how influential one assignment or exam is on the final grade, and you set grade weighting through the “Weighted Total” column in the Grade Center. In order to successfully set all the weights, you must have already created all the columns for your Grade Center. If you have not created all your assignments yet, please go back to the Assignment or Create a Column sections.

### Weighting Your Grades by Percentages

Once you have created all the columns or assignments for your course, you can start setting the weights for the individual assignments, tests, and other coursework items in the Grade Center.

#### Set Weights

- Click the Menu Arrow at the top of the “Weighted Total” column and select Edit Column Information.

- Scroll down to Section 3: Select Columns and choose whether you will be weighting by column or by category. If you only have a few assignments, you can weight by column, just select the name of the column you would like to weight, click the right arrow to move it to the Selected Columns box and then type the weighting percentage in the box provided.
• If you have a lot of assignments (example, 4 quizzes or 10 journal entries) in a category you can choose to weight by category. What this means is that you will be able to set a weight for "Quizzes", for example, and every column with the category label "Quizzes" will be automatically calculated into that weight. You could have two quizzes or twenty, it doesn’t matter, as long as when you create the column, the category is set to the appropriate group (See Create a Column for more information). If you choose to weight by category, in Section 3: Select Columns select the category then click the right arrow to move it to the Selected Columns box and then type the weighting percentage in the box provided.

• Once you have weighted your columns, click Submit. If your columns do not total 100%, you will be reminded to amend your weights accordingly.

Grade Display

The Grade Center can display a grade as a score, letter or percentage for any Assignment, Simple or Calculated column.

• To change how a grade is displayed, click the Menu Arrow next to the name of the column you would like to edit and select Edit Column Information.

• In Section 1: Column Information find Primary Display and select the type of display from the drop down menu.

• You can also hide the column from students in Section 4: Options. Just click No next to Show this column to Students.

• When you are done editing, click Submit.
**Student Feedback**

In addition to submitting a grade for each student in a column, you can also provide feedback associated with the assignment or exam that students can read to learn more about their grade.

- To submit feedback in a column select the **Menu Arrow** in the student’s score box for the column and select **View Grade Details**.

- From this screen you can submit a grade for the assignment, feedback for the student and private grading notes about the assignment that only instructors and TAs can see. Using the student feedback function of the Grade Center is also an easy way to communicate with your students individually and maintain a record of your communication. You can even create a **Simple Column** that you only use for Class Feedback.

**LinkMaker**

LinkMaker is a tool through the Reserves desk of the University Library that allows you to create stable links to journals and articles in the Library’s databases.

**Create a Link using LinkMaker**

- First select the **Content Area** where you would like to place the article.

- At the top of the Content Area page hover over the **Add Interactive Tool** button then select **Library Electronic Resource LinkMaker** from the menu.

- On the next page, click the **Database** button to select the database you would like to search for an article. A window will pop-up with a list of databases that the University Library subscribes to.

- Choose the database you would like to use from the pop-up window list and you will be taken to the database search page.
• In your selected database, search for the article you are looking for by the author’s name, the article title, or keywords. Once you find the article you would like to link to, find the article information and locate the article’s Stable URL or Permanent Link.

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<th>Bibliographic Info</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Citation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>An Interview with Rob Nixon</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s): Sarah Nutall, Cheryl Ann Michael and Rob Nixon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: <em>Contemporary Literature</em>, Vol. 43, No. 3 (Autumn, 2002), pp. 423-440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Published by: University of Wisconsin Press</td>
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• Copy the link (examp. [http://www.jstor.org/stable/1209107](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1209107)).

• Go back to the Blackboard window and paste the URL into the box labeled Link URL, pasted from window. Type in the citation information for the article, the article title, and click Submit to create a link to the article in your Blackboard site.

Now you and your students will be able to click your link and read the article directly from Blackboard.

**Wimba**

Wimba is a synchronous online meeting tool that allows instructors to meet in an interactive online classroom with their students. For more information, please visit the CTRL website at [http://www.american.edu/provost/ctrl/Wimba.cfm](http://www.american.edu/provost/ctrl/Wimba.cfm).

Add a Wimba classroom to your Course

• Enter the Content Area where you would like to place the link to the classroom for your students. Hover over Add Interactive Tool button at the top of the page and select Wimba Classroom from the menu.

• Click Create Classroom to build a new room.

• On the next page, give your classroom a title (examp. Online Classroom) and make any changes to the preferences listed below. Click Submit to finish creating the room.
• On the next page you will see your new classroom in the list box. Select the room you just created and click **Submit** to create a link to your classroom.

• On the next page you can make changes to the link or click **Submit** to finish. A link to your classroom will now appear in the Content Area you placed it in.

![Course Wimba Classroom](Wimba Classroom)

Visit our website or attend CTRL training sessions to learn more about how to use Wimba classrooms with your students [http://www.american.edu/provost/ctrl/Wimba.cfm](http://www.american.edu/provost/ctrl/Wimba.cfm).

**Tests, Surveys and Question Pools**

You can create a test or survey and have Blackboard collect and grade the exams for you, for most question types. This can be useful for short quizzes or helping you collect feedback from your students.

**Create a Test or Survey**

• Select **Course Tools** from the **Control Panel Menu** and click **Tests, Surveys and Pools**. Select **Tests** to start building a Test. Surveys work exactly the same as tests except they are not graded.

• Click **Build Test** to start a new test. Give the test a **name**. Remember, the name you give the test will be the same name for that test’s column in the Grade Center. You can type in a description of the test and instructions in the boxes provided, then click **Submit**.

• The next page is the **Test Canvas** where you can add questions to your test. Hover over the **Create Question** button to see the question menu. There are 17 types of questions you can choose from, but only some of the questions can be auto-graded by the Grade Center. Any questions that require a text response will have to be manually graded by you in the Grade Center. Multiple Choice, True False, Matching, etc. can be graded by the Grade Center and you will not have to grade any responses. Click a type of **question** to add it to your test.

  Each question type requires different information, but here is how to add a multiple choice question to your test...

**Add a Multiple Choice Question in Tests**

• In the **Question Text** box type in the question you would like for your multiple choice document.

• In **Section 2: Options** you can choose whether you would like the question to have numbers, letters or Roman numerals and select the question orientation and other options.
• In Section 3: Answers you can select the number of answers possible (4-20) and then a text box will appear for the number of answer options you selected. Type each possible answer in a different text box, and select the bubble next to the correct answer.

• In Section 4: Feedback you have the option to give the student feedback after they complete the answer correctly or incorrectly. This could be an explanation of what the correct answer was or a longer explanation of the question.

• Select Submit to add the question to your test. Remember, you can always go back and edit questions after you create them.

• Once your question is finished, it will show up in the Test Canvas. The questions are worth 10 points each by default, so if you would like to change the point value, click on the Points box to the right of the question, update the points value and click Submit.

Pools

Pools are collections of questions that can be imported into any test or survey. So if you will be reusing questions for another test or survey, you may want to use the Pools function to save your questions. Pools are created exactly same way as tests and surveys, and you can even copy questions from tests or surveys into your pools rather than having to re-make them.

Deploying a Test or Survey

Once you have created a test or survey you need to deploy it to make it accessible to your students.

• Select the Content Area where you would like the link to the test/survey to be placed.

• Click Create Assessment then Test or Survey. From here you will be able to select the name of the test or survey you created from a list, then click Submit.

• The next screen is for Test Options. In Section 1: Test Information you can change the name of the test, add a description or have the test open in a new window.

• Section 2: Test Availability allows you to customize how your students view the test and when they have access to it. You must select Yes next to Make the Link Available even if you will be having the test “turn on” at a later date. Other options such as timers and changing the date and time availability of the test/survey are also in this section.

• Once have finished making all the changes to the test deployment, click Submit to activate the test. Remember, the test will only activate immediately if you did not have any date restrictions. If your test is set to “turn on” at a certain time, it will not be active till then. To tell whether your test is “on” check whether it’s “grayed out,” if it is, the test is gray, it’s not active yet.
Collecting Tests

Once your students have taken a test, their results will show up in the Grade Center in an Assignment Column that is linked to the test. When a student has an “attempt” in the Grade Center there will be a green exclamation mark ⚠️ next to their name in the assignment’s column. You can view the attempt the same way you would view an assignment.

- Go to the Grade Center and click the Menu Arrow next to the student’s name.
- Select Attempt from the menu to see the student’s submission. If you have allowed multiple attempts for the test, there may be several attempts in this list.

Clear an Attempt

If you have a test set so that only one attempt is allowed, and something goes wrong for a student, you may have to reset their attempt to allow them to complete the test.

- To reset an attempt, go to the Grade Center and click the Menu Arrow next to the student’s failed attempt then click View Grade Details to view the student’s submission.
- On the Grade Details page on the Edit tab click the Clear Attempt button.

Test and Survey Tips from Prof. Jill Klein

- Create Pools to facilitate question reuse.
- Keep the Assessments relatively short, 30 minutes or less. (I had some timed for 60 and 90 minutes and something is more likely to go wrong.)
- Set up tests to open in a new window.
- Provide students with a reliable way to contact you for resetting, etc. Some students will get clever and learn how to game the system so you want them to have to come to the instructor or designated proctor.
- Guide students when using the test tool that this is really a test. Distractions will cause the machine to time out and they can lose all concentration. This reminder cannot be offered enough!
- Be sure to make the Grade Column “unavailable” when you are grading. This way you are not giving grades to one person sooner than another.