



CHALKDUST

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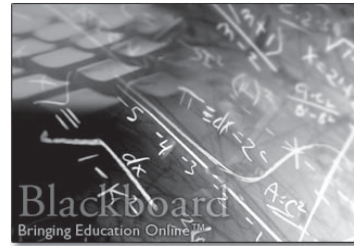
Blackboard 6 - Not Quite Yet

I know many of you were looking forward to the new version of Blackboard. It offers a range of new features that address some of the shortcomings in the existing 5.5 version as well as introducing some quite nice additions to the overall functionality of the platform. The bad news, however, is that after testing the new version we have decided that the benefits provided by the new features do not yet outweigh the problems associated with a couple of major bugs that have yet to be resolved by Blackboard. We had hoped that the release of recent upgrade patches would have addressed the issues, but unfortunately this has not been the case.

At this point the strategy for version 6.0 will be based on a mid year roll-out. If problems in the system are resolved to our satisfaction, we will begin training for 6.0 after the Easter break with a full change over from 5.5 to 6.0 occurring during the mid year break in early July.

The good news from the student point of view is that (if you choose) the interface for 6.0 is basically the same as 5.5 so there will be little change from their perspective. The major changes from the staff perspective are associated with the new layout of the control panel and the introduction of a number of new features. These changes include the ability to copy course content to different areas of a course, the ability to mix different types of content and the addition of new features like online assignment submission and management.

With the roll-out of Blackboard 6 we are also hoping to introduce a couple of third party extensions to the system (see



page 3 for an overview of the Wimba voice forum currently being investigated). The additional features currently being considered also include an html editor (demonstrated at last year's Blackboard Teaching Day), a frequently asked questions (FAQ) tool and "what's new" module for the portal page.

Editor's Note: We would like to thank the staff involved in testing version 6.0 during the summer period.

Changing Course ID

Many of you will have noticed that the Course ID for your Blackboard courses has changed. The reason for the change is that staff have expressed a need to keep old courses active while working on the next version of the course. To facilitate this, course IDs now include the year, trimester and course code e.g. 2003.1.PSYC101. Similarly, course names also include an abbreviated form in the front of the name e.g. 03.1.

This means that you can keep a course running without interfering in the setup of the next trimester or next year's course. It also means that your courses will be ordered on your front page of Blackboard by year and trimester making it easier to manage your activities.

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*Chalkdust welcomes feedback, suggestions and contributions. Please contact Irina Elgort if you have a short article or idea about online learning that you would like to share.
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Eight Ways to Get Students More Engaged in Online Collaboration



By
Dr. W.R. Klemm, Professor,
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1. Require participation.

Don't let it be optional. Set aside a portion of the grade allocation for participation in the online discussions. Tell the students that they must post x-number of items each week or for each topic. Critics will say that this approach does nothing to ensure quality of input. But it at least gets the students engaged, and hopefully, once they get caught up in the activity, they will strive to improve the relevance and quality of their work, because now they are on display. No longer can they hide. For many students, it is more embarrassing to make public postings that have no value. As another incentive for quality work, the teacher should grade on quality of the postings. That is highly subjective, but no more so than grading term papers or essays.

2. Form learning teams.

The advantages of so-called cooperative or collaborative learning are abundantly documented. Collaborative learning can occur just as well via computer conferencing. Moreover, asynchronous conferencing overcomes the schedule coordination problems that plague typical face-to-face learning teams. The advantage for promoting online interaction is that learning teams should bond and thus make each student in the group want to do his or her share. Helping students learn how to acquire team spirit is important in and of itself, but it also provides students with powerful incentive to become more engaged in online conference activity.

3. Make the activity interesting.

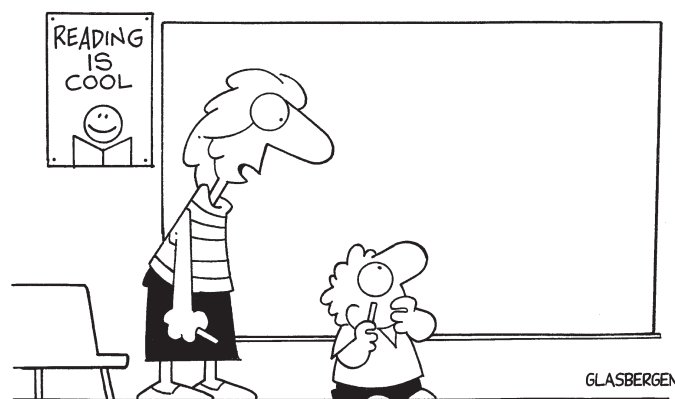
If it is a discussion topic, make it one that students have a reason to get engaged in. Appeal to their life experiences, vested interests, and ambitions. It might even be a good idea to let the students create some of the topics, especially if you provide an

overall academic framework to guide them where you want them to go. If it is a group-created paper or project, let the students pick the subject within the bounds of the academic objectives. Surely, you want more than just "discussion" of student opinions; a matter discussed in more detail on the topic of academic deliverables (Item 6).

4. Don't settle for just opinions.

Everybody has opinions. They are like knee jerk reflexes, occurring with little thought once they have been formed. Thus, it is not surprising that many classroom discussion groups online are dominated by opinion messages, rather than rigorous analysis and creative thought. Teachers should insist that

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"There aren't any icons to click. It's a chalk board."

opinions alone are not sufficient. They must be supported with data and rational discourse and even re-examined in light of what others in the online group are thinking.

5. Structure the activity.

Give students guideposts to help them think of things to say that are academically meaningful. Choice of topics has a great deal of influence here. Topics should be organized around an academic theme that serves course objectives. Topics should not be so open-ended that students digress. You can go further by creating activities that are best performed in a structured way. For example, debates can be structured by requiring students to post a position, to which others respond with pro or con supporting arguments, followed by

critique of the arguments. Brainstorming can be structured by having students first generate a list of alternatives; re-think the list by creating new ordering, structure, or relationships, systematically evaluating each item to produce a "short list" of viable alternatives; and then reaching consensus decision on the best choices, followed by prioritization.

6. Require a hand-in assignment (deliverable).

To extend structuring to its logical conclusion, you should require students to do something besides just express ideas and opinions. They should produce a deliverable from the conference. This kind of activity capitalizes on all the advantages of constructivist theory, which holds that students learn best when they have to integrate, synthesize and apply information by creating a deliverable piece of work. Such a deliverable can include idea generation and analysis, decisions, plans and designs, proposals, case studies, problem solution, research projects, term papers or reports, portfolios or role-playing.

7. Know what you are looking for and involve yourself to help make it happen.

Irrespective of the specific learning activity, the teacher should know what quality work is and should intervene as the work is being developed to steer students in the right direction. When the teacher participates in a conference, providing extensive critique, feedback, and encouragement, students cannot help but become more involved.

8. Peer grading.

Tell students at the beginning of the conference that at the end of the activity they will be asked to rate each other on the value of each person's contribution. This can be a powerful incentive for students to do quality work in the conference. However, most

of the students that I encounter do not like to grade each other. This is especially a problem if they have bonded as a result of operating in a learning team. In that case, they may want to give everybody an A, even when some students made distinctly greater contributions to the conference. Problems also arise by having them rank each other, because they might think that rank 1 gets an A, rank 2 gets a B, and the lower ranked students will get a failing grade. One possible solution is to have students grade the contributions of another group, which also gives them added learning experiences. Another possibility is to structure the ratings so that they don't translate directly into A, B, C, etc. The teacher might say, for example, that everyone will get an A, B, or C for the peer helping portion of the final grade, depending on the peer helping ratings. The ratings might be in the form of "superior, good, fair, poor," or some equivalent. Another possibility is to have each student name the one student in the group who helped them the most. Students who are named more than once might get bonus points added to the final grade. A similar approach could be used with a ranking scheme. Students with the best rank get the most bonus points on the final grade.

Material excerpted (with permission of the author) from "Eight Ways to Get Students More Engaged in Online Conferences" in the August 1998 Edition of T.H.E. Journal. The online version of T.H.E. Journal can be found at <http://www.thejournal.com>.

Please Note: Use of peer grading is dealt with as part of the group work guidelines in the VUW Assessment Handbook. Academics considering its use are advised to refer to the guidelines before implementing peer grading in their course. Copies of the Assessment handbook can be found at: http://www.vuw.ac.nz/home/about_victoria/publications.html



Blackboard 5.5 Tips and Tricks

With the start of Trimester one upon us, here are a couple of common questions that we get asked regarding managing students and courses.

How do I enrol a new student, tutor or lecturer who hasn't been automatically enrolled?

To enrol any new person in your course go to your control panel for the course then:

- 1) click "Add User" in the User Management area;
- 2) click "Enroll Existing User";
- 3) search for the user entering their last name (be sure "Last Name" is clicked NOT "Username"), then click "Search";
- 4) once you find the right person click the "Add" check box next to their name;
- 5) finally click "Submit".

If you want the person to have TA or lecturer rights then you need to use the "List/Modify User" option in the User Management Area.

- 1) search for the user as before;
- 2) when you find the right person click on the "Properties" button to the right of their name;
- 3) change their "User Role" to TA or Instructor as appropriate;
- 4) finally click "Submit".

In a small number of cases a user may not have an account in Blackboard and you will need to request that an account be created by contacting the ITS helpdesk (x5050 or its-help@vuw.ac.nz)

How do I remove a person who has mistakenly been added to the course?

To remove a person from your course in Blackboard go to your control panel for the course then:

- 1) click "Remove User" in the User Management area;
- 2) search for the user entering their last name (be sure "Last Name" is clicked NOT "Username"), then click "Search";
- 3) once you find the right person click the "Remove" check box next to their name;
- 4) type "Yes" (note capital "Y", lower case "es") at the bottom right of the page, above "submit";
- 5) click "Submit".

How do I remove a student who has dropped the course?

Unlike people who have mistakenly been added to the course we **do not** recommend that you delete students. The reason for this is that once a person has been deleted then all associated material (e.g. grades, discussion forum entries) is lost. Instead we suggest that you simply disable the students account. To disable a student go to your control panel for the course then:

- 1) click "List/Modify User" in the User Management area;
- 2) search for the user entering their last name, then click "Search";
- 2) when you find the right person click on the "Properties" button to the right of their name;
- 3) change their "Available" setting to No;
- 5) click "Submit".



Why can't the students see my course?

Remember when courses are created they are by default made unavailable to students until the instructor, i.e., you, makes them available. The purpose of this is to allow you to develop the course content and then release it when you're ready. As a result, before anyone can see or get to your courses, you must make it "Available". To do this go to the control panel for the course then:

- 1) click "Course Settings" in the Course Options area;
- 3) click "Course Availability";
- 4) click the "Yes" radio button to make the course available;
- 5) finally click "Submit".

Upcoming Workshops

(March - April 2003)



Blackboard I: QuickStart to Blackboard 5.5

This two-hour hands-on course provides participants with an introduction to the main features of the Blackboard 5.5 course management system.

Date: Tuesday 1 April
Time: 10 am - 12 pm
Venue: RB901

Blackboard II: Diving in Deeper

This two-hour hands-on course provides participants with an introduction to the more complicated collaboration and assessment features of the Blackboard 5.5 course management system.

Date: Tuesday 8 April
Time: 2 pm - 4 pm
Venue: RB901

Blackboard III: Designing for Effectiveness

This two-hour workshop combines both hands-on opportunities and group discussion to explore the design aspects of a Blackboard course that will impact on its effectiveness with students.

Date: Tuesday 15 April
Time: 10 am - 12 pm
Venue: RB901

Teaching Online I: The Challenge of Assessment

This two-hour seminar explores the challenges and opportunities provided by online environments for assessing students.

Date: Monday 24 March 2003
Time: 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Venue: 10 Waiteata Road, R 201

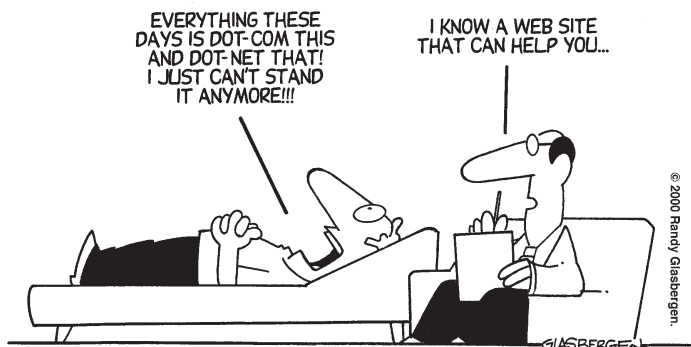
Teaching Online II: Collaboration and Communication

This two-hour seminar (plus a virtual session) explores the opportunities and challenges associated with using online environments to support communication and collaboration in courses.

Date: Friday 4 April 2003
Time: 2:30 pm to 4:30 pm
Venue: 10 Waiteata Road R 201

To Register

To register for these or any other UTDC courses, please visit the UTDC website and use our course registration system, available at: <http://www.vuw.ac.nz/utdc/workshops>



Online Resources



If your students submit assignments to you in electronic form (e.g. Word documents) then a freely available piece of software called Copyfind may be of interest to you.

This program examines any collection of document files and extracts the text portions of those documents looking through them for matching words in phrases of a specified minimum length. When it finds two files that share enough words in those phrases, Copyfind generates a report indicating the percentage of shared phrases. The program also generates html files with the matching phrases underlined.

The advantage of Copyfind is that it is a programme you can install on your own computer rather than a submission service. This way you maintain control of the process rather than passing student material across the Internet.

The software works best on Windows although a copy is available that works on Macintosh and Linux machines. The programme can be downloaded from the UTDC website at:

<http://www.vuw.ac.nz/utdc/resources/>

New in the UTDC Library



147 Practical Tips for Teaching Online Groups by Donald Hanna, Michelle Glowacki-Dudka & Simone Conceição - Runlee

This book starts by challenging the reader to consider their teaching philosophy and then provides a number of practical tips for setting up, implementing and managing online courses. Along the way the book explores some of the myths and constraints surrounding online learning.

The book also covers how to make activities like course discussions as interactive as possible as well as adapting course assessment to cope with the challenges of the online environment.

Rethinking University Teaching: a conversational framework for the effective use of learning technologies by Diana Laurillard - 2nd Edition

This is a new edition of what has become a seminal text in the field of educational technology. Part I of the book starts by considering the learning needs of students and the implications for teaching strategy. In Part II the book introduces a framework for analysing educational media and then uses this to explore the role of different forms of media in enhancing learning. Part III of the book looks at the design process for the development of teaching materials and a responsive organisational infrastructure.