

Blackboardlearn⁺

*Understanding the Change from
Blackboard Academic Suite Release 8
to Blackboard Learn*



Blackboard

Publication Date: January 2009

Worldwide Headquarters	International Headquarters
Blackboard Inc.	Blackboard International B.V.
650 Massachusetts Avenue N.W. Sixth Floor Washington, DC 20001-3796	Dam 27 2nd Floor 1012 JS Amsterdam The Netherlands
800-424-9299 toll free US & Canada	
+1-202-463-4860 telephone	+31 20 5206884 (NL) telephone
+1-202-463-4863 facsimile	+31 20 5206885 (NL) facsimile
www.blackboard.com	www.blackboard.com

Blackboard, the Blackboard logo, Blackboard Academic Suite, Blackboard Learning System, Blackboard Learning System ML, Blackboard Community System, Blackboard Transaction System, Building Blocks, and Bringing Education Online are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Blackboard Inc. in the United States and/or other countries. Microsoft and Windows are registered trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries. Java is a registered trademark of Sun Microsystems, Inc. in the United States and/or other countries. Macromedia, Authorware and Shockwave are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Macromedia, Inc. in the United States and/or other countries. Real Player and Real Audio Movie are trademarks of RealNetworks in the United States and/or other countries. Adobe and Acrobat Reader are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Adobe Systems Incorporated in the United States and/or other countries. Macintosh and QuickTime are registered trademarks of Apple Computer, Inc. in the United States and/or other countries. WebEQ is a trademark of Design Science, Inc. in the United States and/or other countries. JSpell is a trademark of The Solution Café in the United States and/or other countries. Other product and company names mentioned herein may be the trademarks of their respective owners. U.S. Patent No. 6,988,138. Patents pending.

No part of the contents of this manual may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without the written permission of the publisher, Blackboard Inc.

Table of Contents

Introduction	6
Product Naming and Terminology	6
Removed Features	7
New Features	8
Assignments	9
What's New in this Release?	9
Frequently Asked Questions about Assignments.....	9
Blogs and Journals	10
Journals	10
Blogs.....	10
Frequently Asked Questions about Blogs and Journals	10
Groups	12
What's New in this Release?	12
Frequently Asked Questions about Groups	13
Web Services and Proxy Tools	14
What's New in this Release?	14
Frequently Asked Questions about Web Services and Proxy Tools	14
System Customization	17
What's New in this Release?	17
Brand Customization	18
Frequently asked Questions about Brand Customization.....	18
Course Customizations	21
What's new in this release?	21
Frequently Asked Questions about Course Customization	22
My Places	23
What's New in this Release?	23
Frequently Asked Questions about My Places.....	23
Accessibility	25
Frequently Asked Questions about Accessibility	25
Notifications	26
What's New in this Release for Instructors?	26
What's New in this Release for Students?.....	26

What's New in this Release for Administrators?	27
Frequently Asked Questions about Notifications	27
System Administration	31
Features Gained	31
Feature Changes	31
System Wide Improvements.....	32
Features Gained	32
Adaptive Release	33
Features Gained	33
Announcements	34
Features Gained	34
Features Lost.....	34
Assignments	35
Features Gained	35
Features Lost.....	35
Blogs and Journals	36
Branding and Customization	37
Features Gained	37
Features Lost.....	38
Branding With Community Engagement	39
Features Gained	39
Calendar	40
Features Gained	40
Collaboration Tools (Chat & Virtual Classroom)	41
Course Creation Wizard.....	42
Course Navigation and Learning Content	43
Features Gained	43
Discussions.....	45
Features Gained	45
External Links.....	46
Features Gained	46
Glossary	47
Features Gained	47

Grade Center - Instructor Views	48
Features Gained	48
Feature Changes	48
Grade Center - My Grades	49
Features Gained	49
Groups	50
Features Gained	50
Learning Modules	51
Features Gained	51
My Places	52
Features Gained	52
Tasks	53
Tests, Surveys and Questions	54
Features Gained	54
What's New	55
Features Gained	55
Tracking Reports	56
Email and Messages	57
Features Gained	57
Text Editor	58
Features Gained	58

Introduction

This document is designed to give the users a comprehensive look at the features and functions of Blackboard Learn and how they compare to the Blackboard Academic Suite, Release 8.

Product Naming and Terminology

Blackboard Learn is the new name of the Blackboard Academic Suite. It represents the singular purpose of the software suite and will help resolve some of the confusion around product names and terminology that are holdovers from the Blackboard-WebCT merger.

Blackboard Learn features and functions are grouped into modules. The table below identifies the product and module names that are used to define Blackboard Learn.

Name	Description
Blackboard Learn	Blackboard's flagship product for enabling teaching and learning online.
Course Delivery	Includes features and functions for creating online courses. Prior to Release 9, this was known as the Learning System.
Learning Content	Includes tools for storing, managing, and presenting content as well as tools for collaborating on content with other users. Prior to Release 9, this was known as the Content System.
Community Engagement	Includes features and functions for building out a vibrant and diverse learning community as well as tools for delegated system administration. Prior to Release 9, this was known as the Community System.
Outcomes Assessment	Includes features and functions to measure the success of institution learning initiatives. Prior to Release 9, this was known as the Outcomes System.
Building Blocks	Building Blocks is the catch-all name for the program and interfaces used to integrate tools and outside systems with Blackboard Learn. Integrations like those that were achieved through PowerLinks are now achieved through Building Blocks.
Basic License	An entry-level version of Blackboard Learn that includes a subset of the features available with Course Delivery.
Enterprise License	The standard version of Blackboard Learn for Course Delivery. This term is used to differentiate it from the Basic License. Modules, such as Learning Content and Community Engagement, are licensed separately.

Removed Features

The following features are no longer provided in Blackboard Learn:

- **Electric Blackboard:** Now students can use Journals to complete these same tasks—it is also much more full featured than the Electric Blackboard tool.
- **Digital Dropbox:** The more robust Assignments tool and the Group File Exchange meets the needs of individual users and groups for completing and managing course work.
- **Student Homepages:** The new Blogs tool enables students to express their thoughts and reflect on learning within a course. The My Places tool allows Student to post their avatar system-wide (instead of limited to the course environment) and includes additional functionality and a customizable set of links to frequently accessed information as well as tools to personalize a user's own experience.

New Features

Blackboard Learn includes several innovations that are grouped in the following categories:

- Assignments
- Blogs and Journals
- Groups
- Web Services and Proxy Tools
- System Customization
- Course Customizations
- My Places
- Accessibility
- Notifications

Innovations in each of these areas represent the confluence of best-of-breed features and functions from earlier Blackboard products.



Note: Several of these features are also discussed in the section on changes to existing features and functions. To understand the full impact of the upgrade to Blackboard Learn, make sure to review the entire document.

Assignments

The features of the Blackboard Learn Assignment tool allow groups of students to work on and submit assignments together, as well as individually. This provides instructors with the ability to assign a single grade to all of the students in the group without losing the ability to override an individual's grade if necessary. This tool facilitates an interactive learning process by providing faculty with the ability to permit multiple attempts of the same assignment. This allows students to edit, add to, and improve their original effort and allows instructors to provide a grade and feedback for each submission.

What's New in this Release?

1. Instructors can deploy Assignments to all Students individually or to groups of Students. If an Instructor selects to deploy Assignments to groups of Students, the Instructor will be able to choose which groups receive the Assignment. One group member will submit the assignment for the whole group. The Instructor provides one grade to the submission and all members of the group receive the same grade automatically. Instructors can provide individual members with a separate grade if necessary.
2. Instructors can allow Students to submit multiple attempts for the same assignment. Each of these attempts can be graded and commented on individually. Both students and instructors can track progress throughout the assignment. Instructors can specify how many attempts are allowed or allow an unlimited number of attempts. If the specific number of attempts were completed by a student, the instructor can allow an additional attempt if required.
3. Students can attach a file and include additional information and hyperlinks in their assignment attempt using a Submission field instead of simply attaching a file.

Frequently Asked Questions about Assignments

Where does this feature appear?

Assignments can be added to any content page within courses and organizations.

Are there any changes to existing workflows?

Yes. Previously, Academic Suite users would simply submit their assignment and then wait for their feedback and grade from their instructor. Now students can submit their assignments multiple times or receive an additional attempt to submit before receiving their final grade. Likewise, instructors can provide a grade and feedback for each attempt of a single assignment, rather than simply grading the individual submission for an assignment.

Group Assignments also provide a new workflow. Only one student within the group has to submit the assignment for the whole group and similarly the instructor has to submit only one grade for the group, which is given automatically to all of the members in the group. The instructor does have the option to override individual grades.

Where is the Digital Dropbox?

The Digital Dropbox does not appear in Release 9. The Assignments tool now provides a significantly improved submission workflow.

Blogs and Journals

Blogs and Journals provide students and instructors with a social learning tool for expressing their thoughts and reflecting on their learning, either privately (with the instructor) or publicly (with others in the course). These tools empower all course users to create and share ideas, while instructors maintain the ability to edit or remove any inappropriate material.

Journals

Individual Journals allow students to record their course experiences and what they are learning. These thoughts can be a private communication between a student and the instructor or shared with everyone in the course. Journal entries can be commented on by the author and the instructor. Others are able to read public Journals, but they cannot comment on them.

Group Journals allow groups of students to reflect collaboratively on their course work and comment on their fellow group members' findings. To maintain privacy, Journal entries may be added anonymously by group members.

Blogs

Individual Blogs provide each student with his or her own area to publicly share thoughts and work with others in the course and to receive comments and feedback on entries. Avatars added by students will be displayed in their public space to help personalize the page.

Course Blogs allow all users in the course to share their thoughts and work in one common area that everyone can read and comment on. All entries are posted to the same page to help promote collaboration among all course members. Users can add entries and comment on entries anonymously to maintain privacy.

Group Blogs allow groups of students to collaboratively post thoughts and comment on each others' work while all other users in the course can view and comment on their entry.

In each of these cases, users create entries, which are added to their Blog or Journal. The entries can be saved as drafts or published and then edited later. When entries are added to the Blog or Journal, they are added automatically to an index organized by date. A "New" indicator is displayed on entries and comments that the user has not yet displayed. Entries also can be marked as "New" again to create a reminder.

Frequently Asked Questions about Blogs and Journals

What is the difference between a Blog and a Journal?

A Journal is an on-going reflection or record of events by an individual or set of individuals. A Blog is a commentary by an individual or set of individuals that is for public consumption and comment.

Can I make Blogs and Journals Public?

No. The privacy of students' course work needs to be respected. Opening these tools to the outside world may violate privacy laws.

Where Do Blogs and Journals Appear?

Blogs and Journals exist as tools within the course environment. Instructors can access them from the Tools area in the Control Panel. Instructors can provide access to students through tool links on content pages, the Menu, and/or the Tools page. Students access Group Blogs and Journals from within a Group space.

Groups

Collaboration through social interaction allows students to share their personal experiences and understand those of others. Working with peers as a group enhances student motivation by increasing their personal involvement in the learning process. A Group area and Group tools provide the platform for this social interaction to take place.

The Group area provides students with a forum to meet and connect with their peers, which they may not have in a large course environment or through distance education. The Group tools allow students to communicate and collaborate effectively. The customizable space provides students with a sense of ownership within the course. The new Group tools provide instructors with more insight into individual student participation within group activities. These features will aid in creating problem-based learning exercises as well as developing constructivist learning environments.

The Group creation options are great time savers, allowing instructors to easily create and enroll students into any number of groups at one time. Instructors also can empower students to create their own groups so that they can take advantage of the robust group tools available in the absence of instructor participation or if they wish to create their own study groups.

What's New in this Release?

1. Instructors can create any number of groups at once and provide default settings and description for each group. Students can then be automatically enrolled in those groups, manually enrolled at a later date, or asked to sign-up up for a group themselves. These groups then can be managed collectively or individually.
2. Group Members can access a customizable Group area where they will communicate and collaborate with their group members using the group tools available on the page. Group assignments and notifications will be listed within the modules provided, and group material can be saved and authored collectively from this location. The Group area provides a one stop shop for group work.
3. Group Tools: Group members can create their own Discussion Board forums that allow them to conduct ongoing conversations. Group members are able to Blog thoughts and ideas for the rest of the course to comment on or add Journal entries for private reflection within the group. Group members can create Tasks to track the progress of their deliverables. These tasks can be conducted and completed by any of the members in the group.
4. Building Blocks can be group aware and made available to groups within their group area.
5. Students can create their own groups in the absence of instructor participation to take advantage of the robust group communication and collaboration tools provided. Students can provide a description of the group and limit the number of students able to enroll in the group. Instructors always have the option of modifying or restricting access to student-created groups.

Frequently Asked Questions about Groups

Where do Groups appear?

All Group areas can be accessed from a palette in the Course Menu. Each group in which the student is enrolled will be listed.

How can students collectively author and submit an assignment?

If a group member saves a file to the File Exchange tool within their group area, each of the members will have access to that file. The students then can use the communication tools to collaborate. The file then can be updated by any member of the group until it is complete. A group member then can attach the file to an Assignment and submit it. The submission will be associated automatically with each member of the group.

What is the difference between a Group and a Group Set?

A group is a collection of students. A group set is a collection of groups. Originally all of the groups within the Group set will contain the same default settings and description. Groups within a group set can then be managed in bulk or modified individually to customize the settings or description for a specific group.

Web Services and Proxy Tools

What's New in this Release?

1. **Building Blocks - Proxy Tools:** Customers moving to Release 9 will be able to write custom integrations that can run remotely and access the system using well-defined Web Services interfaces.

Third parties writing such integrations will be able to negotiate for specific permissions to retrieve data, write data, or execute code on the Release 9 server, which can be approved and monitored by the administrator.

Proxy Tool code and Web Service documentation is available from <http://edugarage.com>.

2. **Web Services Administration:** Customers moving to Release 9 will be able to administer a set of Web Services across all nodes of their system from a single interface, including granular access control (per-service, per-tool, per-operation, and by access IP address or range).

Frequently Asked Questions about Web Services and Proxy Tools

Are Proxy Tools and Web Services available with all licenses?

Tool Integrations are available only to Blackboard Learn licensees at the Enterprise level.

Where does this feature appear in the product?

Administrator Panel [Bb Building Blocks Settings] > Building Blocks

Administrator Panel [Bb Building Blocks Settings] > Web Services

Did this feature change any existing workflows?

Existing tool integrations managed formerly from Administrator Panel > Building Blocks are now managed from Administrator Panel > Building Blocks > Building Blocks - Installed Tools. At the course and organization level, tool integrations managed formerly from Control Panel > Manage Tools > Building Blocks Tools, are now managed from Control Panel > Customize > Tool Availability.

All tools are managed from the same interface. The instructor or course builder does not need to know whether the tool is an installed tool, a proxy tool, or a native Blackboard tool.

Why choose a Proxy Tool?

- Remote administration (many NG installations, one central service) or just segregation of service (SIS system stays separate from NG system)
- No Java required
- Data can be hosted remotely
- Potential for access without requiring a logged-in user (once authorized)
- More transparency of administration and less potential to interfere with core

Why choose a Building Block?

- Need to use an API not yet exposed via Web Services
- Need backward compatibility to Academic Suite Release 8 or older
- Easier integration with NG Look and Feel and user/session management
- Need to deploy module content

When do I need Proxy Placements for my tool?

- To place links in the control panel, admin panel, or student or group tools
- To handle content types in courses
- To have NG users initiate calls out to your service, rather than just having your service initiate

Do Proxy Tools have to be written in Java?

No. Unlike installed Building Blocks, proxy tool code can be written in any language that can support SOAP-based Web Services protocol.

Are there performance concerns?

While Building Blocks run directly in the Java Virtual Machine (JVM) on the Blackboard Learn server, Proxy Tools run on remote machines. As a result, the risk of memory leaks impacting Blackboard Learn performance is minimal, but there is the potential of increased network traffic to the Blackboard Learn server from Proxy Tools. As with any third-party code, if it is poorly written it could impact performance. Proxy tools can be blocked individually, at the service or operation level, or constrained to a particular IP address or range using the administrative interface.

What Services are supported?

Release 9 ships with four services. All operations of each service are documented (and can be enabled or disabled) from the administrative interface.

- **Util:** shared methods for tool initialization and registration
- **Context:** shared methods for establishing and maintaining sessions and getting authorization
- **Content:** methods for creating, retrieving, updating, or deleting course or organization content
- **Gradebook:** methods for creating and retrieving gradebook columns, retrieving grades for a user or a course, or creating a grade entry. This service may change significantly in a future NG release.

Global Services should be able to provide additional services as needed over this infrastructure, to expose any operation that can be accomplished by an installed Building Block using the Blackboard Learn Java API.

What protocols do the Web Services support?

- Simple Object Access Protocol (SOAP) is supported. Representational state transfer (REST) protocol is not.
- The Services themselves are deployed over the Apache foundation's Axis framework (<http://ws.apache.org/axis/>) with proprietary Blackboard extensions for session management and authorization negotiation.

How does the Learning Environment Connector relate to Proxy Tools, Web Services, and Co-Production?

- The Learning Environment Connector is a set of interfaces that will be available beginning with Release 9 that enables other CMS's to begin to integrate with Blackboard and share important data. Blackboard is working closely with client institutions to build basic connectors for Moodle and Sakai that will be released as Open Source connectors.
- The existing connectors for CE4 and Vista are implemented as Building Blocks. The initial implementations of the Moodle and Sakai connectors will also follow this approach.
- The Learning Environment Connector will enable users in other CMS's to access new capabilities built using Proxy Tools and/or Web Services when they are inside Blackboard Learn.

System Customization

What's New in this Release?

Tab Groups

Tab management in the Community Engagement module has been expanded to support the grouping of tabs. Tabs that belong to a group appear as a secondary row of tabs below the top frame and can be ordered and managed like the top frame tabs.

Single Login Page

In response to customer feedback from current administrators of all products, we have made improvements to the user experience on entry to the Blackboard Learn software. Administrators can choose whether users begin on a gateway page that includes the login form, or directly on the My Institution tab that includes a login module. Administrators can publish system announcements directly to the gateway page using familiar announcements tools, and Enterprise Edition customers can customize it extensively using a simple template.

Brand Customization

Release 9 provides an extensive set of user interface themes that can change the entire look and feel of the system. The Blackboard default theme uses modern rounded edges and a soft blue and yellow color scheme. To help ease the transition to Release 9, themes inspired by each of the legacy LMS products (CE4, CE8/Vista 8, and legacy Academic Suite 8) are available, as well as a Schoolhouse theme designed to appeal to younger learners and a Brushed Metal theme with clean lines, drop shadow, and neutral colors.

Fifteen separate color palettes will also ship with Release 9, each of which can be overlaid on top of any theme to change the set of colors used throughout the system.

For customers who want even more flexibility, the colors of the most common interface elements can be customized individually beyond the color palette offerings. For example, an administrator can set the button color throughout the system to an institution-defined value.

Release 9 also allows Enterprise Edition customers with technical expertise to download and customize the entire package of style sheets for each theme, or the single style sheet for all colors in the color palette, and upload those changes for use on their system.

Frequently asked Questions about Brand Customization

Are there any exceptions based on license level?

- Customization of the login page is available only to Enterprise Edition customers (as in Release 8).
- Community Engagement licensees can also customize a portion of the login page differently for different hostnames (e.g. `bizschool.myinst.edu`).
- Tab Groups are only available to Community Engagement licensees.
- Download and upload of custom themes and color palettes is available only to Enterprise Edition customers.
- The ability to associate different themes, palettes, and settings with different host names or user communities is available only to Community Engagement licensees (similar to the Brands feature of Release 8).
- All customers will be able to choose a single theme and palette, and set individual color settings to be shared by all users.

Where do these features appear?

Tab Groups

Admin Panel (Bb Community Engagement Settings) > Tabs and Modules > Tab Groups

Admin Panel (Bb Community Engagement Settings) > Tabs and Modules > Tabs

Login Page

Login Page

Admin Panel (Security) > Gateway Options

Admin Panel (Bb Community Module Settings) > Brands and Themes > Customize Login Page

Admin Panel (Tools and Utilities) > Announcements

Themes

Admin Panel (Bb Community Module Settings) > Brands and Themes

Are there any Changes to Existing Workflows?

- **Tabs and Modules > Tabs:** Community Engagement License only. The Tabs inventory list contains one row for each tab on the system, and can be used by administrators with tab management privilege, including any domain administrators with management privilege for a subset of tabs, to manage default layout, content, personalization and other settings of the tab. Controlling visibility, position order and membership of a tab within a tab group moves to the new Tab Group manager tool, which is controlled by a separate entitlement. Non-community engagement licenses will see no change in existing tab management capability.
- **Tab Menu Column:** The Release 8 tab layout options included the ability to manage a menu column on the left with a fixed set of possible menu modules with a separate color scheme theme, and a one-column or two-column layout of modules. The 9.0 tab layout options allow one-column, two-column or three-column layouts of modules, all of which use the same theme. The Tool Panel, Sponsorships, Course Search, Organization Search and Hot Links menu areas have been converted to modules, and can be managed in the Tabs and Modules > Modules list page. The contents of these modules continue to be managed from the Tabs and Modules > Tabs list page in Release 9. In upgrading from Release 8, the existing menu modules will still appear on the same tabs and in the same position in the layout where they did, but they will adopt the theme of the rest of the modules on the page, and, if the tab can be personalized, they will be repositionable as the other modules on the page via drag and drop.
- **Manage Brands > Tab Rounding:** Changes to the HTML in the top frame (in order to facilitate accessibility and customization) led to support for tab rounding only with Firefox and Safari browsers. IE browser users will always see square tabs. Custom colors and themes will be available to all users.
- **Brand Management:** The number of interface settings that can be customized for a brand has been dramatically increased in Release 9. These customizations have been bundled into "themes" - packages of style and layout directives, similar to the Language Packs. A theme can be associated to the default brand, or for Community Engagement customers, to any brand on the system. Within a theme, the color palette has been extracted and can also be associated to a brand, either in lock-step with the theme, or independently. The available palettes roughly correspond to the module colors available when customizing or personalizing a module tab, but they encompass many more colors on the system. Even beyond the theme and color palette, some individual colors and navigation settings can be set for a specific brand, including all of the top frame settings that were previously settable per-brand, and a few more besides. All choices may be previewed within the new Brands and Themes tool before being applied to the system. Existing brands are set to the Blackboard default theme on upgrade.
- **Login Template:** The default login page template and the login tag syntax will change in Release 9 - it is possible that some login template customizations will need to be redone for Release 9. Both brand-specific customizations that formerly resided on the gateway page and system-specific login template changes will be feasible in Release 9.

Do I Have to Know CSS to Customize Blackboard Learn?

No! Administrators who are comfortable with the Blackboard interface can use the theme and palette library that ships with Release 9 to choose one of over 100 combinations of theme and color palette for their system, and with Community Engagement, to apply distinct combinations to any campus community they choose, by institution role, hostname or both. Furthermore, with the new Blackboard Learn color picker, over 16 million color choices are available to be set for any of 21 commonly used color elements in the system.

Course Customizations

What's new in this release?

Direct Access to Course Management Tools

All course management tools will be immediately available upon course access for instructors, teaching assistants, and other users with the appropriate entitlements. Course management tools in the control panel and course content editing capabilities have been organized into common tasks.

Instructors will have direct access to edit and organize their Course Menu. They also have the ability to add content areas, tool links, sub-headers, and visual separators to the menu. The ability to rearrange the order of menu items using drag and drop or a keyboard accessible method of organization is also included. More intelligent handling of empty content areas, such as hiding them from the student's view of the course if they do not contain at least one visible piece of content, will keep the course clean and organized.

Multiple Methods of Content Presentation

Course Module pages can be added to a course to provide easy access to a variety of information. By default a course homepage will be created that contains modules such as "Course Announcements", "What's New", "Calendar", and "Tasks." Any Community Engagement module can be displayed within a course by the system administrator. Modules which typically display roll up information (Announcements, Tasks, What's New, and so forth) will only display content relevant to the course when displayed on a course module page. Any module which can be displayed within a course can also be added to a group home page and will further filter the display to reflect information applicable to the specific group. The instructor will have the option to allow the individual user to personalize course module pages giving them the ability to add additional content at their own discretion.

The content layout options previously available in all Learning System products; Icon Only (Vista/CE) and Icon with Text (legacy Academic Suite) as well as a new layout option (Text Only) are included. Instructors can make use of all three layout options within a course to ensure the content for any given area is being presented in the most appropriate manner for their users. Content in all layouts can be repositioned using drag and drop or using a keyboard accessible method.

Increased Options for Course Design and Style

Instructors will have the ability to design and style their course to reflect the individual needs of their subject and material. They can select the menu color and style of the course menu (including the option to use text or buttons to represent individual items); they can create a customized page banner (using the Text Editor); select the color scheme displayed on each course module page; and they can upload a course banner image to be displayed on the page designated as the "Course Entry Point". All of these options provide the instructor with added flexibility to determine the presentation of their course.

Simplified Tool Management

Instructors can manage the availability of all course tools in a single interface. They will have full control over how tools are presented to users. Tools can be added as direct links on the course menu, embedded in line with other course content or made available on a central Tools page for easy access.

Frequently Asked Questions about Course Customization

Are there any exceptions based on license?

A core set of Blackboard modules (including Announcements, Calendar, Tasks, What's New, Needs Attention, To Do List, and Alerts) will be available for inclusion on course module pages. Clients who also have the Community Engagement module will have the increased ability to make any module available for display within a course.

Are there changes to any existing workflows?

- **Default course and organization menu for new courses:** The default menu for new courses has been changed, based on customer feedback and best practices from across the client base. Menus in Release 9 will support dividers and subheadings. Existing course menus will not be changed on upgrade and all color and styles choices will be maintained. Default menu customizations made by system administrators in Release 8 will be logged during update so that they can be manually restored if necessary. This includes the default text and background colors on the menu.
- **New organization and placement of Control Panel:** The course control panel is now available to instructors and other privileged course users on any course page, as a menu below the navigation area, rather than as a standalone page. It has also been reorganized to more clearly group tasks related to building out, designing or customizing a course, as distinct from tasks related to teaching or administering a course.
- **New user enrollment tool within a course:** User management (previously controlled from multiple pages) has been simplified into a single, easy to use interface allowing instructors and other privileged users to quickly and efficiently enroll users, manage their course permissions and remove users from the course list.
- **Observer access to course tools:** Observers will still have access to the Calendar Items, Tasks, and Grades of the user they are observing. The dedicated Observer Tools landing page will no longer be available - observer users will access the tools either from the main tools page (if enabled) or directly from the course menu, just as student users do.

What do Administrators need to know about Course Modules?

Any system module can be made available for display in courses and organizations. If the module shows roll up information when displayed on a tab it will be filtered to display information specific to the course or organization when viewed in that context. Permission to view modules is still controlled by institution role so modules which have limited access (such as Faculty only) will only display to users with the selected institution role(s) even when viewed in courses or organizations.

My Places

What's New in this Release?

My Places is an expansion of a best-of-breed tool from the CE product line which provides the user with quick and easy navigation to a variety of places within Blackboard Learn. It is always one click away in the top frame, and contains a customizable set of links to frequently accessed information as well as tools to personalize a user's own experience.

A user can choose to display a list of courses and organizations that have been accessed in the last [X] number of days. The value for [X] is 30 by default but can be changed by the user. The user can also choose to display a list of their Content Collection bookmarks (taken directly from the list of book marks in Content Collection) and a list of Outcomes Assessment Place affiliations. All users will have a link to the Notifications Dashboard if it is enabled and System Administrators will have a direct link to the Administrator Panel from My Places.

Avatars are a personal image which can be used to represent the user throughout their online experience. Administrators can enable avatars on the system and either allow a user to upload an image of their choice or select an institution approved image to display. Avatars are displayed in My Places, Blogs, Journals, and within Notification Modules including: What's New, Needs Attention, To Do, and Alerts. Users will have quick access to accessibility options including how to enable the Blackboard interface to display according to operating system settings for high contrast and how to increase the browser font size.

From My Places, users will be able to manage notification settings for all courses and organizations they are enrolled in as well as other personal and privacy settings including updating their name, address and contact information, determining what information is public, who can view it, and who can email them.

Frequently Asked Questions about My Places

Are there any exceptions based on license?

- Content Collection bookmarks will only be available for display in My Places if Learning Content is licensed.
- Links to Outcomes Places will only be available for display in My Places if Outcomes Assessment is licensed.
- Organization links and the link to the Notifications Dashboard will only be available for display in My Places if Community Engagement is licensed.

Where does this feature appear in the product?

All users will access My Places from a direct link in the top frame. Administrators can manage avatars from the Tools and Utilities section of the Administrator Panel.

Are there changes to existing workflows?

My Places contains all of the links that are also available through Personal Information. Direct access to the Personal Information tool is still available from the Tools module.

What does the System Administrator need to know about Avatars?

- Avatars can be enabled or disabled by the system administrator at any time, for the entire system.
- If enabled, the administrator has the option to allow users to upload their own image or select from a system approved image.
- User-uploaded images do not go through any approval or moderation process, but they are stored in a specific file system location and the avatar file name contains the user's user ID, so files can be deleted or otherwise managed as needed.
- If the administrator opts to have users choose a system approved image, the admin will need to upload the set of images to the Blackboard system and define the location in the settings pages for Avatars.

Accessibility

Frequently Asked Questions about Accessibility

Are there any exceptions based on license level?

No. Every capability of Blackboard Learn is designed to support accessibility.

How is accessibility implemented?

Most of what makes the product so easy to use for all users, including those with assistive technologies, is under-the-covers with a combination of CSS (Cascading Style Sheets) and semantic markup (that is, well formed HTML). Accessibility features include:

- **Keyboard reordering**
- **Personal styles accepted**
- **Embedded and optional help:** The embedded help throughout the application helps users with and without disabilities access the features of Blackboard easily. The personal setting to hide or show help until the user chooses to call upon it again helps users from both perspectives: it removes text from the application that may be distracting, or it adds text to the application that helps them without forcing them to leave what they are doing. The Personal setting is found in My Places, and the on-the-fly change can be executed using the help icon in the top right corner of any page with help available.

Are there any changes to existing workflows?

Note that this release has a significant impact on the workflow of nearly all tasks for the purpose of improving the usability. Overall these change result in a positive change with a more intuitive user interface, but this is most challenging to learn for the blind or visually impaired user, because they have memorized the pathway to all of their activities. The structure provided in Release 9 is drastically improved to help guide them to easy discovery.

Is everything accessible and highly usable in Release 9?

No. Accessible users should be aware of the following issues:

- **Virtual Classroom:** Although the Accessible Chat alternative is provided, this is not considered "equal access" to all users.
- **JavaScript Requirement:** The requirement of JavaScript to use Blackboard is sometimes considered not accessible. Note however, that the login page of Blackboard will identify if the user does not have JavaScript enabled, and will inform the user of the requirement. This is equal access.

Notifications

Notifications recognizes the fact that Instructors do not live in Blackboard and delivers their course information to them via email in a format that draws them back into Blackboard to view or act upon the Notification.

Notifications provide an excellent reference point for Instructors to keep abreast of their Students' course related activities on a daily basis. Combined with the Early Warning System, Notifications gives Instructors insight into which Students may be at risk and provides a mechanism for communication with their Students.

The customization of Notifications gives users increased control over their experience within Blackboard and provides a way for System Administrators to decide which aspects of the Notifications system they will provide to their users.

What's New in this Release for Instructors?

Blackboard Learn provides timely and actionable Notifications of Instructor's course information, including when new content becomes available, when students meet Early Warning System rules criteria and when Student submitted assignments and tests are available for grading. Notifications are displayed in modules within Bb Learn and are delivered via email, either as individual email notes or as a daily Notifications digest.

While not new to Blackboard Learn, there are several things Instructors should consider when creating course content to take full advantage of Notifications:

- **Content Availability**, which can be controlled by the Display As Of dates in the content properties
- **Adaptive Release rules**, which will be respected by Notifications
- **Early Warning System rules**

The user experience is much improved with this centralized view of course related activity. Instructors will no longer be required to keep track of their students' activities inside each course. Instead, they will have easy access to notifications across of their courses. The format of the display automatically segments by urgency, further automating the process of determining which of the multitude of events require immediate attention, or which can be deferred.

What's New in this Release for Students?

Blackboard Learn provides timely and actionable Notifications of student's course information, including when new content becomes available and Due Dates of assignments and tests. Notifications are displayed in modules within Bb Learn and are delivered via email, either as individual email notes or as a daily Notifications digest.

Notifications will make students' online learning experience much nicer. Instead of hunting around for all of their new content and wondering when Assignments and Tests are due, this information will be given to them in an easily consumable format. Using the context menu to navigate to the appropriate action page (i.e., Assignment Due notification will take the student to the Submit Assignment page and Survey Available notification will take the student to the Survey), students will have a more intuitive way to navigate Blackboard Learn.

With the Community Engagement module license, the To Do List on the Notifications Dashboard gives students a single source of all of their upcoming Due Dates, allowing for more efficient management of their time.

What's New in this Release for Administrators?

Blackboard Learn 9 introduces timely Notifications of what is happening in the user's courses, including newly available content and surveys, assignment and test due dates.

The Notifications subsystem can be customized on several different levels:

- User-level personalization of Notifications
- System-wide settings, including general availability of Notifications
- Default Notifications settings that affect newly created courses and organizations

Frequently Asked Questions about Notifications

How do Instructors create Notifications and when will Students receive Notifications?

Most Notifications are tied directly to the creation of course content. When creating course content, Instructors can control the delivery of Notifications in several ways:

- **Display As Of date range:** Content Availability Notifications will be sent to Students based on these dates. If there are no Display As Of dates on the item, Notifications will be delivered immediately.
- **Adaptive Release Rules:** Any content that is subject to Adaptive Release rules will send Notifications to the appropriate Students if and when they meet the criteria of the Adaptive Release rules.
- **Announcements:** When creating Announcements, email Notifications can be forced to students via email, regardless of what personalization settings the Student may have. This is an excellent way to send emergency Notifications, such as when a class is canceled.

Some Notifications are created by the actions of Students, as when a Student submits an Assignment or Survey, or when posts are made to Discussion Board forums, Blogs and Journals.

How can Instructors use Notifications to take action?

Notifications, both on-line and in email, include links to pages where students can take appropriate actions. For instance, Notifications for unread Discussion Board postings contain links to the course Discussion Board and Notifications for Submitted Assignments contain links to the Assignment Submission page. Most Notifications also provide a quick way to send an email to the Instructor or Course Group members pertinent to that Notification.

Many Instructors use Announcements as a way to notify Students when Assignments are due. Do Announcements generate Notifications to Students?

Students will receive Notifications when Course Announcements become available to them. However, Instructors will discover that Students are also receiving Notifications when Assignments become available and are due and will quickly learn they can rely on Notifications to keep Students up to date.

How can Instructors take advantage of Notifications to determine at-risk Students?

The Alerts module displays information about which students that may be at risk. For example, when Student's miss a Due Date for an Assignment; Passed Due Notifications are displayed in the Alerts Module.

The Alerts module also displays Early Warning System rules created by the Instructor. The Early Warning System is an excellent way to search for at risk behaviors. Rules can be created based on a Student's last access to the course, on specific Grade Center columns or on specific Due Dates. Once a day, these rules will collect the latest information about which Students meet the rule criteria. Results of Early Warning System rules are displayed in the Alerts module.

How can Instructors communicate with students?

Each Notification has a contextual menu. For many types of Notification this menu provides, among other actions, a quick way to communicate with Students or Groups via email.

How can Instructors track Course activity on a daily basis?

The Needs Attention module displays all Student Submissions that are ready to be graded. Not only can Instructors easily see which Students have submitted each assignment, they can use the Notifications' context menu to navigate directly to the submission page where they can view and grade the submission. Submission Notifications even tell the Instructors if a submission came in after the due date.

How can Students use Notifications to take action?

Notifications, both on-line and in email, include links to pages where students can take appropriate actions. For instance, Notifications for unread Discussion Board postings contain links to the course Discussion Board and Notifications for Assignment Due Dates contain links to the Assignment Submission page. Most Notifications also provide a quick way to send an email to the instructor or Course Group members pertinent to that Notification.

Can Students personalize how they receive Notifications?

Yes. Notifications Settings can be accessed via a button on the Notifications modules and via My Places. Students can choose, on a course-by-course basis, which types of Notifications they want to receive and if they want to receive Notifications by email. See the *Notifications - Customization* datasheet for more details.

The To Do List shows the due dates of Assignments and Tests. What if a Student wants a few days advanced notice?

Students can set up Reminders via email for Due Date Notifications by defining how many days in advance they would like to receive them.

Are Notifications only for Course content?

Notifications cover Course and Organization content, but not System Announcements. Students can have different personalization settings for each of their courses and organizations.

Several of these features are also discussed in the section on changes to existing features and functions. To understand the full impact of the upgrade to Blackboard Learn, make sure to review the entire document. Email Notifications are turned off by default. If the System Administrator has turned on email Notification, students can select which types of Notifications they would like to receive in email form.

Students can also elect to have their email Notifications come individually (one email note per notifications) or as a daily digest of all new Notifications.

Are there any exceptions based on license?

All Blackboard Learn licenses provide on-line Notifications within Courses and via email. Community Engagement provides an additional Notifications Dashboard, which shows students a roll-up of their Notifications across all of their Courses and Organizations.

Where does this feature appear?

Notifications modules can reside on any Modules page in the system. By default they appear on the Home Page within Courses and, with Community Engagement, on the Notifications Dashboard tab of My Institution.

There are four Notifications modules available to users:

- **To Do List** shows future due dates as well as any due dates they may have missed.
- **What's New** shows all course content as it becomes available and any unread posts to Discussion Boards, Blogs and Journals.
- **Needs Attention** shows Student submissions that are ready for grading. This is an excellent place for Instructors to get a sense of what needs to be done today.
- **Alerts** shows Students who have not submitted work as of its due date and Early Warning System rules. It provides a good sense of which Students may be falling behind in their course work.

These modules can be made role-specific and are displayed, by default, on the course Home Page and, with Community Engagement, on a Notifications Dashboard.

Edit Notifications Settings allows students to personalize which Notifications they receive and how they receive them.

Email Notifications are sent to the email address listed in the student's Personal Information.

Are there any changes to existing workflows?

The What's New module has been removed in favor of Notifications module.

Is the Notifications System enabled by default?

No. The System Administrator will need to turn on Notifications before any Course/Organization Notification data will be collected.

The Notifications System is on and users receive Online Notifications, but are not receiving Email Notifications. Why?

Email is turned off by default on the user level as well. The System Administrator can turn on email Notifications to give users the ability to choose if they want individual email or a daily digest of their notifications. However, users still need to opt-in to email notifications by editing their Notifications Settings.

Is there a way to clear out old, unneeded notifications?

Many Notifications have known life cycles. For instance, an Assignment Due Date Notification will be removed from your display once you have submitted the Assignment. Others, such as new Content Available Notifications do not have an obvious life cycle. These Notifications can be removed, individually or en mass, using the Dismiss option from a context menu.

When students personalize their Notifications via Edit Notifications Settings, they can also set up an Aging option, which will automatically Dismiss older Notifications. Due Date Notifications are not Dismissed by this setting.

Both the System Administrator and individual users can control how long to keep old notifications:

- The System Administrator can set the number of days in which to retain Notifications. This is a good way to clear out Notifications from previous semesters.
- Individual users can choose to Dismiss their older notifications by setting their own number of days to retain them. However, a user's setting cannot exceed that of the System Administrator.

Based on these settings, Notifications that are not Due Date specific will be deleted X number of days after creation. Also, any Notification can be dismissed (removed from the users display) manually.

Will too many Notifications pose performance concerns?

Notifications will increase overall load on system, particularly just prior to and early in the semester when course content, and therefore the Notifications, are being created. Once the semester gets underway, expect online performance issues to be limited to a bit of a hesitation when loading pages where the Notifications modules reside.

What options are available to ensure performance?

Administrators can turn off email Notifications all together. They can also force users to get their email Notifications as a daily digest. Finally, there is a setting that determines when digest email Notifications are processed. This can be set to a low usage time of day to alleviate some of the pressure on the server.

What can users modify?

Users can decide on a course-by-course, organization-by-organization basis which types of Notifications they want to receive and whether or not they want to receive them by email.

Where do users go to personalize Notifications?

There are two ways to get to the Notification settings pages:

- The **Edit Notifications Settings** button on each of the Notifications modules.
- The **Edit Notifications Setting** link in My Places.

Are there any exceptions based on license?

Settings for Organization Notifications require Community Engagement.

Where does this feature appear?

User's personalization settings are available through My Places and through the **Edit Notifications Settings** button on each of the Notifications modules.

Administrative settings are available on the System Admin page in the Course Settings section and the Organization Settings section. General Notification Settings are found in the Tools and Utilities section.

System Administration

Administrators will find that there have been a number of changes to the administrative tools available in previous releases of Blackboard. New features include a smart user interface that only shows the features available to the user and an overall reorganization of the Admin panel for easier access to features.

Features Gained

- + Administrator Panel Personalization
- + Users can drag and drop modules on the Administrator Panel to personalize it for their needs
- + Users See only the Options Available
- + Users will only see those options that are available to them in the Administrator Panel; options that are not available based on license and permissions do not appear.

Feature Changes

- Administrator Panel Organization
- The Administrator Panel is streamlined with intuitive placement of like settings and tasks.
- Outcomes Assessment Privileges do not appear by default
- Privileges related to the Outcomes Assessment module do not appear in the Privileges management area unless Outcomes Assessment is licensed.

System Wide Improvements

All users will enjoy a number of changes in Blackboard which impact the entire system.

Features Gained

+ Accessibility Improvements

Improvements to accessibility ensure that all users, including those with assistive technologies, find the product easy to use. These changes are, for the most part, under-the-covers and utilize a combination of CSS (Cascading Style Sheets) and semantic markup, such as well formed HTML. There are also a few features that appear to users, such as keyboard re-ordering and accepted personal styles

+ Embedded Help

Embedded help throughout Blackboard helps users with and without disabilities access the features of Blackboard easily. The personal setting to hide or show help until the user chooses to call upon it again helps users from both perspectives: it removes text from the application that may be distracting, or it adds text to the application that helps them without forcing them to leave what they are doing. Institutions also have the option to customize this help text to meet their specific needs.

+ New User Interface Design

Users will enjoy not only a new look, but advanced user interface functionality such as drag and drop, inline edit capabilities and consolidated page layouts.

+ Inline Confirmations Everywhere

Instead of separate receipt pages, inline confirmations are used throughout the system for more seamless workflows.

+ Fewer Clicks Everywhere

Users will enjoy using fewer clicks to navigate the system and complete tasks.

Adaptive Release

The function of Adaptive Release for course content is the same as the previous release with a few minor enhancements and an improved user experience.

Features Gained

+ Content Notifications

Students are notified when content is made available via Adaptive Release.

+ Fewer Clicks to Create and Manage Adaptive Release Rules

Managing adaptive release rules is immediately visible in the contextual menu.

Announcements

The features in the Announcements tool are very similar to those in previous releases of Blackboard Learn. While the announcements filter has been removed, faculty and administrators will enjoy a number of new flexible options for displaying announcements.

Features Gained

+ Multiple Display Options

Announcements can be displayed on both a Course Announcements page, a portal Announcements module and in a course specific Announcements module giving the instructors added flexibility over how the information is presented.

+ Priority Ordering

Instructors have the ability to re-order the display of announcements so the most important information will appear first.

+ Options to only Display Course Announcements

Instructors may select to only display course announcements in their course, and not display system announcements. This enables Instructors to reserve course announcements for pertinent information and reduces the noise level of announcements within the course.

+ Login Page Announcements

Administrators can communicate critical information to users before they login by placing Announcements directly on the login page. Institutions should develop and communicate business rules for displaying announcements prior to login.

+ Advanced Filtering Options

Advanced filtering options to display All, Course only, and System only announcements enable users to easily find important announcements and recover critical details.

+ Notifications

Notifications of new Course Announcements will appear on users' dashboards and may be sent via email according to the users personal preferences.

Features Lost

- Announcement Filter

Users are no longer able to view just the announcements posted from the current day. Communicate to the faculty the increased flexibility provided with new reordering capabilities to ensure that students are getting the most important information and are not missing announcements due to date filters.

- Announcement Text in Email

Email notifications for announcements include a link to the announcement, but do not include the full body of the announcement text.

Assignments

Users will enjoy a number of new enhancements to the Assignments feature, such as the ability for students to submit multiple attempts of an assignment when the Instructor would like to see iterative progress. Instructors can also allow students to turn in additional attempts of an assignment for exceptional cases or submissions. Additionally, faculty has more flexibility when it comes to submitting grades for their students.

Features Gained

+ Multiple Attempts

Instructors can allow students Multiple Attempts at the same assignment. The instructor can grade each attempt individually. This promotes the learning process and allows instructors to track progress.

+ Additional Attempts

Instructors have the ability to give specific students an additional attempt at an assignment in order to accommodate extenuating circumstances.

+ Submission Field

Students have access to a submission field in addition to attachments to provide text and links to online documents and websites.

+ Submission History

The Submission History provides a quick recap of the submission content, feedback, comments, grades and participants of each submission. This allows students to see what they have completed and allows instructors to view the progress made throughout the lifecycle of the assignment.

+ Release Assignments to Groups

The Assignments feature has been expanded to Groups so that a set of students can work together on one deliverable.

+ Group Grades

If a Group completes an Assignment, the instructor can grade one student's submission and submit the same grade to all students within the Group. The instructor also has the ability to provide each student an individual grade overriding the group grade.

Features Lost

- Digital Drop Box

The functions of the new Assignment tool made the Digital Drop Box obsolete. The workflows in the new Assignment tool enable users to accomplish the same tasks as the Digital Drop Box.

Blogs and Journals

Blogs and Journals are new features for Academic Suite clients. Blogs are an effective means of sharing knowledge and materials created and collected by the group with the rest of the course. Multiple blog types, including course, group and individual blogs are available. Instructors can assign a journal to each user in a course or course group that is accessible by only the user and the instructor. Journal entries can also be made available to the rest of the users in a course. Faculty needs to be educated on the new tool and best practices.

Branding and Customization

Institutions will enjoy a large number of new customization options available to the larger user community alongside an improved user experience. Administrators should consider their specific institution's needs and best practices when using these features.

Features Gained

+ Simple Upload/Download Template for Login

Administrators will be able to use a simple upload/download template mechanism for customizing the login page using a single template. This new process allows them to use simple HTML tags in a single template file to tailor the look and feel. Please speak to your client manager about licensing at the Enterprise level to gain access to this feature.

+ User Login Directly from First Loaded Page

All users will be able to log in from the first page; there is no need for a gateway page.

+ Post Announcements directly to the Login Page

Administrators can create HTML or text announcements posted to the login page directly from the Announcements tool. This will ensure that users see the most important information even before logging in. Note that the tool used to customize the information on the login page may be used without changing the template.

+ Themes and Color Palettes

Administrators can apply themes and color palettes to the entire system, including a "Blackboard Classic" theme, inspired by Release 8. Applying a look and feel is useful for easing retraining anxiety or for creating a bold new look.

+ Customize individual Colors

Custom individual colors in common use throughout the system can be changed using the standard color picker. For example, the Administrator could match the tabs to the rest of their institutional design. This enables institutions to customize the interface to match 'corporate' branding.

+ Modify the Cascading Style Sheet (CSS)

Staff with technical expertise can fully customize all aspects of the user interface with downloadable CSS themes through the Theme and Palette library tool. Please speak to your client manager about licensing at the Enterprise level to gain access to this feature.

+ Color Picker

A new more accessible color picker is used throughout the system; it allows users to select any color and uses color names and hexadecimal codes to identify colors in use.

+ Translation

Great Britain English, Finnish, Swedish, and Russian Language Packs, will be available with Blackboard Learn, Release 9.

Features Lost

- Login Page Customizations

Existing customizations to the login template may need to be re-applied. The tags used in the login template in prior releases of Blackboard have been superseded, so some customizations may need to be re-done.

- Numerous Changes to Text

A lot of text throughout the system has been modified which will require updates to existing customizations.

Branding With Community Engagement

All customers will benefit from the following new features if they license the Community Engagement module.

Features Gained

+ Tab Groups

Grouping tabs organizes related content in a way that improves user experience and saves screen real estate.

+ Customized User Communities

Administrators have the ability to brand separate schools, or provide one user experience for faculty (or a subset of faculty), and one experience for students by applying separate themes, palettes and color customizations. For example, the Administrator may select to use the BbClassic theme for one set of users at their institution. This theme is inspired by Release 8 and designed to make users comfortable in their online environment.

+ Customize Login Page

A section of the Login page may be customized for each supported host name. This allows the Institution to brand the entry point for separate schools differently by URL.

Calendar

The function of the Calendar is the same as the previous release of the product; all users will enjoy an improved user experience.

Features Gained

+ Duration of Activity Displayed on Calendar

The duration of activities is displayed on the Calendar, which allows for easier planning and enables users to view overlaps and conflicts between entries.

Collaboration Tools (Chat & Virtual Classroom)

The user experience and the function of the Chat and Collaboration features are the same as the previous release of the product.

Course Creation Wizard

The function of the Course Creation Wizard is the same as previous releases of the product.

Course Navigation and Learning Content

All users will enjoy a number of new enhancements and a new user experience in Course Navigation and Learning Content. Before using the new course environment, faculty might need to be educated on the functions and best practices of the following features.

Features Gained

+ Easily Accessible Control Panel

All options in the Control Panel are now available from the main course menu. Instructors no longer have to navigate to a separate area of the course to access these options.

+ In-line Add, Edit, and Drag and Drop

In-line actions and drag and drop results in quicker Course Menu set up and management; instructors no longer have to navigate to multiple areas of the course to access these controls and they can complete each action with fewer clicks.

+ Display of Tool Links is not dependent on Tool Availability

Tool availability is no longer linked to the display of tool links in course content areas, on tools page or in the course menu. Available tools can be displayed in a content area, on the tools page, in the course menu or in any combination of the three options. The display of the link to Instructors (in the Edit – ON view) is independent of the availability of the tool.

+ Presentation Options

Items in specific content areas can be displayed in “Icon View”, “Icon with Text” or “Text Only” for increased flexibility in course creation. This increased flexibility for content presentation allows Instructors to build course content areas that suit their unique pedagogical needs.

+ Course Module Pages

Course module pages provide the instructor with another way to present course related information to students. When building or updating a course Instructors should keep in mind this new page type, the kind of material that can be added to it and the personalization options available for students if they enable it.

+ Reorganization of Course Management Actions

Course Management features, such as the Control Panel and action bars, have been re-organized to align with the day-to-day tasks performed by instructors, increasing efficiency and becoming more task-appropriate.

+ Edit Mode for Additional Tools

Edit Mode now provides the instructor with access to management capabilities for additional tools such as the discussion board, calendar and announcements rather than requiring them to go to the control panel.

+ Hidden Content Areas

Empty content areas will be hidden from the student view of a course, which allows the instructor to build out the course content while only displaying areas that contain information pertinent to students. Students will not waste time clicking on empty folders to see if it contains content.

+ Dividers and Sub-Headers

Instructors now have additional organizational elements in the course menu that enable easy restructuring of the menu in a way that matches the presentation of the course material.

+ Notifications

Personal notifications provide direct navigation to specific content from within the course, Community Engagement, and/or users' email.

+ Tools Panel

There is no longer a separate Tools panel in the Course Menu. "Course Tools" and "Communication Tools" have been combined into a single Tools area that appears within the default Course Menu. This enables faculty to have more flexibility over tool management and presentation of tools in the course menu than previously available.

+ Tool Management

Tool management for content tools, communication tools, and building block tools has been combined into a single interface. This will improve Instructor efficiency because all the tools can be managed from a single, easy to use area.

Discussions

The function of Discussions is the same as the previous release of the product. All users will enjoy an improved user experience.

Features Gained

+ Notifications

Users may receive notifications of new Discussion Board posting activity. In-system notifications, such as in the What's New module, include links directly to the forum.

External Links

The function of External Links is the same as the previous release of the product. All users will enjoy an improved user experience.

Features Gained

+ Adding External Links to the Course Menu

Instructors can manage External Links that appear in the course menu using inline options. They no longer have to navigate to a separate area.

Glossary

The function of the Glossary is the same as the previous release of the product. All users will enjoy an improved user experience.

Features Gained

+ Easier Glossary Entry

An improved workflow enables Instructors to add entries to the Glossary with more ease and fewer mouse clicks.

Grade Center – Instructor Views

The function of the Grade Center feature is the same as the previous release of the product.

Features Gained

+ Grade Center Row Display

The Grade Center structures itself automatically to the available browser space but the user can define a minimum number of rows to display regardless of browser size or screen resolution.

Feature Changes

Action Bar Menu Items

Action Bar options have been re-organized to fall in line with the task oriented categorization of action bars across the system. Instructors should to be informed of the changes to the action bar menu and the increases in efficiency gained by task oriented organization and naming standards.

Grade Center – My Grades

The function of the My Grades feature is the same as the previous release of the product; users should be made aware of the new notifications feature.

Features Gained

+ Notifications of New Grades

Students will receive notifications of new or changed grades posted by the Instructor.

Groups

Users will enjoy a new Groups tool which includes robust, flexible features and an improved user interface. Instructors should be educated about the new features and best practices for using them in their courses.

Features Gained

+ Group Creation Options

There are more ways to create groups with Blackboard Learn, Release 9. Students can sign up for groups they would like to join. Alternatively, Instructors can create sets of related groups and manually enroll users or randomly distribute all students amongst the groups.

+ Student Created Groups

Students have the ability to create their own groups that other students can sign up for without any involvement by the instructor.

+ Bulk Management of Groups

Instructors can manage groups and their properties in bulk upon group creation.

+ Quick Access to Group Areas

Students will have access to their group area from the Groups palette in the Course Menu and the Notifications module.

+ Group Module Page

The group area is a module page that provides access to new and existing group modules. The page also allows group members to add any additional modules that will help with group work.

+ Customizable Group Area

Groups can customize their group area to create their own space with its own look and feel.

+ Group Assignments

Instructors can create Assignments to be completed by an entire group and then give one grade for the group while still allowing individual grades to be overwritten. (See the Assignment feature for additional details).

+ Group Blogs and Journals

Groups can have their own Blog for the rest of the course to view and comment on, or a Journal for private communication within the group.

+ Group Tasks

Groups can create tasks to track progress of the group deliverables.

+ What's New Group Modules

Groups will have access to modules that provide group specific data about new material and due dates.

Learning Modules

The function of Learning Modules is the same as the previous release of the product.

Features Gained

+ Drag and Drop Reordering

Instructors can easily re-order content items and folders in a Learning Module using the drag and drop feature.

My Places

My Places is a new feature in Blackboard Learn, Release 9 that will provide users with quick access to frequently visited links and personal settings management. All users should be educated about the following new features.

Features Gained

+ One Click Access to Common Links and Preferences

Users can navigate to commonly accessed places within the system, such as courses they teach or participate in, without having to return to a common starting point.

+ Customizable List of Commonly Accessed Links

Users can define which links are displayed in My Places. These may include: Courses, Organizations, Bookmarks, and Outcomes Places. The types of links available depend on the institution's Blackboard licenses.

+ Quick Access to Personal Settings

Users can access personal settings such as email and privacy settings in one click, no matter where they are in the system.

+ Personal Avatar Image

Users can upload or select an approved personal image to display within My Places, Blogs and Journals. If avatars are enabled by the System Administrator, the additional function will include policies for image selection and upload.

Tasks

The Tasks feature is the same as in previous releases of Blackboard Learn.

Tests, Surveys and Questions

The function of the Tests, Surveys and Questions feature is the same as the previous release of the product. All users will enjoy an improved user experience.

Features Gained

+ Question Reordering

Instructors can re-order questions in a test or survey using the new drag and drop feature.

+ Fewer Clicks in All Workflows

Instructors will enjoy more efficient workflows with fewer clicks for creating, managing, and deploying tests and surveys.

What's New

The What's New module in Blackboard Learn, Release 9 has been enhanced to provide users with easier access to notifications and new content.

Features Gained

+ Course and Organization Info

In previous releases the module displayed new content that had been added to courses in which the user was enrolled. In Blackboard Learn, Release 9 the What's New Module shows new Course and Organization content, providing links directly to the item; performance has also been enhanced for this feature.

Tracking Reports

The usability of the Tracking Reports feature has been greatly improved in Blackboard Learn, Release 9. Please note that this feature was formerly referred to as Course Statistics.

Email and Messages

The function of the Email and Messages tools are the same as the previous release of the product.

Features Gained

+ External Emails for Observers

Instructors can select and send external emails to users with the Observer role. This allows them to communicate with Observers who are not logged in.

Text Editor

The user experience has improved and the Text Editor includes several enhancements.

Features Gained

+ Accessibility improvements

Users requiring assistive technology can easily and quickly access the text area of the Text Editor.

+ Availability

The Text Editor is now available in more areas of courses.

+ HTML Markup Validation

Users can quickly run a check against the HTML markup included in the Text Editor to ensure accuracy.