

# Xavier's Blackboard Learning Management System

## Some Best Practices and Suggestions to Use in Your Blackboard Course

### Good Practices for Successful Test Creation and Administration

- Consider using our “Respondus” test creation program. Respondus is a better tool for the creation, modification, renaming and uploading of exams and assessments. You are also able to save the original test content files on your own computer. The Respondus program can be downloaded to your computer from the Applications (P:) drive on our campus network.
- When naming your exam, (or any other Blackboard file) do not use diacritical marks as: # / \* % \ . etc. These characters interfere with the Blackboard application and will cause problems.
- Make all modifications to the exam questions such as question wording, point values, and feedback **before** you deploy it in a content area
- After deployment and before you make it available to students, take the exam to make sure it meets your expectations, and that there are no mistakes in the creation.
- **DO NOT** rename the exam once it is deployed
- **DO NOT** make changes, (other than minor textual changes) to questions once you have deployed the exam in a content area, including:
  - Do not change the number of points for a question.
  - Do not add or remove questions.
  - Do not add or remove answers or feedback.
  - Do not change creation settings.
  - Do not change attached files.
- **Heed all Blackboard warnings**, particularly this one, which appears when you attempt to modify an exam after it is open to student access:  
*This action will modify a Test that has been taken. Only textual changes to existing fields are allowed, for example to correct a typo or reword a confusing question. Be aware that after making changes, existing attempts (Tests that have been taken) will show the new text, not the original text.*
- If changes are needed, other than textual changes, create a new Test. Any changes other than textual changes to existing fields will invalidate existing Test attempts and could corrupt the entire Test and its Gradebook entries.
- Request your students “Save” the answer to each question as they take the exam.
- Remind students that they must click “Submit” only when the exam is complete for their exam to register as being taken.
- Post a notice in Blackboard to remind students of their best practices when taking exams in Blackboard. (below is a list you may want to copy, or modify and then post to your courses).

### Best Practices for students when taking online exams in Blackboard

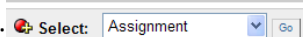
- Do not have multiple browser windows or tabs open when taking the exam.
- Do not browse away from the exam once you have opened it.
- Unless it is necessary for test taking, close all other applications when taking the exam.
- Click “Save” on each question answered.
- Do not allow the computer to go to screensaver, sleep, or standby when taking the exam.

- Know the “time out” period for your computer, and manipulate the mouse or the keyboard to avoid exceeding that time limit.
- Be absolutely sure to click “Submit” when you are finished with the exam.

### **Posting Assignments in Blackboard**

The **Assignment** function in Blackboard allows the instructor to deliver instructions, post links or files for download, review, and/or modification, create a gradebook entry, and create an assignment deadline. The instructor can also receive files from students that can be viewed and scored directly from the gradebook function of Blackboard. This functionality offers many controllable features not seen in the commonly used **Digital Dropbox**.

The **Assignment** function can be found in the right hand drop down box of the editing task bar that is seen at the top of any content area in Blackboard:



Below are a few important tips to remember when creating assignments.

- Use a short and meaningful name. This name will also appear in the gradebook.
- Avoid changing the name of the assignment after creating it, since this **will not** be reflected in the gradebook.
- Be careful when deleting an assignment: all attachments and feedback will also be deleted from the system.
- When you do delete an assignment, check the gradebook and, unless you need to keep the scores, also delete the gradebook column, to avoid cluttering up the gradebook.
- Never **copy** a folder with an assignment in it: this will very often corrupt the file. (Error message: 'Problem loading assignment')
- As a precaution, ask students to only use numbers, letter of the alphabet and underscores in their filenames and to keep the filenames short. Blackboard can have problems with attachments that make use of very long filenames, spaces and/or diacritical marks '%' and 'é'.
- Explain to your students the difference between the save (which protects the work in progress) and submit (which sends the test to the Gradebook) buttons.
- Be sure to ask your students to submit their assignment in a program file form compatible with that on your own computer, (or other student’s computers should their work need to be shared) e.g., MS Word 97-2003

### **Course Design: Consistency in Course Menu Contents**

Students design consistency helps to create a more user-friendly learning interface. in Consider using the **Course Information** area for class business such as posting the syllabus, course schedule, and course policies. The **Course Documents** area is best used as a repository for the documents used in class meetings, including readings, Powerpoint slides, and class handouts. The **Assignments** area is a good place to put a student tasks, such as homework assignments, out of class readings, or special projects. **External Links** is a great place to put pertinent web links for research and reference.

### **File Format Compatibility**

- Consider the document file formats you use when posting to Blackboard, e.g., MS Word 2007, .pdf, .mpg, etc. Are they compatible with the programs that your students or colleagues have on their computers?

### **Special exam navigation button**

- If you will be using online testing frequently in Blackboard consider creating a special content area in which to deploy your exams.
- To create an exam content area:
  - Go to Manage Course Menu in the Course Options box of the control panel
  - Click on Add Content Area
  - Type “Exams” in the box at the top of the page that opens and click Submit.

### **Using Blackboard’s communication tools**

#### **Using the Chat Function for Office Hours**

- The chat function is found in the Collaboration menu inside the **Communications** area in any Blackboard class. This synchronous tool offers instructors an opportunity to meet online with both individual students and student groups for class discussions. Instructors should also consider using the chat function allows for “virtual office hours” and for personal meetings with students. Office hours can be held at anytime where ever a computer and network connection is handy, creating new possibilities for meeting times, especially for students who are out of town or off-campus.

#### **Using a Blog as a Feedback Tool**

- Consider using a blog embedded in a content area for ongoing student feedback and as a venue for student cross-talk and file exchange. The blog creation tool can be found in the right hand drop down box of the editing task bar that is seen at the top of any content area in Blackboard.