

Blackboard Overview

What is Blackboard?

Blackboard (Bb) is Western's learning management system (LMS) that allows instructors to supplement face-to-face or blended courses as well as create a fully online course. Blended courses have faculty and students meeting in person as well as using Blackboard outside of time in the classroom. Online courses do not meet face-to-face and are conducted entirely using Blackboard.

What Can Blackboard Do and How Can I Use It to Teach?

Blackboard Allows the Instructor To:

- **Communicate with Students:** Instructors can communicate with the class by posting announcements or emailing the entire class or individual students from within Bb.
- **Distribute Information:** Instructors can post lecture notes, presentations, video, images, audio, links to website and other documents or media, so they are accessible to students all term.
- **Create Learning Activities:** Blackboard allows instructors to post assignments that are submitted online and create interactive learning experiences such as wikis, blogs and discussion boards. Students can work individually or instructors can create groups of students in Bb for group assignments.
- **Assess Student Learning:** Online Bb exams are scored automatically and provide immediate feedback to students. Online surveys allow instructors to solicit input from students at any time.
- **Track Student Participation:** Blackboard's Retention Center allows the instructor to view missed deadlines, receive grade alerts and monitor student access and activity levels.
- **Restrict Availability of Items:** Availability of items such as assignments or assessments is under the instructor's control so that students may only have access based on criteria instructors set such as date, time or score.
- **Calculate and Store Grades:** Blackboard's grade center is secure and is available to students at all times. Blackboard Assignments and Assessments automatically create gradebook entries, but as an instructor, you have the ability to add columns for graded items not submitted online (e.g. live presentations, speeches, attendance at tours or paper submissions). Grades can be weighted or not weighted and can be

presented as a point score, percent, or letter grade based a grading schema determined by the instructor. Other useful grade center features include the ability to set up grading rubrics, smart views of a specified set of grade center columns such as those that need grading, and color coding to alert the instructor to students falling below a certain grade level.

- **Save and Reuse the Course:** Instructors are encouraged to save their Bb courses so they can be reused, saving time, as only changes need to be addressed.

Students Benefit From:

- **Access** to the course at any time from any device with an internet connection.
- **24/7 availability of materials** including the course syllabus, learning materials, tools and exams that are available online for repeated review the entire term.
- **Accommodation of various learning styles** when both audio and visual materials are available in Bb.
- **Immediate feedback is provided** on online assessments.
- **Elimination of lost homework** when assignments and assessments are submitted online within Bb.
- **Convenience** of being able to complete course requirements within the time/date parameters the instructor sets without the restrictions of a traditional classroom meeting time.
- **Collaboration** much as it is in a regular classroom without the need for physical attendance.
- **Increased availability to instructor** via online communication tools.
- **Ability to track their own progress** via the online grade center.

How Does It Work?

You decide which features you want to use (content PDF documents, PowerPoint slide decks or videos of narrated PowerPoints; assignments that students submit online; assessments; journals and other interactive tools like blogs or wikis), and post them in your Blackboard course shell. Western has implemented a Standard Blackboard Shell for all Blackboard courses. This standardized design offers consistent navigation buttons for consistency from course to course. Instructors do have some color customization options.

Think about how you will organize and manage graded assignments. Some instructors allow access to the entire course at the beginning of the term; others make materials and assignments available by unit or week. Setting expiration dates can also be managed by Blackboard so that assignments are no longer available to students after a certain time.

During the term, you will use various tools within Blackboard to interact with students, grade homework, and monitor their performance.

How Do I Get Started FAQ

- **How do I get a course shell?** A standard Blackboard course shell is created automatically for each course you teach prior to the start of each term. You will find the shells for your courses at Western's Blackboard Site at: <https://blackboard.westerntc.edu>.
- **What username and password do I use to log into Bb?** Your username is your Western email address prefix (e.g. John Doe's username would be doej if his email address is doej@westerntc.edu); your password is your Western email password.
- **How do I set up assignments, assessments and interactive tools in Bb?** Refer to training materials under Adding Content to a Course on the Blackboard section of the Faculty Resources Website (facultyresources.westerntc.edu/blackboard). Live Bb training is provided throughout the school year and by appointment by Academic Excellence and Development (aedd@westerntc.edu). Mentors are also available to assist you. See the Blackboard Checklist for things to do at the beginning of the semester.
- **How are students enrolled in my Bb class?** Students are automatically enrolled. If you have multiple sections of the same course, you can request to have them combined so that you only need to maintain one Blackboard course shell (see Course Management, Combining Multiple Sections into One Bb Course). You can delete users or add users (see Course Management, Enrollment – Add User/Delete User).

Additional Resources

- Blackboard Help <https://help.blackboard.com>
- Blackboard's [Instructor YouTube playlist](#)