COURSE MANAGEMENT
IN AN ONLINE
ENVIRONMENT
A Quick-Start Guide for Teaching and Learning

Technology Support/Creative Studios @ UTEP
stvarela@utep.edu
Course Management in an Online Environment

To ensure you are managing your course efficiently, please see the end of this document for a Course Management Checklist.

Teaching and Learning Considerations

**Face-to-face classes** require a clear structure of instruction for students to follow. Courses that also utilize online environments, however, require students to understand this instructional structure with minimal, to no in-person guidance. **Students in online environments are typically expected to take ownership** of their learning with the support of their peers and instructor. However, many students have not been adequately prepared for managing their own time before taking a class in an online environment.

**Creating predictable patterns for course activities**, therefore, will aid students in planning and managing their learning and non-learning time. **To support students’ satisfaction and engagement in online learning**, we must help students learn to be self-motivated and self-regulated through strategies and supports, including a detailed course schedule, clear course policies, a specific communication plan, and a short discussion on time management strategies.

**Policies and supports** should be included in the syllabus, outlining major considerations for expected behaviors, netiquette, plagiarism, ways to resolve issues (e.g., contacting an instructor). **Additional supports and guidance** can be provided as part of the structure of your course (i.e. “Ready for Online Learning?” section in your navigation area.).

**Maintain open lines of communications** to ensure that students feel comfortable and open to contact you in case of challenges with the course or grievances with other students.

**Model self-sufficiency by being able to troubleshoot your course** in order to respond more expediently to student concerns and issues. **It’s important to keep in mind** that you’re not the only one who may be a little anxious about going online. Students often have anxiety if it’s their first time learning in an online environment. It’s up to you to help them feel more confident and secure, all the while keeping your workload at a manageable level.

**Best Practices:**

There are several learner-centered practices for managing a course that can best guide learners in an online learning environment, and if faculty get comfortable using this section of their Bb course, will lead to more self-sufficiency in the administrative aspects of a class:

**Course structure that supports independence.** Set up a course structure that is easy and
intuitive for students to navigate, even if they may not have prior online learning experience. Provide additional supports that may help navigation, including:

- Weekly module structure—packaging each week’s learning objectives in a module that contains diverse and differentiated learning materials.
- A clear location for the syllabus, calendar and introductory materials (e.g., “Start Here” or “Week One” module);
- An introduction from you about the course;
- Descriptions and deadlines for course readings, engagement pieces like Discussion Board, communication, and assessments;
- Opportunities for students to communicate outside of the immediate course topics (e.g., Help Board, “Watercooler,” the “Muddiest Points”).

**Overview for students new to online learning (or “Ready for Online Learning? section).** Create a section in your navigation area that provides information about course overview and guidelines, technology needs, campus resources (like HELP Desk), communication and “netiquette” expectations, etc.

**Structure and monitor student behaviors online.** Clearly state rules for online behavior and communication (netiquette). Monitor student communication and posts to ensure that students follow the rules. You don’t have to respond to every post, but you should provide an end of the week feedback summary (could be video, could be Announcement or a post on Discussion Board) regarding the responses posted that week from students.

**Structure class participation.** Give students a time frame and minimum requirements for class participation activities. If participation is graded, set up a clear rubric and give the students the rubric to inform them about the requirements.

**Announcements** give students an active reminder of due dates and important events.

**Hold virtual office hours.** Virtual office hours (e.g Blackboard Collaborate) to allow students to meet and ask questions about concepts and assignments and also allow instructor(s) and student(s) to build rapport.

**Bb Retention Center = Proactive communication.** Engage struggling students in communication to address any issues related to challenges with the course (e.g., missed discussions, assignment deadlines) and suggest ways to remedy the situation, as well as clearly stating the consequences for not taking action.

**Use proactive strategies to deter academic dishonesty.** Shape assignments that focus on helping students critically analyze and synthesize information (e.g., reflections, critique), and/or be multimedia or project-based. Use Bb Safe-Assign for students to submit rough drafts to essays to self-monitor/revise any red flag warnings. Create large test pools to be able to
randomize assessments effectively ensuring no student takes the same test.

**Getting Started: Using the Course Management Section of Your Bb Course**

Your **Course Management** section is found in the lower left corner of your course. It is visible **ONLY to instructors and/or those with an appropriate collaborative role (teaching assistant, co-teacher, program director, etc.)**. Students, however, do not see or have access to this part of your course.

In an online environment, this section provides your **administrative abilities**, including a file repository for easy access and implementation into a course, a shortcut to your available course tools, course reporting, adding and removing participants in your course and so much more.

For the purposes of our Quick Start Guide, we will focus on areas we know aid faculty immediately in setting up, managing and troubleshooting a course. We’ll go link by link in the order they appear in this section of your course.

**Content Collection: Your File Repository**

The **Blackboard Content Collection** is an area where your files are stored. The benefit of using the content collection is that files are “saved” and/or “stored” on the server are accessible via the Internet. That is, if you were to upload a file, e.g., a syllabus or a written mini-lecture, you would have access to those documents as long as you have access to the Internet.

We really suggest creating weekly folders in your Content Collection—similar to the folder and sub-folder system you probably already do on a computer. The benefit, though, is having access whenever you have internet, and knowing where your weekly content is.

When completing a semester, and transferring your course, having your Content Collection nicely organized makes it easier to find materials in the new course, as well as being able to fix any broken
links easily rather than tracking down where those files originated from.

**Easter Egg**

Click on Institution Content!

You will find custom icons, rubrics, retention templates that have been created for UTEP faculty by Creative Studios. Copyright and attribution center to use free!

Course Tools

In many ways, Blackboard gives you many access points to the same tools and functionalities in a course. To keep this manageable in our Guide, we will focus on Assessment tools—which are best accessed in this area.

1. **Tests, Surveys and Pools:** To keep any online exams, quizzes manageable, we encourage you to build them here through your Course Management section. Start with Pools to create a large set of potential questions you can use for any kind of formative or summative assessment. It’s definitely something you always want to add to. Next, build some tests that you know you want to use over the course of several semesters. Again, if you have a large set of pool questions, creating the actual assessment is so much easier! Building your assessments also allows you to export your pools and tests to use in other courses in a much more organized manner!

2. **Rubrics:** A rubric is a scoring tool you can use to evaluate graded work. When you create a rubric, you divide the assigned work into parts. You can provide clear descriptions of the characteristics of the work associated with each part, at varying levels of skill.
Students can use a rubric to organize their efforts to meet the requirements of the graded work. When you allow students access to rubrics before they complete their work, you provide transparency into your grading methods.

**Easter Egg**

Click on Institution Content from the Content Collection, and you will find many rubrics already created to assess different types of assignments. At the very least, it gets you started, as you can modify any of them to suit your needs.

3. Respondus Lockdown Browser, Monitor, and SafeAssign: Maintaining the integrity of our assessments is a commitment to, and demonstration of, ethical behavior in any course delivery format. Academic integrity is an issue in both face-to-face and online learning environments, and at all levels of education. As educators, we will be challenged to find or develop effective practices for preventing academic dishonesty and to inform our students about the consequences of compromising their integrity and ethics. The best course of action is to be proactive by creating large test pools and using randomization, question sets or random blocks to ensure no student take the same exam.

In addition, we can take additional steps, that can work as a deterrent, or as a way to verify academic dishonesty if it occurs:

- **Respondus Lockdown Browser** is a custom browser tool that prevents students from printing, copying, and accessing other applications or websites during proctored online exams. It locks down the testing environment within the learning management system so that during tests students are unable to go to other URLs, access other applications, capture screen content, or print.

- The **Respondus Monitor** tool in Blackboard is the companion tool to Respondus Lockdown Browser. It adds webcam and video technology to deter academic dishonesty in non-proctored online exam settings. Suspicious behaviors are automatically flagged during an exam, such as a student leaving the computer, a different person entering the video frame, and more.

- **SafeAssign**: SafeAssign is a plagiarism prevention tool that allows your instructor to check the originality of a homework submission. SafeAssign automatically conducts the check by comparing your assignment against a database of other assignment submissions.
All of these assessment functionalities and tools are best accessed in the Course Management section of your course!

**Evaluation: Access the Retention Center**

**Engaged students** are invested in their learning. They are motivated, attentive, curious, and involved. Research demonstrates that engaged students achieve greater academic success. Engagement may include intellectual, emotional, or social interactions.

**Bb’s Retention Center** is a tool to help faculty manage their learning community, easily provide feedback to students how are struggling (and those who are not), enhance communication, increase instructor presence, and provide authentic support.

It is also an excellent tool for tracking students' progress and easily sending targeted feedback. Your proactive feedback can support changes in their learning and study habits and motivate self-directed learning. You can also use the Retention Center to track and recognize student success.

![Risk Factors](image)

**Tailor the default rules to suit your teaching methodologies:**

- Check to see who has not accessed the course shell in 5 day, or who missed an assignment.
- Create two or three new rules to track specific items that are good indicators of risk.
- Create rules to check which students are in the top five percent of your class and reward their work. You can use this information to discover student mentors, assign group membership, or find teaching assistants.

Watch the following **VIDEO** (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HczlUIHMR4o) to learn about using this tool can have!
Grade Center

The Grade Center is arguably the most important areas in all of Blackboard—and there is quite a bit of functionality in here. For the sake of this Guide, however, we will touch on the two parts that are key to management: Needs Grading and the Full Grade Center.

Some faculty may not be using their Bb shell to its fullest capacity and prefer to use it as a repository. At the very least, though, the Grade Center should be utilized by ALL Faculty! Why?

- Anything that is put into the Full Grade Center shows up in My Grades—where students can access their course grades and keep track of their progress. Students no longer have to wait until the next F2F class to know how they are doing (or have to ask you!)—they can always check on their grades if you utilize the Full Grade Center.

- Recording grades on Blackboard helps faculty be efficient and not have to worry about losing Excel sheets or paper gradebooks.

- Calculate grades, organize student-submitted assignment documents, record the last time each student accessed the course and include point-and-click rubrics that can be used to facilitate scoring of assignments.

- Can calculate percentages, dropping lowest grade, extra credit and other variable that sometimes make grading complex.

Users and Groups: Enrolling Others into Your Bb Shell

1. Go to your Course Management section

2. Click Users & Groups

3. Click Users

4. Go to Find Users to Enroll
(Note: This step confuses some. Do NOT click or use the search box. This would only allow you to search your class for a student who is already in the shell!)
5. **Enter the username of the person you want to enroll** (the first part of their UTEP email).

6. **Select the role of that is appropriate for that person.**

7. Click on **Submit**.

(Note: If you do not know the username, you can search for it by clicking on “Browse.”)
**Customization**

There are two main functions under Customization that faculty use frequently—**Properties** and **Teaching Style**. Both functions help faculty with course management, such as students needing access to a course prior or after a semester and controlling what page students land on when they enter your course.

Let’s start with **Properties** and changing the availability of your course:

1. Login to the course.

2. Under the **Course Management** and **Control Panel** menu on the bottom left side of the page, click on **Customization** and then **Properties**.

3. The ideal way to change your course availability is to modify the dates in the **Set Course Duration** area. By changing the start date of your course, you ensure no students have access to the course, but they can still see the link to the course in their **My Courses** area.
4. There may be times where you simply want to turn availability to your course off or on for a short period of time, and in that case, it is easier to use the **Set Availability** tool.

5. To make this change, go to the **Properties** page, under the heading **Set Availability** and the question *Make this course available to users?* Click on the radio button next to **Yes** to make the course available, or **No** make it unavailable.

![Set Availability](image)

If you make your course unavailable to your students, the link to the class in their **My Courses** area will **disappear**. This can be upsetting to students, so use this option with caution.

6. Click the **Submit** button at the bottom of the page to save your settings.

The **Teaching Style** link is very helpful in determining which page of your content or tool you want students to land on when they enter your course. Some faculty like it to be the Announcements page, while others want them to see My Grades as the first thing! Or if you have a Course Modules page with weekly content, perhaps you want that to be the first thing students see.

To manage this, you go to **Customization** and then **Teaching Style**. You then want to **Select Course Entry Point** for the page or tool that will be the first thing students see when they enter your Bb shell.

**Packages and Utilities**

The two main tools to use in this section of Course Management is **Course Copy** and **Export/Archive**. This is invaluable at the completion of a semester, and instead of rebuilding a new course from scratch, we can transfer a course into a new CRN.
To Copy a Course:

1. Click on **Course Copy**.

2. Select **Copy Type**, select **Copy Course into an Existing Course**.

3. Select **Copy Options**:
   Enter the **Destination Course ID**. If you don’t know the destination course ID, click the **Browse** button to search for your desired destination course.

   From the list of checkboxes, select the materials you want to copy to the destination course.

4. Leave the section for **Course Files** in its default setting.
6. Do NOT click **Include Enrollments in the Copy** for a regular course. If you are using the Course Copy tool for a workshop, organization, or non-standard course, then you may want to bring over the users from one course to another.

![Enrollments](image)

7. Click the **Submit** button. Assuming there are no initial problems, the "Success" banner should appear across the following page, indicating that the course copy request is being processed. You will receive an email when the process is complete.

Use the **Export/Archive tool** to create a package file containing all of the course content for the purpose reusing the course content at a later date or even using at another institution (if they have Bb). It is also a good way of transferring a course into a new CRN, as it will also carry over your assessments and assignments!

**Use the Data!**

As a final note to managing your course in an online environment, one of the biggest benefits to using Blackboard for teaching and learning is the wealth of data we can use to influence our course design or potentially use to present/publish.

Data is one of the most powerful tools to inform, engage, and create opportunities for students along their education journey—and it’s much more than test scores. Data helps us make connections that lead to insights and improvements.

So click on **Evaluation**, and go to **Course Reports**—it will provide everything you need to know about the performance of the students in the course!