USING BLACKBOARD AT
DOMINICAN UNIVERSITY:
A FACULTY GUIDE

Part Three: Course Tools (including Discussion Board and Digital Drop Box) (pages 54-78)
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**COURSE TOOLS: ADDITIONAL METHODS OF CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION**

The **Course Tools** section of the Control Panel has many interesting additional options you may want to use as an instructor, mostly related to methods of communication with your class:

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**Announcements**

By default, the Announcements screen is the first thing your students will see when they get into your course--unless you changed the **Set Course Entry Point** option, as explained on page 25. Suffice to say that **Announcements** is a good place to post things where you want to get students' attention right away--such as a class cancellation, an extra credit assignment, etc.

When you click on **Announcements** you will see the following screen:

Click the **Add Announcement** button (the only thing you can click upon on this screen!), and the screen shown on the following page will appear. You should type in your **Subject** and **Message** in the appropriate text boxes. (Don't forget, if you make a mistake, you can always get back in and click the **Modify** or **Remove** button!)

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Setting the Always show this announcement on the course's main page option to Yes means this Announcement will always be on the main Announcements page. Setting it to No will set a date on it, and after a week's time it will move off the main page, as we will see on the screenshot.

As with many other postings in Blackboard, you can always set a specific date and time to start showing something.

After clicking the Submit button you will get the usual Blackboard receipt screen. Here is what the Announcements screen will look like from the student's perspective:

After 7 days, any posted announcement will move off this "main" screen over to the View Last 30 Days tab, unless you chose to Always show this announcement on the course's main page, as we did for this one. In this case, the announcement will always stay here.
Course Calendar

Blackboard has a Calendar feature available on everyone's My Institution page—including yours. It is in the Tools section at the far right when you first login to Blackboard, as well as via the area labeled My Calendar:

Any Blackboard user is able to add events to his/her own calendar once they click on the Calendar link in the Tools section. (The My Calendar link above only allows one to view events, but not add any.) With everyone on campus using Outlook, the stark reality is that it is rather unlikely you—or your students—will be using this too much, but it's there if you want it.

More importantly from the Blackboard perspective, each course also has its own calendar once a student enters the course. The calendar is accessible for students via the Tools link on the navigation menu:
As an instructor, you can add a calendar event for a course in Blackboard via the Control Panel. The listed event will not only show up within the course calendar, but all students in your class will also have the event added to their personal calendars, as well—assuming they bother checking it!

In the Control Panel, click on Course Calendar within the Course Tools section, and you will see the following:

![Calendar: View by Day](image)

After clicking the Add Event button, you can add an event for a specific date. (Using the Quick Jump button opens a window allowing you to view your calendar for a specific month or date):

![Add Calendar Event](image)

Once you click the Submit button, it will be added to your course calendar as well as the student's calendars. This will be what your students see in their calendars for the date you specified in the Event Date field:

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Additional information about the Calendar may be found in the online instructor's Manual, accessible by clicking the **Manual** link in the **Support** section of the Control Panel. The information is in Chapter Three—Course Tools in the contents.

### Staff Information

This is the area that corresponds to what students see when they click on the **Faculty Information** link on the course menu. (This is the ONE Control Panel link that does not correspond exactly by word to what the items are called on the course menu.) Clicking on **Staff Information** in your Control Panel displays the following screen:

The **Staff Information** screen displays a list of faculty members and their contact information. The specific details are not visible in the image provided.

Just click the **Add Profile** button to reach the following screen, which has been filled in:

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You can upload a photo of yourself in a manner similar to the way documents and other items are uploaded to Blackboard. Note, however, the caveat that the picture size should be about 150 x 150 pixels. This is not a hard and fast rule, but is intended to avoid having the picture dominate the entire page!

Microsoft Photo Editor—on every PC with the Office suite—can do this easily.

If you have a home page, here is where you should type in the entire address.
After clicking the **Submit** button, you will receive *Blackboard*'s usual receipt screen. This is ONE page you definitely want to view from the student's perspective:

**Tasks**

Going into the **Tasks** section of **Course Tools** allows you to add tasks for a course. Students may view these tasks either via the **Tasks** link on the **My Institution** page when they first login (see screenshot on page 56--it is just below the **Calendar** link), or by clicking on the **Tools** menu item once entering your course. Students may then **Modify** the task so that it is either **In Progress** or **Completed**. Here is the student's view of a task list:

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Discussion Boards

Blackboard’s Discussion Boards may well prove to be one of the main reasons you use Blackboard. This feature is what those in educational technology like to call an asynchronous communication tool. It is somewhat like an electronic bulletin board, in that students may post messages and responses to messages both to you and to each other. In fact, this is the first tool we have discussed so far where students—not just you, the instructor—have the ability to add something directly onto Blackboard. It is NOT online chat (though Blackboard has that, too, as we shall see), because users do not have to all be logged in at the same time in order to participate. Students get in, leave a message, then others read the message and, perhaps, respond to that message. Each message topic can form a "thread," with several students responding to the original message.

Your students have access to the course Discussion Board in one of two ways. One is to click on the Discussion Board link on the course menu—assuming you have left it enabled. (That would be via the Manage Course Menu link under the Course Options area of the Control Panel, as discussed beginning on page 10). The other way they have access is by clicking on the Communication link in the course menu, which brings up the window seen below.

Make Sure You Enabled Discussion Board in the Enable Blackboard Tools Area!
A point of confusion here is that you not only have to ensure you enable some items (such as Discussion Board) via the Manage Course Menu link in your Control Panel, but also via the Manage Tools link. For the latter, after clicking the Manage Tools link, you then click Enable Blackboard Tools—at least if you want your students to have access to them more than one way. The former determines what appears on the main course menu, while the latter determines what appears under the Communication and/or Tools links, as was explained beginning on page 16.
To add to the confusion, this is one of the very few tools in Blackboard where you, the instructor, can enter material either via the Control Panel or using the same course menu that your students use. We will stick with using the Control Panel method here. Once you click on the Discussion Boards link, you will see the following screen:

![Discussion Boards](image)

This discussion board has no forums. To create a forum, use the Add Forum button above.

Your first step is to create a **Forum**. Think of a **Forum** as a "placeholder" for your discussions. You can name the Forum whatever you want, but the name should provide some sort of clue for what you view as appropriate topics within the Forum. You can have as many Forums as you want—but you MUST have **at least one** or else your students (or you!) will not be able to post a message. So, click the **Add Forum** button, and you will get the rather lengthy screen that we have depicted on the next page.

**REMEMBER--ONLY YOU CAN CREATE A FORUM!**
A frequent misunderstanding on the part of faculty is that only an instructor (that's you!) can create a Forum. No Forum = no postings! You **must** have a Forum before anyone can post **anything** in a Discussion Board!
Your description of the Forum should be just that—what the Forum should contain. It's not really intended as a place for you to write your first message for the Forum.

Check these Forum Settings closely! Note, for example, that Allow anonymous posts is enabled by default! You may want to uncheck this.

As for the others, the defaults are likely fine. You probably want to Allow new threads (i.e., topics) within a Forum. The alternative would be to force all students to reply to an original posting from you. You also likely want to Allow file attachments, particularly for anything involving peer review, though be aware these will count against your allocated space on the Blackboard server. Whether you allow the author (i.e., your students) to edit message after posting or remove own posted messages is up to you.

You can Block specific students from posting in a Forum by selecting a name and clicking the Block button. Also, you can give specific students Administrator privileges within this specific Forum here by clicking the Admin button.
After adding another Forum, this is what the Discussion Board will look like from the student's perspective:

Students may begin posting messages by clicking on a Forum name link once they have entered the Discussion Board. Once in a Forum, they can create a new thread. (Assuming you have enabled that capability. Otherwise, you as the instructor will have to create the thread.) After clicking the **Add New Thread** button, your students will be able to type their message. Note that their text box looks very similar to yours (including the ability to check spelling!):
Here is what the same Discussion Board Forum looks like after another student replies to the original message and another posts a new thread:

Assuming you allow attachments in the Forum, the Discussion Board is the only place in Blackboard where students are allowed to post documents for others in the class to see. Students post Discussion Board attachments the same way you add attachments to postings—by clicking the Browse button and finding the document on their computer for uploading. Of course, students can choose not to post anything.

What To Do If Students Report Difficulty Sending Attachments
On occasion, we have observed Blackboard not posting attachments in the Discussion Board. If this happens, it is safest to remove all characters other than letters, numbers, and underscores in the name, keep the file name to under 20 characters or so, avoid spaces in the file name, AND get rid of uppercase letters in the file name. This is not a constant problem, but it does happen, particularly when every student in the class is trying to post an attachment with the exact same name.
Discussion Board has many other facets that may be of interest. We have a separate handout, The Discussion Board Component of Blackboard: An Instructor's Guide, available from our intranet at: http://domin.dom.edu/documents/blackboardfac.htm. The student perspective on all this is available in our separate handout for students.

## Send E-Mail

*Blackboard* allows you to send e-mail to all students in a class easily, and you don't even have to set up a distribution list in your own e-mail program. Here is what you will see when you click the Send E-Mail link in the Blackboard Control Panel:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Send E-mail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|  ▶ **All Users**  
  Send an e-mail message to all of the users in this course. |
|  ▶ **All Groups**  
  Send an e-mail message to all of the groups in this course. |
|  ▶ **All Teaching Assistants**  
  Send an e-mail message to all of the teaching assistants in this course. |
|  ▶ **All Instructors**  
  Send an e-mail message to all of the instructors in this course. |
|  ▶ **All Observers**  
  Send an e-mail to all observers. |
|  ▶ **Single / Select Users**  
  Select users to whom you wish to send an e-mail message. |
|  ▶ **Single / Select Groups**  
  Select which groups in the course to whom you want to send an e-mail. |
|  ▶ **Single / Select Observers**  
  Send an e-mail to select observers. |

If you click **All Users** on the screen above, you will see the screen on the following page.

### You Still Need E-mail Software to Read Messages!

You and your students must still use your own e-mail software to **READ** e-mail! *Blackboard* can **SEND** e-mail, but does not provide a facility for reading it!
All students are listed. The e-mail will be sent to whichever address they specified when creating their Blackboard account. Note that by default, you will receive a copy, too.

Sending an e-mail from within Blackboard is obviously a tremendous time-saver, since you do not have to set up separate distribution lists using Outlook. However, be aware of the issue below.

**Why your students may not be receiving e-mails sent in Blackboard**

We have received some complaints that not all e-mails sent by instructors in Blackboard are received by students. This happens somewhat unpredictably, and may often boil down to the e-mail address the student has in his/her Blackboard profile. The first step is to ensure that your students followed the instructions outlined in our separate handout, *Using Blackboard at Dominican University: A Student Guide*. For their Dominican e-mail address, they must specify the entire e-mail address (such as smithjill@dom.edu). Most importantly, if they use an off-campus e-mail address they may have to change their "junk mail" or spam filters to allow e-mail from the domain of dom.edu. E-mail systems differ, but AOL, in particular, is notorious for filtering out what it thinks is spam.
Collaboration

The collaboration link in the Control Panel allows you access to two "real time" (what the online education people like to call synchronous) chat functions. Blackboard's two tools for this function are called Virtual Classroom and Lightweight Chat. The former includes not only a chat feature, but also a whiteboard (for drawing and/or equations, for example) and group web browsing. The latter is just a conventional online chat tool. Both require students to have Java-enabled browsers. (Don't worry--if a student does not have it, they will be prompted for a download from within their browser.)

After clicking on the Collaboration link, you will see the following screen:

Blackboard has two sessions that one can Join straight away—one each for the Virtual Classroom and Lightweight Chat. If you prefer, though, you can click on the Create Collaboration Session button on the top to create your own:

You may want to change Blackboard's default Session Name.

Choose here whether you want the feature-laden Virtual Classroom or "chat-only" Lightweight Chat.
Once you created it, you can **Join** it by clicking the appropriate button, seen on the first screenshot on the previous page.

Students may join the session via the **Communication** link on the course menu, then by clicking on **Collaboration**. They **Join** a session much as you do at that point:

![Collaboration Sessions](image)

With **Virtual Classroom**, you have the ability to draw something on the whiteboard, and compose a message to send to all students (assuming they are in the **Virtual Classroom**, too) at the bottom of the screen:

![Virtual Classroom](image)

Instructors can "record" a session (archive it) using these controls.
Students can contribute to the "chat" session while viewing all your fancy artwork on the whiteboard:

![Virtual Classroom Interface]

Down here is where one types to compose a message.

**Disable Popup Blockers!**

If you plan on using the *Virtual Classroom*, be sure to disable popup blockers! These chat sessions open a separate Java window, which many popup blockers will block.

The *Lightweight Chat* is very similar, but opens a smaller window with just the chat functionality. If you are interested in the many abilities of *Virtual Classroom* or *Lightweight Chat* and the Instructor controls within them, consult the online documentation within your *Blackboard* course by clicking on the **Manual** link the Control Panel (in the **Support** section), and going to Chapter 3.
Digital Drop Box

The Digital Drop Box allows your students to turn in files to you privately, and allows you—as the instructor—to retrieve those files and, if necessary, return them (via the Digital Drop Box) to your students. You can also choose to send files to a specific student or group of students, or even to the entire class. (Of course, sending something to the entire class through the Digital Drop Box is rather pointless, since you might as well just place the file in a content area in Blackboard!)

The Digital Drop Box is the only place in Blackboard—other than posting an attachment in the Discussion Board—where students can actually upload something to the system. Unlike adding an attachment to a Discussion Board topic, however, uploading a file to the Drop Box is a private, one-to-one (i.e., student-to-instructor) posting from the student's perspective.

Let's look at this first from the perspective of the student—in this case, a student who is submitting a paper to you, the instructor, via the Digital Drop Box.

Students access their drop box via the Tools menu on the Blackboard course menu. There will be a link from the ensuing screen for Digital Drop Box. After clicking this link, students will see the screen below:

Sending a File

The Add File button is at first rather confusing here. Frankly, most students do not have to bother with the Add File button at all. To send a file to the instructor, they should click on Send File. After clicking Send File they will see the following screen:
Consider Telling Your Students to Use Specific Files Names in the Digital Drop Box

Now is a good time to mention that if you plan to have your students submit assignments via the Drop Box, you may want to have them name the files uniquely--such as by their last name. Note in the above example, the student uploaded a file named dahltermpaper (Dahl being the student's last name). This keeps you from having to rename them yourself every time you download a file from the Drop Box. (Do you really want to receive 25 files all named termpaper?)

Students upload their document clicking the Browse button. After clicking the Submit button, they will receive an acknowledgement screen:

After clicking OK, Blackboard will return them to the Digital Drop Box screen:

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Blackboard will automatically store a copy of the sent file in the student's Drop Box. (Which is why the Add File button is hardly ever needed.) Unfortunately, this DOES count against your course size quota on the server, so you may want to remind your students from time to time to remove copies of items from the Drop Box--particularly those already graded.

Retrieving Files From the Digital Drop Box as an Instructor

To retrieve files your students sent to you, you must enter the Digital Drop Box via the link in the Control Panel. You will see a screen like this once you get there, assuming at least one student has sent you a file:

Any files sent to you by your students will appear in your Digital Drop Box. Note that there is a Received on: field indicating the date and time the student submitted the file to the Drop Box. Files will stay here forever unless you "clean house" periodically by clicking the Remove button.
Now, you have two choices to retrieve the file sent:

- You will more than likely want to **save** the file to your own computer. To do this, **right-click** over the link name, then click **Save Target As** (assuming you are using **Internet Explorer**):

  - You can now save the file to the directory of your choice on your own computer.

- Alternatively, if you click directly on the name, you will **open** the file within **Blackboard**, just as you would if you clicked on an attachment name. This is not too useful, however, unless you just want to read the file without saving it.

**Digital Drop Box**

- **Barbie's term paper**
  - Submitted by: Eba
  - Received on: 2004
  - Comments: Attach

You can now save the file to the directory of your choice on your own computer.

**Your anti-virus software IS updated, isn't it?????**

Although the **Blackboard** server scans for viruses, it is worth pointing out that anytime you download a file from the Internet, it is worthwhile having an **up to date** virus scanner on your own system.

**Remove Your Drop Box Files!**

As mentioned previously, all Drop Box files DO count against your quota so far as server space is concerned. To confuse matters, BOTH the copy sent to you as well as the student's copy added to his/her Drop Box after sending it must be removed in order to purge the file from the server completely. Unfortunately, your students do not have a **Remove** button like you do until YOU have removed your copy from the Drop Box! So if you want to keep your server quota down to a reasonable level, it starts with you removing the files from the Drop Box first and then asking your students to do likewise.
Sending Files to Students' Digital Drop Boxes

Sending files from the Digital Drop Box to your students works in much the same way as outlined above from the student perspective, though with a few additional features.

Again, remember to enter the Drop Box from the Control Panel. Once there and you click the Send File button, you will see the following:

You select the student(s) to send this file to in the To: field. If you want to send the file to more than one student (such as for cooperative projects), hold down the Ctrl button on your keyboard while clicking on the other names.

Note: Group names will appear here, too, if you have placed students into Groups (discussed beginning on page 84).

If you have other files in your Drop Box (such as files that other students have sent to you that have not yet been removed) they will appear here in the Select file: drop-down menu. Any files you added to your Drop Box separately will also appear here. Be careful! Do not accidently resend the same file back to the student!

Click the Browse button to find the file you want to send from your hard drive (or wherever else you have it). Note that we have re-named the student's original file name after adding comments. We do NOT want to click the Select file: drop-down menu, as that would only send the student's original file in the Digital Drop Box back to the student!

After clicking Submit, Blackboard will acknowledge receipt and a copy of your sent file will also be placed within your Digital Drop Box.
Did You Know . . .

. . . that you can add Comments to a student's Word document? This way, your students can have their original documents sent back to them with your comments included. Comments appear in yellow, highlighted text on the screen. Your students can hover their mouse over it to read your comments.

You can insert comments in Word by highlighting the text you want to comment on, then click on the Insert drop-down menu, then Comment. You type your comment into a box that looks very much like a footnote box in Word:

```
Therefore, I agree with those scholars who state that the Venn character in Return of the Native symbolizes an almost devil-like character, given that he is described as being covered in the red-colored dye of his trade and appears and disappears with almost supernatural abilities.
```

From the student's perspective, here is what they will see when they open the Word document and hover their mouse over the highlighted text:

```
Robert Johnson: Good point. You should add a few specific examples here.
```

An Alternative to the Digital Drop Box

You can use Blackboard's ability to add an Assignment as another way to exchange files with a student. This feature is discussed on page 121, when dealing with the Gradebook, since while using this feature you access the file through the Gradebook rather than through the Drop Box.

Glossary Manager

The final choice in the Course Tools area of the Control Panel is Glossary Manager. Clicking on the Glossary Manager link in the Control Panel leads to the following screen:
You can create a glossary either within the Blackboard interface or by importing a comma delimited text file (such as from an Excel spreadsheet, if saved as a CSV file rather than as an Excel workbook). If you want to do the latter method, clicking the **Upload Glossary** button will walk you through the procedure. Since it is likely most of our readers will opt for the former method, however, we will walk through this method instead. Clicking the **Add Term** button will bring you to this screen shown below, which we have filled in:

Unfortunately, note that Blackboard's usual text box editor is not present. That means any hyperlinks (such as what we have above) will NOT become a "live" hyperlink automatically when posted. (See the next page for a way around this.)

Upon clicking the **Submit** button, you will receive an acknowledgement screen with the option to continue adding terms, if you want to. When posted, students may access your Glossary by clicking on the **Tools** link on your course menu, and then Glossary from the ensuing screen. It will appear something like this:

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For True "Webheads" Only: Using HTML Tags in Blackboard

With the lack of Blackboard's usual text box editing screen in the Glossary Manager, if you would like to use italics or actual hyperlinks, you will have to resort to using HTML tags. Here is an example below, italicizing the title (Return of the Native), and using anchor tags to create a "live" hyperlink. Needless to say, don't try this at home if you are unacquainted with using HTML tags.

Modify Glossary Term

Please provide the term and the definition in the areas below. Modifying a term by changing the term to one which already exists in the Glossary, in upper, lower, or mixed case, will erase the previous term and substitute the term and definition provided here.

- **Term:** Egdon Heath
- **Definition:** Locale of Return of the Native. The name was made up by Hardy, but Hardy himself stated that it is actually comprised of the real-life locations of Puddleton Heath, Moreton Heath, and several others located between Dorchester and Bournemouth. There is a site devoted to present attempts to preserve the locale at a web site called "Tomorrow's Heathland Heritage," located at: http://www.english-nature.org.uk/thh/