Students who feel connected to the other members of the class as well as the instructor are more likely to freely participate in activities and spontaneously share information, engaging in course work and committing to course objectives. Interact with students and empower them to interact with each other by helping them form their own communities, encouraging collaborative work and using the suite of communication tools available in Blackboard.

ISSUES AND ANSWERS

Issue: Some students had trouble joining the first Virtual Classroom session. Assisting them disrupted the session.

Answer: Hold an orientation before the first scheduled Virtual Classroom session to make sure students have the Java plug-in and allow pop-ups in their browser settings.

Issue: Virtual Classroom sessions turn chaotic when all the students try to type at the same time.

Answer: To control the flow of a Virtual Classroom session, restrict student access so that they cannot all type or navigate at the same time. Use the Session Controls to make some participants passive. Create breakout sessions for participants who have developed a tangential idea.

Issue: Some students are having difficulty sending, receiving, or accessing email. They do not use the college provided email address or are not allowed to update their Personal Information with a current address.

Answer: Use Blackboard Messages instead of email to communicate with students. Blackboard Messages provides a similar interface as email, but does not depend on an email server or client to send and receive messages.

Links
Discussion Board Flash Tutorial
http://www.blackboard.com/corp/
objects/images/quicktutorials/
discussionboard.swf

Collaboration Tools Flash Tutorial
http://www.blackboard.com/corp/
objects/images/quicktutorials/
collaboration.swf

BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF LEARNERS

Student Homepages • Virtual Classroom • Content Collection

Begin building community before the start of the course as a way of helping students acclimate to the online course environment. Have each student create a Student Homepage (no knowledge of HTML is required) as a way of introducing themselves. Enable the Roster from the Control Panel > Mange Tools > Tool Availability, so that students may view each other's Homepages. Ask that they give each other feedback using another communication tool such as Discussion Board or Email.

Sharing a common event helps form cohesive group ideas that can build consensus and solve problems. By using the Virtual Classroom as a shared experience to make presentations in real-time, students and instructors can browse the Web together, participate in live discussions, draw on the Whiteboard, or display and discuss files. Virtual Classroom sessions can be recorded by the moderator and snapshots of Whiteboard activity can be saved, creating an archive that can be released to others.

Intertwine and expand academic experiences within a course by connecting to a larger community, sharing content from academic departments, institutional programs and student organizations. The Content Collection allows users to discover, store and share content within personal folders, course folders and institutional folders. As part of the Content Collection, Portfolios is another way to build communities that transcend the course and encourage students to discover and share their own content with one another, with the larger institutional community and beyond.

Content is fully searchable, can contain metadata, can be bookmarked, and its usage can be tracked. Content items can be shared with internal Blackboard users by setting permissions to read and/or write. Passes can be created to share content with anyone who does not have a Blackboard account.

COMMUNICATING SAFELY AND PRIVATELY

Email • Blackboard Messaging • Chat

Keep everyone connected using a suite of familiar communication tools. All course members can email one another from within the course. Email messages are sent and received by the user's personal email account and are not part of the course record. Email accounts may be set up at an institutional level and populated in the course with other student information. Email addresses are hidden within the course; an email author is simply presented with a list of course members. The Personal Information Tool allows users to edit their email address, if permitted by the institution.

Similar to email, Blackboard messaging sends secure messages from within the course, but without relying on email. Users must be logged into a course to retrieve their messages. By using Blackboard Massaging instead of Email, instructors can drive students to log in more frequently to receive communication. Blackboard Messages do become a part of the course record.

Communicating instantly using the Chat tool provides a platform for brainstorming, fast feedback, and social interaction. Chat sessions can be scheduled in advance or occur spontaneously. The session moderator can decide to record a session, creating an archive that can be released to others. Chat archives are fully searchable and can contain bookmarks for easy navigation during review. Chat is also part of the Virtual Classroom.

Blackboard
Educate. Innovate. Everywhere.

STIMULATING COLLABORATION

Groups • Discussion Board • Portfolios

Blackboard makes it easy for students to collaborate online sharing materials, projects, assignments and study sessions. Collaboration can be open to the entire class as well as for specific groups of students working on a common task or project. Break down the class into collaborative units to support group work on the Control Panel, under User Management > Manage Groups. Some types of collaboration may involve all course users, such as "Peer-to-Peer Help". Create a group that includes all the students to provide such an environment.

Groups can be set up any time during the course and can be managed dynamically throughout the course by adding, removing and modifying them. Groups can be given access to different tools such as Chat and Discussion Board so that each group can have its own areas to work in.

Group projects, study sessions, peer review and round table dialogue are some examples of how the Discussion Board can be used to encourage collaboration. This threaded message board organizes postings under topic headings or Forums. Creating student centered forums on topics relevant to the course allows students time to read and consider what others have posted before composing a response.

Links to items on the Discussion Board can be embedded anywhere in the course to generate continuous feedback. To maintain high quality content, allow students to rate each other's postings. Discussion boards can also be moderated by any designated user to ensure appropriate and relevant content. Forums are added to a course using the Control Panel > Discussion Board > Add Forum. Forum settings include rating, moderation, editing, attachments, grading and many more.

Students can create a continuous assemblage of their work using Portfolios. Portfolios can display work from various classes and other sources in one place, located within the Content Collection. An example of an individual portfolio for a Journalism student might contain their articles from the school newspaper, images from a photography course, and essays from writing classes. A cohort of graduate students might assemble a portfolio that contained each person's thesis, a departmental bibliography and examples of research techniques.

Faculty can use portfolios to share information about themselves with students and other departments. Faculty can also use portfolios to assemble information and work in support of seeking tenure. Portfolios are searchable, and can be shared with other Blackboard users or with anyone who does not have a Blackboard account. Comments collected from viewers can be shared or kept private.

ISSUES AND ANSWERS

Issue: Students are posting personal messages on the Discussion Board and leading threads off topic.

Answer: Create a Discussion Board forum for social communication to give students a place to post off topic items, keeping course related forums uncluttered.

Issue: Is there a way to close a forum so no new postings are submitting while keeping the old postings available for review?

Answer: Yes, forums can be "locked" so that no new posts will be accepted, but existing posts can still be accessed.

Issue: As an instructor, you want to be able to monitor the work groups are doing and to be available in case individual groups needs assistance.

Answer: Instructors can enroll themselves in the group so that they can participate in group activities.

Issue: Managing many groups is time consuming. Is there any way to manage more than one group at a time?

Answer: Install the Advanced Group Management Building Block written by Florida State University, to display a summary of all groups, modify assignments to all groups in one display page, and randomly assign students to groups. For more information on Building Blocks, visit http://www.blackboard.com/extend/b2/