Evaluating what students have learned throughout the course can be accomplished in many ways, depending on the course objectives and how student performance will be measured. Homework, class participation papers and tests are all traditional methods for assessment that can be created and recorded within Blackboard. Portfolios, projects and presentations are also ways that students can demonstrate their understanding and mastery of course material and these too can be implemented within Blackboard.

ISSUES AND ANSWERS

Issue: It took much longer for students to finish taking their first exam online than was anticipated. They were not sure how to proceed within the testing interface.

Answer: Create a practice test to orient students to use of testing in Blackboard. Once students are familiar with how testing works online, they will not spend time trying to figure out what button to push.

Issue: Is there a faster way to create test questions that writing them one by one in the course?

Answer: Pools of test questions can be acquired from Course Cartridges that are tied to specific textbooks, from a Learning Objects catalog, or from other courses. Question Pools, Tests and Surveys can be exported and imported into other courses. Many types of questions can be prepared offline, saved in a specific file format and then uploaded into Blackboard.

Issue: Is there a way to use test scores as a gateway to unlocking additional content items?

Answer: Use Adaptive Release settings based on test score ranges to create gateways to content items. For example a minimum score of 70 percent on an end-of-unit test is needed to progress to the next unit. If the minimum score is not obtained, remedial material is released instead.



ASSIGNING HOMEWORK AND PARTICIPATION

Assignments • Discussion Board

Textbook and other assigned reading followed by answering summary and review questions, solving problems, creating presentations, and writing papers and essays are only some of the ways that instructors can present opportunities for students to practice their skills and demonstrate their mastery of course material. By using the Assignments tool, any task, project, or homework can become a gradable item in the Gradebook. Assignments are added to a course as a content item. Instructors may create Assignments that list the name, point value and description, and files may also be attached; a Gradebook item is automatically created. After an Assignment is added to a content area, students may access the Assignment, and complete it by submitting rich text or a separate file from their local computer or their Content Collection. The instructor may respond to each student with comments about their individual Assignment and by attaching files, if necessary.

The Discussion Board is often used as the place where students can interact with the instructor and with other students, promoting and facilitating the type of discourse and participation that occurs in a classroom setting. By making Discussion Board forums or threads gradable, instructors can assess student achievement and understanding or simply give a grade for participation. When grading is enabled for a forum or thread, a Gradebook item is automatically created. Students can be allowed to rate one another's Discussion Board items providing another platform for stimulating participation and further discourse. By allowing postings to be rated, higher quality contributions result, encouraging forum threads to stay on topic. Allowing members to rate postings and making a forum or thread gradable is found under Forum Settings when creating or modifying a forum.

ADMINISTERING ASSESSMENTS AND SOLICITING FEEDBACK

Tests • Surveys

Formal tests, quizzes, and exams are the traditional methods for assessing student achievement. Surveys are the traditional method to solicit feedback from students about the course and the instructor. Survey questions are not assigned a point value and Surveys are not graded.

Tests created in Blackboard have many options for grading and security, ensuring that instructors have control over the way the tests are administered and evaluated. All tests and surveys created in Blackboard automatically create a Gradebook item. Self-assessment options are also available, wherein scores can be excluded from a student's overall grade, and even hidden from the instructor. Tests and Surveys can be released at a predetermined date and time, can be password protected, and be set to prevent backtracking if needed. Tests have the additional feature of being able to present randomized sets of questions. Any question in a Test may be designated as extra credit. Feedback to students after taking the test can customize, and the number of attempts that a student is allowed may be specified.

There are many ways to create questions for online Tests or Surveys in Blackboard. Instructors can write their own questions based on course objectives, reading assignments, discussions, or other course materials. There are eighteen different types of questions that can be created within Blackboard including Calculated Formula, Essay, Multiple Answer, File Response, Opinion Scale/Likert and many more. Questions added to Blackboard can contain metadata and can be categorized, so that they can be identified and used in other assessments.

ISSUES AND ANSWERS

Issue: My students want to see their grades immediately after an assignment or test but it takes time to grade everything.

Answer: Make Gradebook items unavailable while in the process of grading. When grading is completed, make Gradebook items available to the student's view when you are ready to share this information.

Issue: How do I calculate Extra Credit in the Gradebook without impacting other entries?

Answer: Use the 'Total Points" method of grade calculation instead of 'Weighted." Extra credit cannot be automatically done with weighted grades since the weights must add up to 100%.

LINKS

Assignments Flash Tutorial

http://www.blackboard.com/corp/ objects/images/quicktutorials/ assignments.swf

Gradebook Flash Tutorial

http://www.blackboard.com/corp/ objects/images/quicktutorials/ gradebook.swf

STRUCTURING THE COURSE

Folders

Reflect the course structure by dividing course material into units, providing organization and a framework for development. Build the course structure and stay organized by placing content items within a conventional system of folders and sub-folders. Folders can be used to group related material into logical sections. An organized presentation of materials will guide students through the course, and will help them stay focused.

The Course Menu, located in the left frame is a visual representation of the organization of your course, and will help students find materials quickly and easily. If the course structure has a deep hierarchy of nested folders, consider setting the default Course Menu to Detailed View, so students see and can navigate to exactly where they need to go. If your course structure is flatter, set the default Course Menu to Quick View to streamline navigation.

Folders can be created and nested within each other to create the desired presentation. For example, a theme-based course site may group similar content items together, such as placing all assignments in one folder, lecture notes in another, and external resources in another. The course could also be presented using a schedule-based structure, where folders group content items that are used within the same time frame together, such as all material for "Week One" in one folder and all material for "Week Two" in another, or "Chapter One" and "Chapter Two". Use a combination of organizational techniques to best represent the structure of your course and the needs of the students.

