Communicating
With Students

Blackboard Learn 9.1

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1.0 Workshop Overview

Researchers have found when instructors use communication tools in online courses, student motivation and participation increase[1]. Each student can view other students' comments and learn through the exposure to different perspectives. Students benefit because they can combine new opinions with their own, and develop a solid foundation for learning. Frequent communication and information from the instructor can also enhance student success and retention.

Blackboard Learn™ offers a wide variety of communication tools allowing you and your students to share information and communicate, either synchronously—in real-time—or asynchronously—not at the same time. This workshop provides a hands-on introduction to many of these tools, offering you ways to extend a sense of community beyond the traditional classroom.

In this workshop, you learn how to use the Syllabus, Announcements, Calendar, and Tasks tools to provide students with critical course information. You, as an instructor, can share information about yourself using the Contacts page. You also learn to use the Email and Messages tools to send messages to course members. For times when real-time communication is required, such as a brainstorming session, you learn to use the Chat tool.

First, you experience the tools as a student to familiarize yourself with how they appear to your students. Then, you move to an instructor perspective and learn how to create and manage content in each tool.

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[1]Schmieder, Eric J. "Communication: The tool to interact with and control your online classroom environment." *International Journal of Instructional Technology and Distance Learning* 5.3. (March 2008). Web. 29 Jul. 2009.

Roadmap

2.0 Student Experience

- The Syllabus and Announcements tools provide critical course information, updates, and due dates.

- Access the Calendar tool for important dates and reminders, and the Tasks tool for a prioritized list of tasks to be completed.

- Use the Contacts page to learn about an instructor and access the Roster to view course members.

- Learn to use the Email and Messages tools.

- From the My Institution tab, students can access tools for all their courses, as well as create personal calendar and task entries.

3.0 Real-Time Communication

- Send messages, view and manage chat recordings, and learn about the participant roles.

- Learn to create new sessions, edit roles, record and end sessions, and explore tips for using chat for academic purposes.

4.0 Keeping Students Informed

- Learn how to create announcements, as well as how to order announcements.

- Upload or build a syllabus and customize it to the fit the online environment.

- Keep students on track by posting due dates and reminders.

- Learn how to add your instructor profile and folders for guest lecturers.

2.0 Student Experience

In this section, you explore course information and communication tools from the student perspective.

Students need to keep track of a large amount of dates and information, including course requirements and resources, instructor information, group and course meeting times, and due dates. Blackboard Learn offers a number of tools to help students stay informed as the course progresses.

After we cover the course information tools, we turn our focus to tools allowing asynchronous communication between student and instructor.

Experiencing each of these tools from the student perspective provides some context for the decisions you make for your course and the discussions you have with your students. After the tools are presented from the student perspective, you learn how to use them as an instructor.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this section, you will be able to:

- View course announcements.
- Access the course syllabus.
- Consult the course calendar.
- Access a list of prioritized tasks.
- View the list of course members.
- View information about the instructor.
- Send messages to course members using the Email and Messages tools.
- Identify the differences between the Email and Messages tools.
- Use tools and access information for all courses from the My Institution tab.

Viewing Announcements

Use the **Announcements** tool to communicate important, time-sensitive information. For instance, you can use announcements to provide the following:

- Corrections and clarifications of materials
- Assignment due dates or exam schedules
- Reminders or helpful tips for success

As a default module on the Home Page, announcements are typically one of the first things students see when accessing the course. When students click an announcement link on the Home Page, they are taken to the main **Announcements** page. Instructors can control the order of the announcements and how long they appear.

Viewing the Syllabus

The online syllabus can be a one-stop spot for students to find the most important information they need to succeed in their courses.

The syllabus typically includes the following:

- Course description and learning objectives
- Instructor contact information and office hours
- A course outline, which may include important dates
- Course and institution policies
- A list of required texts and recommended readings
- Class participation requirements and grading criteria

Students access the syllabus from a course area, such as a Content Area created by the instructor. The syllabus can be added in two ways:

- Uploaded to the course, such as a PDF or Microsoft® Word file
- Created within Blackboard Learn, as shown in the following image
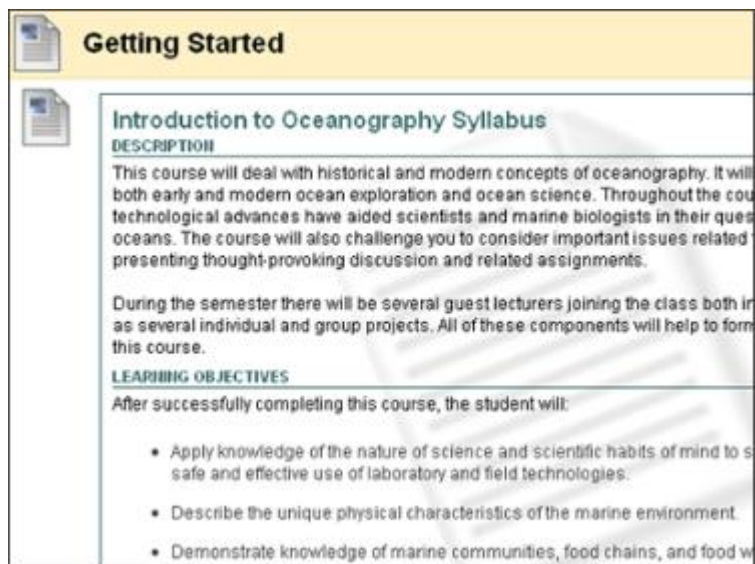
Viewing the Calendar

Students can consult the Calendar to see events an instructor has added, such as:

- Reminders of course meetings and chat sessions
- Due dates for assignments and projects
- Suggested milestones to help keep students on track

By default, students access the Calendar from the course Home Page. Clicking the **Tools** link on the Course Menu can also access the Calendar.

NOTE: An instructor can rename links on the Course Menu.
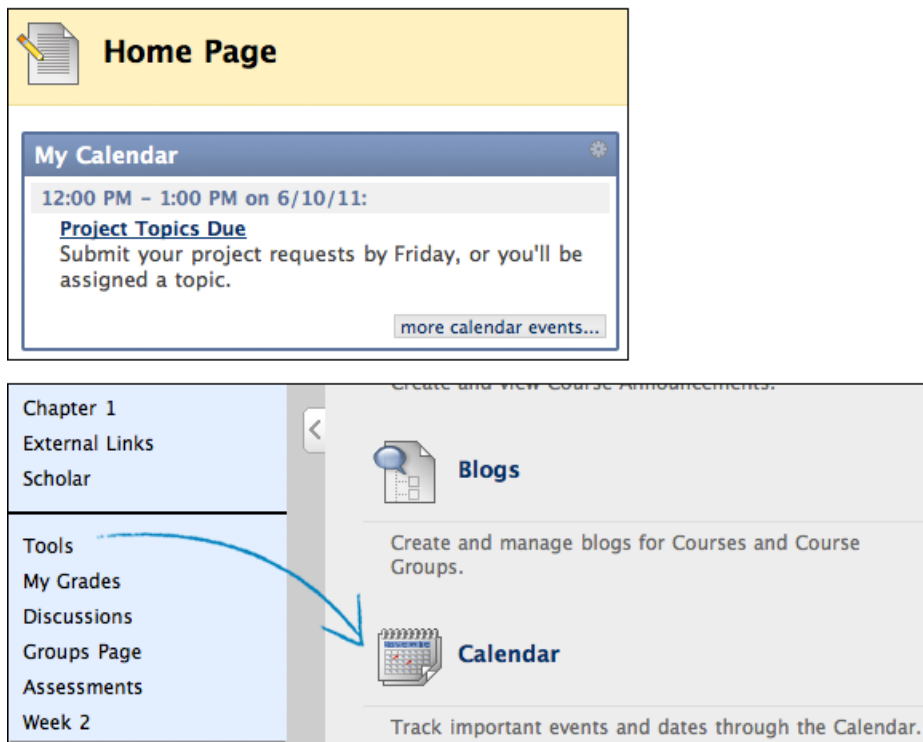
Students can view the Calendar by day, week, month, or year. If viewed by month, only the first few characters of the event title appear on the Calendar. Click the link for details.

Viewing Course Tasks

The **Tasks** tool is used to keep track of work that must be completed. Each task has a status and a due date. An instructor identifies the course tasks and adds them to the list. An instructor can create a list of tasks for the entire term or just for a project.

Students can use this list to keep themselves on track and may be required to report their status for each task.

By default, students access **Tasks** from the course Home Page. Clicking the **Tools** link on the Course Menu can also access tasks.
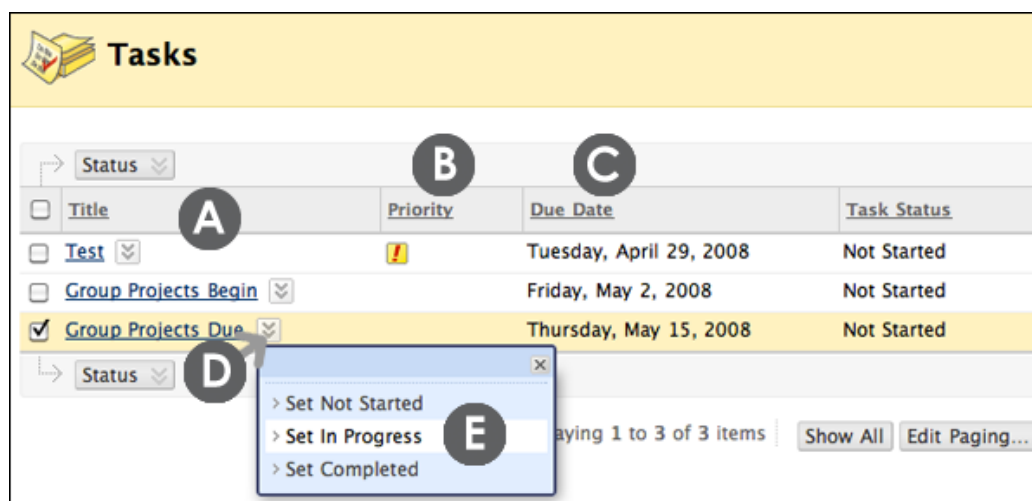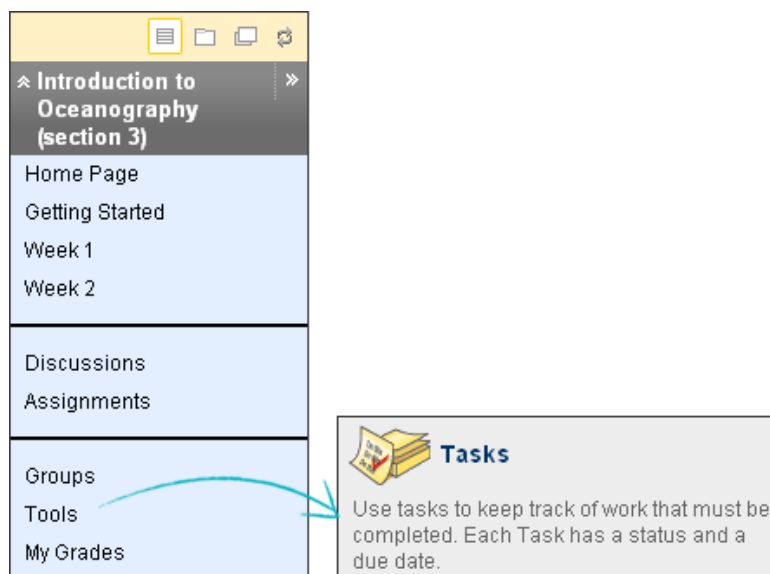
A. Click a task link to view the description.

B. The instructor can assign a level of priority for tasks:

- o High priority icon – exclamation mark ( )

- o Normal priority – no icon

- o Low priority icon – an arrow pointing down ( )

C. Sort any column by clicking the heading title.

D. Click a task's Action Link ( ) to access the contextual menu.

E. A student can select the status of the task:

- o Not Started

- o In Progress

- o Completed

On the main **Tasks** page, students can click a task link to access the **View Task** page for the task's description and other information.

![] View Task		
1.	**Task Information**	
	Task Name	Chapter 3 Worksheet Due
	Description	Worksheets and instructions are available in the *Assignm*
	Due Date	Tuesday, August 18, 2009
	Priority	High

Accessing the Roster

Students can use the **Roster** tool to view a list of the students enrolled in the course.

A. Click the **Tools** link on the Course Menu to access the **Roster**.

B. Click **Go** on the Action Bar to display all students or use the drop-down lists to narrow your search to specific students.

C. A list of students appears after clicking **Go**. Click the column heading to sort the contents. For example, to sort messages by Last Name, click the Last Name title or the caret beside it.

Finding Staff Information

On the **Contacts** page, students can view an instructor's contact details, office hours, photo, and other personal data. They can also learn about teaching assistants and upcoming guest speakers.

Students access this information by clicking the **Tools** link on the Course Menu and selecting **Contacts**.

Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Student Course.

Use the tools

- Access **Announcements** and note how you can choose to view **Institution**, **Course**, or **View All** announcements. System announcements will include any institution-wide information posted by the Blackboard administrator.

- Access the **Calendar** and view an event's description.

- Review the **Tasks** list and change the status of two tasks to **Completed**. **TIP:** You can change the status of more than one task by selecting multiple check boxes and pointing to **Status** on the Action Bar.

- Access the **Roster** and view the list of students.

- Access the **Contacts** page and review the contents of the **Guest Lecturers** folder.

Sending Email

In your Blackboard Learn course, you can send email messages to other course members' external email addresses.

QUICK STEPS: Sending an Email

1. Access **Tools** and select **Send Email.**

2. On the **Send Email** page, select the link for the intended recipient group. A new page appears.
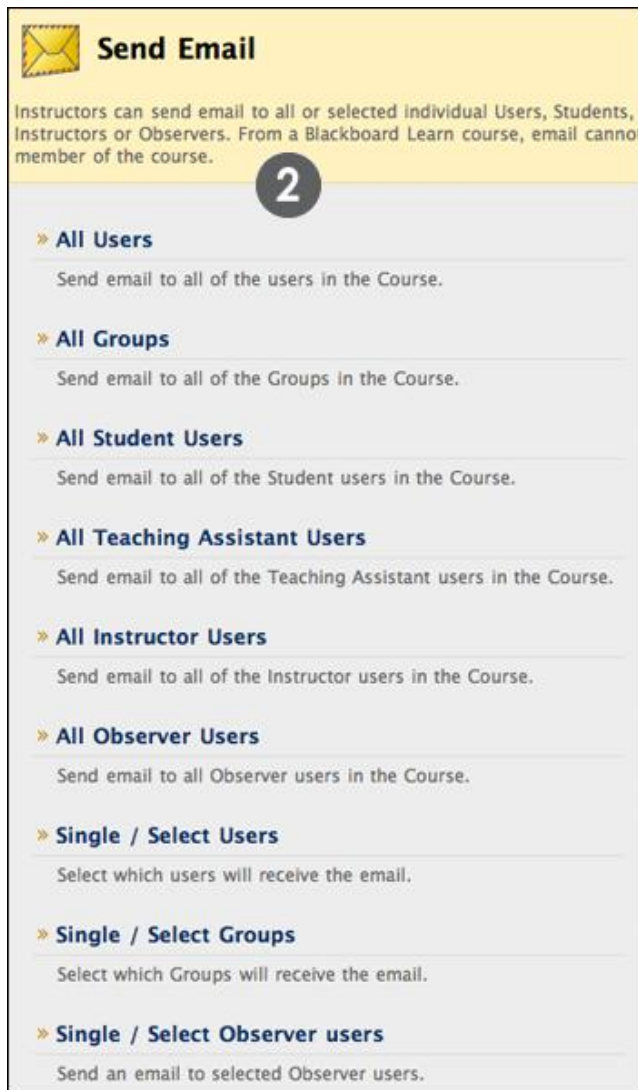
3. For **Select Users** or **Select Groups**, select the recipients in the **Items to Select** box and click the right-pointing arrow to move them into the **Selected Items** box.

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4. Type the **Subject** and **Message**.

5. Optionally, browse for a file from your computer. You can attach multiple files.

6. Click **Submit**.

You cannot send email from a Blackboard Learn course to anyone who is not a member of the course.

Tip: For Windows, to select multiple users in a list, press the SHIFT key and click the first and last user. To select users out of sequence, press the CTRL key and click each user needed. For Macs, press the COMMAND key instead of the CTRL key. You can also select all course members with the **Select All** function.

Important Tips

- Blackboard Learn keeps no record of sent emails. You receive a copy of your email in the Inbox of your external email account. Keep a copy of important messages in case you need them at a later date.

- Blackboard Learn does NOT recognize files or email addresses with spaces or special characters, such as #, &, %, and $. In general, use only alphanumeric file names and addresses in Blackboard Learn.

- Do not send email through Blackboard Learn without content in the subject line. Leaving the subject line blank can prevent the message from being delivered.

Ask Dr. C

In the following table, Dr. C discusses the Email tool. Dr. C is our Blackboard Learn expert.

Your question	Dr. C's reply
When I send someone an email using the Email tool, I cannot see the other person's actual email address. Why?	Email addresses are not visible unless participants choose to make them visible to course members. Find this setting in the page header above the tabs at: **My Places** > **Personal Information** > **Set Privacy Options**. From this page, students choose the information they want course members to see. **NOTE**: **Personal Information** is also listed on the **My Institution** tab under Tools.
Am I able to change the external email address used in my course?	Yes. Change your email address by going to **My Places** > **Personal Information** > **Edit Personal Information**. Type your preferred email address and click Submit. **TIP:** If you do not see the option to edit your Personal Information, check with your school's computing help desk to learn the procedures for you and your students to update information.
Why am I not receiving any emails? Other students have received several from the instructor and I have not.	Many popular email clients, such as Hotmail, Yahoo, and AOL may identify email from Blackboard Learn as junk mail and either automatically delete the email or move it to a junk mail folder. If you have problems, check your user preferences or options for settings regarding the handling of junk email. You can also change your email address.

Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Student Course.

Use the Email tool

- First, add your email address to your **Personal Information** record: **My Places** > **Personal Information** > **Edit Personal Information**.

- Send an email to **All Users**.

- Send an email to three members of the course.

Sending Messages

You can also send messages to course members using the **Messages** tool. The Messages tool sends secure electronic messages within the course without relying on external email addresses or clients. This means that external factors do not affect course communication.

Students are not notified if they receive a new message so advise them to make routine checks for new messages. Both incoming and outgoing messages are saved in the Messages tool.

QUICK STEPS: Sending Messages

1. Access **Tools** and select **Messages**.
2. On the **Messages** page, click **Create Message** on the Action Bar.
3. On the **Compose Message** page, click **To**, and a list of course members appears.
4. In the **Items to Select** box, select the recipients and click the right-pointing arrow to move them to the **Selected Items** box.

5. Type a **Subject** and **Body**. You can use the Text Editor functions to format the text and include files, images, external links, multimedia, and Mashups. Any files uploaded from your computer are saved in Course Files or the Content Collection in the top-level folder.

6. Optionally, add an attachment. You may not see this function. The Blackboard administrator at your school must enable this function.

7. Click **Submit**.

Tip: For Windows, to select multiple users in a list, press the SHIFT key and click the first and last user. To select users out of sequence, press the CTRL key and click each user needed. For Macs, press the COMMAND key instead of the CTRL key. You can also select all course members with the **Select All** function.

NOTE: You may not see a **Create Folder** function. The Blackboard administrator at your school must enable this function.

Viewing Messages

Click the **Inbox** link to view received messages.
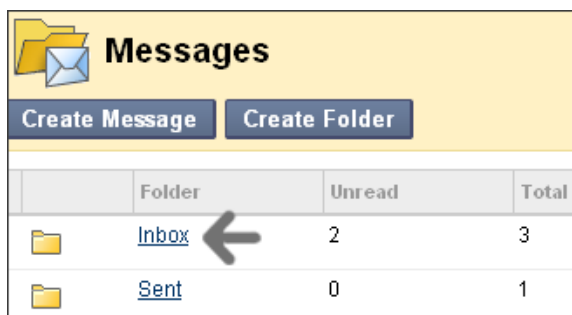
Student Experience: Sending Messages

Click the **Subject** link to read the message.
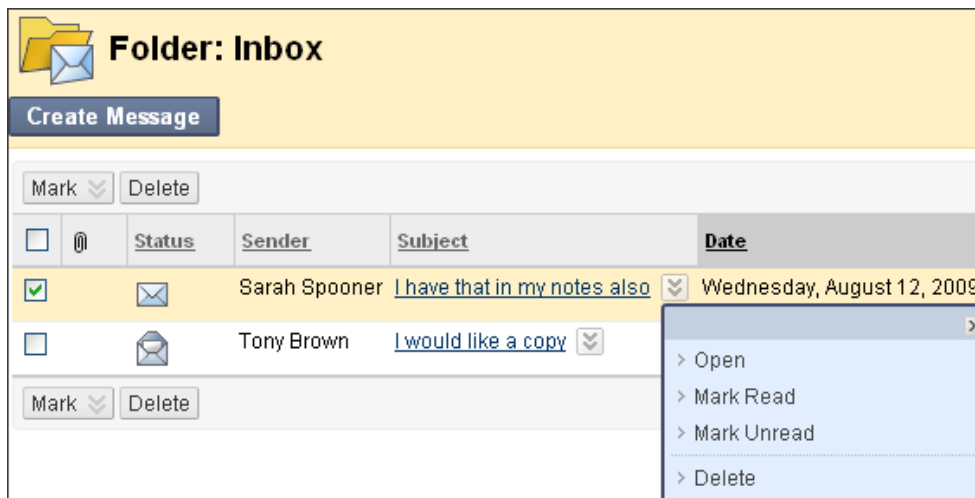
The **Status** column icons represent if the message has been read. An opened envelope ( ) means read and a sealed envelope ( ) means unread.

Use a message's contextual menu to mark a message read or unread, or delete it.

When you have finished reading the message, you can do any of the following:

- Reply to the sender or reply to all recipients.
- Forward the message to another user.
- Move the message to a different folder.
- Delete the message.
- Print the message.

NOTE: The **Move** function does not appear on the Action Bar as an option until a user creates a folder.

Sorting Messages

Click the column heading to sort the contents in that column. For example, to sort messages by read and unread, click the **Status** title or the caret beside it.

		Status △	Sender	Subject	Date
☐	✉		Bruce Lopez	Project Resource ⌄	Wednesd:
☐	✉		Alyssa Dubois	Chat on Tuesday ⌄	Wednesd:
☐	✉		Tony Brown	I would like a copy ⌄	Wednesd:
☐	✉		Sarah Spooner	I have that in my notes also ⌄	Wednesd:

Ask Dr. C

In the following table, Dr. C discusses the Messages tool.

Your question	Dr. C's reply
What are the advantages of using the Messages tool rather than the Email tool?	The Blackboard Learn Messages tool provides a familiar, email-like environment that can be used for course communication. Accounts are automatically created for each member of the course, and messages are sent and received using that account. This provides additional privacy because external email addresses are not used.
	Using the Messages tool instead of the Email tool can also be more reliable. Problems with incorrect or out-of-date student email addresses will not affect course communication.
	Using the Messages tool also encourages students to log in to their courses frequently.
	On the other hand, some students and instructors prefer the convenience of checking their course email along with their personal email messages in one location.
	Many schools have policies on the use of the Email and Messages tools. Check with your Blackboard Learn trainer for more information about your school's approach.

Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Student Course.

Read and send messages

- Send a message to all members.
- Reply to one of the messages you received.
- View the sent message.

Using Tools Across Courses

Up to this point, we have focused on the student experience within the course itself. Many of the tools we have covered can also be accessed from the **My Institution** tab. Since you are not logged in to a course, you can access information for all your courses. The modules shown can be rearranged using the drag-and-drop function or can be deleted.
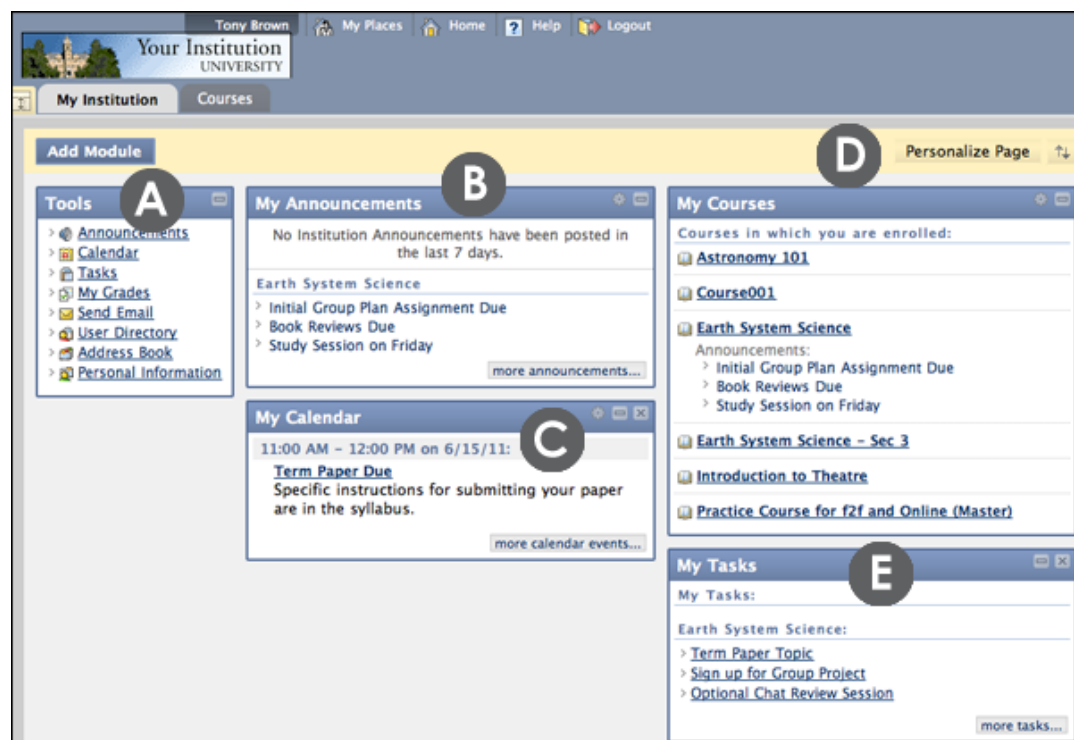
A. The **Tool Panel** gives students access to several tools, such as Email. Students can send email to members of any of their courses from the Tool Panel.

B. The **My Announcements** module lists announcements from all courses in which a student is enrolled, as well as institution-wide announcements.

C. The **My Calendar** module lists all instructors' calendar entries for all courses in which a student is enrolled. Private events are added using the **Calendar** link in the Tool Panel.

D. The **Personalize Page** function allows customization of the page's color theme.

E. The **My Tasks** module list tasks for all courses in which a student is enrolled. Personal tasks are added using the **Tasks** link in the Tool Panel.

3.0 Real-time Communication

You have learned about some of the course information and communication tools you can use to keep students informed and exchange messages with them. Now we look at how you can communicate with your students in real-time, using the Chat tool. We first explore the Chat tool from the student perspective.

Chat is a virtual meeting space, where you and your students can gather to communicate with each other using instant messaging. Chat can be used for a variety of applications:

- Online office hours
- Exam reviews and study groups
- Guest speakers or question and answer sessions
- Small group collaboration and brainstorming sessions

Together, the Virtual Classroom tool and the Chat tool form the Blackboard Learn Collaboration tool. The Virtual Classroom tool includes a whiteboard, chat panel, web browser, Course Map, and a question and answer area. It is ideal for course lectures, especially those in which you present visual material. We do not explore the Virtual Classroom tool in this workshop, but we take a close look at the Chat tool.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this section, you will be able to:

- Participate in a chat session.
- Send private messages.
- View session recordings.
- Create new sessions.
- Modify participant roles.
- Manage sessions.
- Create session recordings.

Participating in Chat Sessions

Chat within the Collaboration tool is a slimmed down version of the Virtual Classroom tool where only the chat room facility is available. This provides a large screen for the chat room.

Use the Chat tool when real-time discussion is required. Most students are familiar with using some form of chat and comfortable using this form of communication.

The Chat tool is designed to be ideal for low bandwidth situations, such as when your students are connecting to the course using a dial-up connection.

After joining a chat session, students can send messages. The message appears in the chat display panel of all participants who are currently in the room.

QUICK STEPS: Participating in a Chat Session

1. Access **Tools** and select **Collaboration**.

2. On the **Collaboration Sessions** page, click the **Session Name** link for the available Chat session you wish to join.

3. On the chat screen, compose a message.

4. Click **Send**.

NOTE: A Launching Chat Tool page appears. Do not leave this page until you are finished chatting. The chat session opens in a new browser window and may take a moment to load. Chat does not work if pop-up blockers are enabled. Either turn off your pop-up blocker or make your course site a trusted site.

A. A list of participants and their roles appear in the first column.

B. The title of the Chat room appears at the top of the chat display panel.

C. All messages are shown in the chat display panel.

D. Type your message in the **Compose** box and click **Send**. Alternatively, the **Compose** icon can be clicked to open a new window, allowing for a bigger area for typing.

The following table describes the icons assigned to each participant role.

| ▼ Icon	▼ Role
	A globe icon represents the Moderator. The Moderator is typically an instructor. The Moderator can modify participant roles, grant passive users permission to participate, expel users, and record and end the session.
	A full color icon represents the Active User. An Active User is typically a student. By default, Active Users can send messages as often as they like during a chat session.
	A gray toned icon represents the Passive User. A Passive User is typically a student. Passive Users can observe the chat exchange, but must raise their hands to request permission to send messages. If more than one student raises their hands, numbers are assigned to the handraise icons to represent the order they raised their hands.
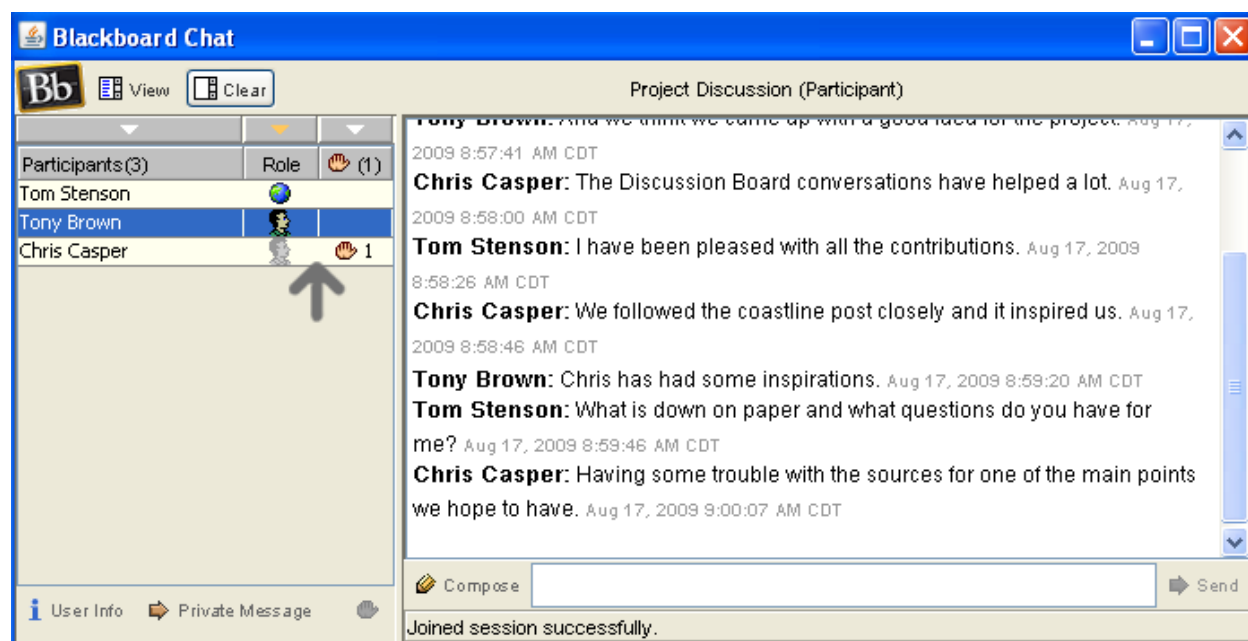
Sending Private Messages

Chat participants, including an instructor, can send private messages to one or more participants,

Private messages are not included in chat recordings and can be disallowed by the instructor.

QUICK STEPS: Sending Private Messages

1. On the **Participants** list, select the recipient or recipients of your private message.
2. Click **Private Message**.
3. In the **Compose Private Message** pop-up window, type your message.
4. Click **Send**.
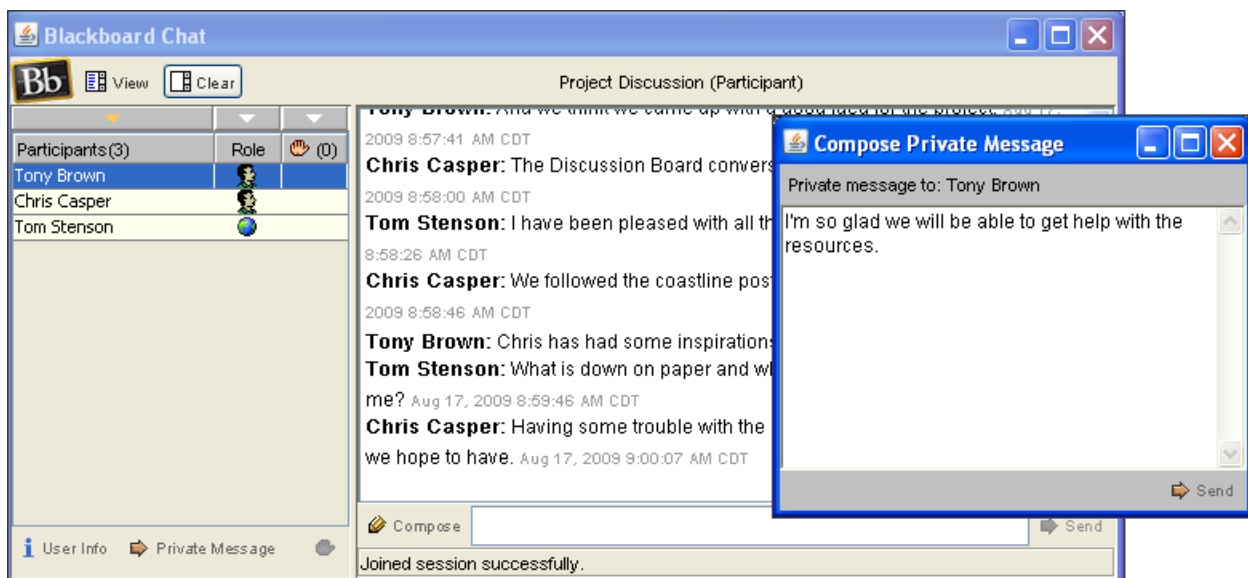
**TIP:** To send a private message to a single participant, double-click the participant's name.

Private messages can appear with all your other messages in the chat display panel or you can choose to display them in a separate panel. "Private Message from" always precedes private messages.

Click **View** on the Action Bar and select where private messages appear.

# Real Time Communication: Sending Private Messages
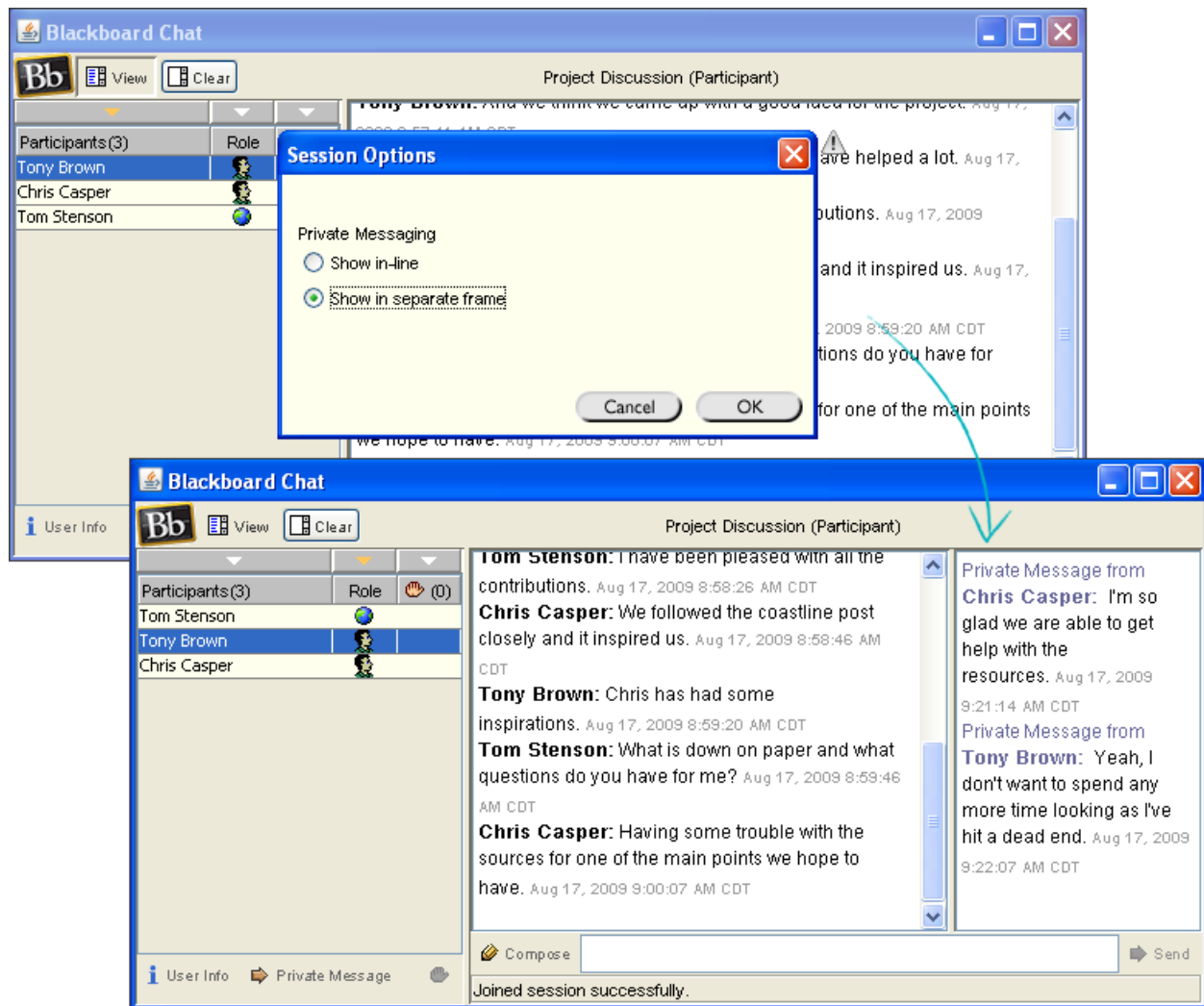
Viewing Chat Recordings

If you have recorded any portion of a chat session, students can access the recordings. For example, students can access recordings if they missed the session or if they want to review the ideas discussed.

Title recordings with meaningful names so students can locate them easily. For example, use either the topic discussed or the date of the session as the name. Multiple recordings can be made within one chat session.

QUICK STEPS: Viewing a Recorded Chat Session

1. Access the **Collaboration Sessions** page.
2. Click a session's Action Link (⬇) to access the contextual menu.
3. Select **Recordings**.
4. On the **Session Recordings** page, click the name of the recording.
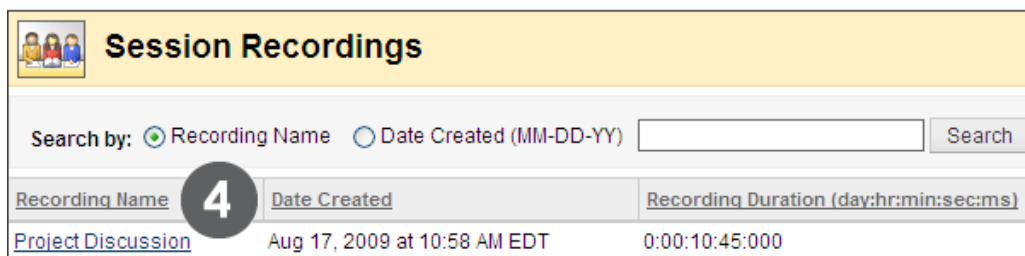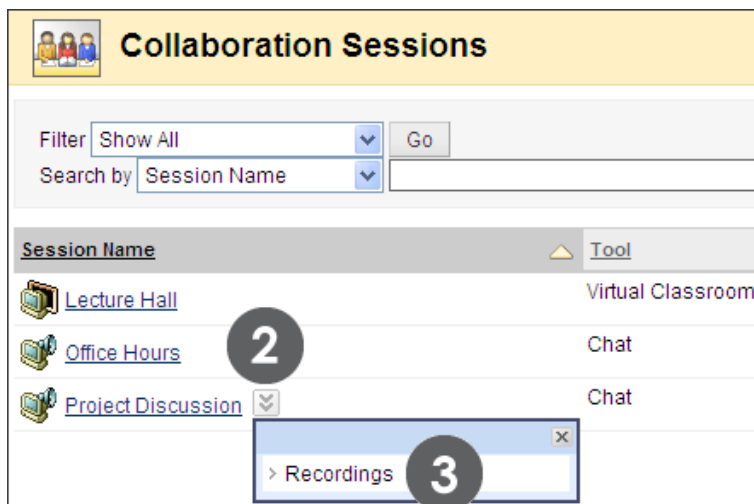
NOTE: In the **Recording Duration** column, the length of the session is listed. If several recordings exist, use the **Search** function on the Action Bar.

Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Student Course.

Send chat messages

- Join the **Student Lounge** session and send a message to the participants.
- Choose to view private messages in a separate frame.
- Choose a participant and send a private message.

View a session recording

- View the **Culture and Identity** session recording. **NOTE:** You may see **anonymous** instead of an instructor name in the transcript, which can happen when a course is archived and restored.

About the Instructor Interface

Now we turn to an instructor perspective. In this section, you create and manage chat sessions in the Practice Course. Ensure **Edit Mode** is **ON** to access the instructor functions.

As an instructor, you have access to the same features as students. In addition, you can do the following:

- Create sessions
- Modify participant roles
- Manage sessions
- Record sessions

A. Click **Create Collaboration Session** on the Action Bar to create a chat session.
B. Click a session's Action Link ( ) to edit session settings, delete a session, and view and manage session recordings, if they exist.
C. Search for sessions using the **Search** function on the Action Bar.

Any session with a start date in the future does not become a link until the start date has arrived.
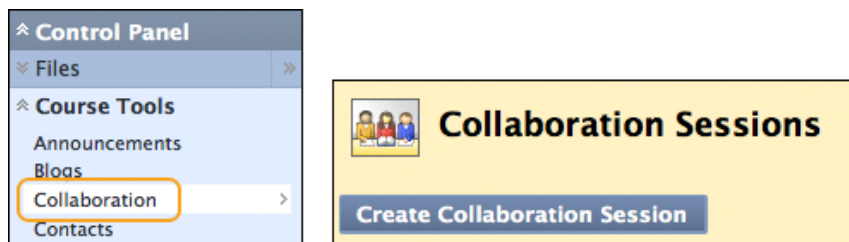
Creating Chat Sessions

As an instructor, you can create chat sessions for real-time communication. You can create sessions that are available

- For the duration of the course; students can schedule meetings and use the session at any time.

- At a specific time; student attendance at these sessions may be mandatory.

- To group members only; students in a group can schedule sessions to discuss projects, divide up tasks, and brainstorm.

QUICK STEPS: Creating a Chat Session

1. On the **Control Panel**, expand the **Course Tools** section, and select **Collaboration**.

2. On the **Collaboration Sessions** page, click **Create Collaboration Session** on the Action Bar.

3. On the **Create Collaboration Session** page, type a **Session Name**.

4. In the **Schedule Availability** section, you can set a Chat session to display on a specific date and time and to stop displaying on a specific date and time. Select the **Display After** and **Display Until** check boxes to enable the date and time selections. Type dates and times in the boxes or use the pop-up **Date Selection Calendar** and **Time Selection Menu** to select dates and times. Display restrictions do not affect the Chat session's availability, only when it appears.

5. Next to **Available**, select the **Yes** option.

6. Under **Collaboration Tool**, select **Chat** from the drop-down list.

7. Click **Submit**.

Each course contains a default Chat session titled **Office Hours**. You can rename or delete this default session.

Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Practice Course.

Create chat sessions

- Create a chat session students can enter at any time to discuss questions and concerns, or socialize.

- Create a chat session where students meet for a specific time period about a specific topic.

Modifying Participant Roles

By default, participants are Active Users when they enter a chat session. At any time, you can change the role to Passive. Passive Users can view the chat exchange, but can only contribute if they raise their hands and are granted permission by the Moderator.

You control chat sessions to a greater degree when users are passive. For example, if each student must first ask for permission to participate, you are less likely to have 15 questions to respond to at once. You can also make only certain users passive if they are dominating the conversation or responding inappropriately.

**QUICK STEPS: Modifying Participant Roles**

1. From the chat session, click the participant's name to select it.

2. Click an icon to activate or deactivate a user's permission to chat. The icon in the **Participants** list is updated.
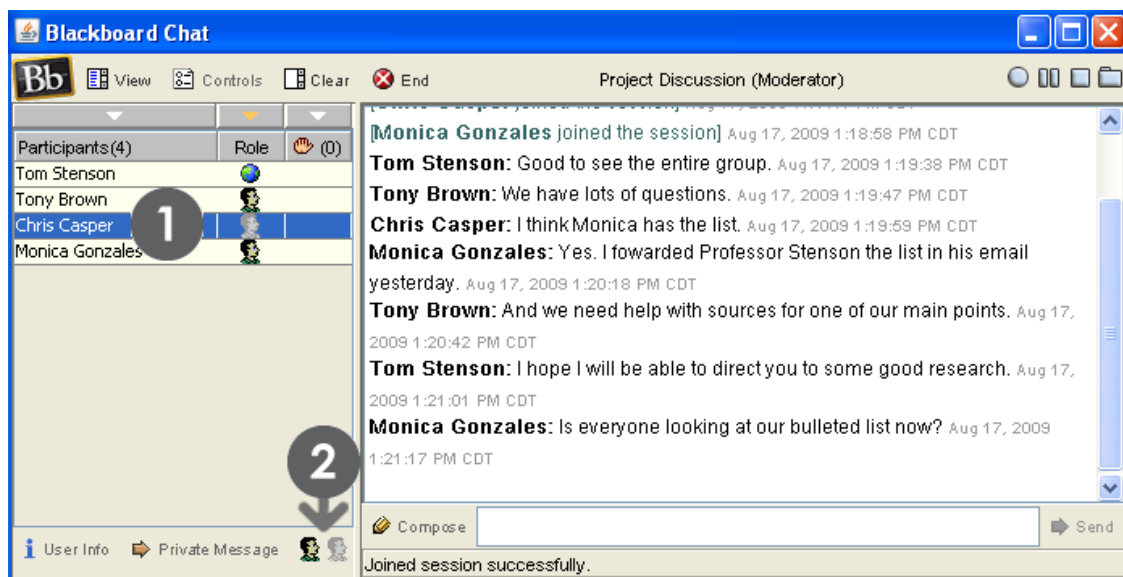
In the **Participants** list, one participant has been changed to a passive user. This user can select the handraise icon to ask for permission to contribute to the chat.

Managing Sessions

As an instructor, you can use the functions on the Action Bar to manage the chat session.
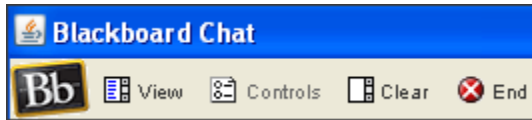
The following table explains the functions on the left side of the Action Bar.

If you want to	Function on Action Bar
Select which features each role can use	**Click Controls.** By default, only active users can send messages and private messages.
Clear the screen	**Click Clear.** You can choose to clear your chat panel or the chat panel of all session participants.
End a session	**Click End.** The session is ended and all users are expelled. If you are recording the session, the recording is also ended and it is no longer possible to add bookmarks to the recording.

Recording Sessions

Create a transcript of a chat session by recording a session using the recording functions on the right side of the Action Bar.

Session recordings can be beneficial if student participation is graded. Students can use the recordings for review purposes, or if a chat session was missed.

You can type a name for the recording or use the default name of the start date and time of the recording. You can create single or multiple recordings for a session.

QUICK STEPS: Recording a Session

1. After joining a chat session, click the **Begins recording** button ( ).

2. Type a name for the chat recording or use the default.

3. Click **OK**.
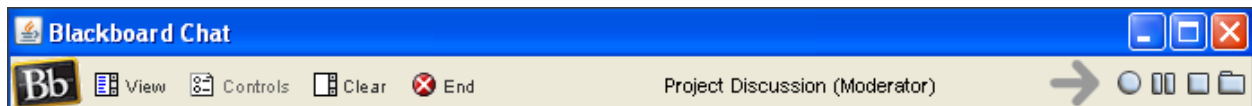
The following table explains the recording functions on the right side of the Action Bar.

▼ Icon	▼ Function on Action Bar
⬤	Click **Begins recording** to create the transcript. Information is recorded as participants exchange messages. More than one recording can be created per session. **NOTE:** Clicking the **Begins recording** function again when recording is already in progress will stop the recording.
❚❚	Click **Pauses Recording** to temporarily stop the recording. The chat display panel and the transcript indicate the recording has been paused. Click it again to resume recording.
▢	Click **Stops Recording** to end the recording. Once a chat session has been stopped, it is not possible to add to the recording. **TIP:** If you end a recording in error, simply click the **Begins recording** function to start another transcript. Title the next recording "Part Two" or "Continued."
📁	Click **Bookmark** to add comments to the recording. For instance, make a note that you are about to introduce a new topic. When adding bookmark comments, remember students can view recordings. Bookmarks will appear in a different color than the chat text. **View Recording Project Discussion** Tom Stenson: I will record this part for future reference. Aug 17, 2009 2:57:59 PM Tony Brown: Great. Less notes. Aug 17, 2009 2:58:11 PM EDT Monica Gonzales: Look at bullet four. Aug 17, 2009 2:58:25 PM EDT [Tom Stenson inserted bookmark: BULLET FOUR] Aug 17, 2009 2:58:34 PM EDT Monica Gonzales: We only found one source we liked. Aug 17, 2009 2:58:59 PM E Chris Casper: And it isn't that great. I searched and searched. Aug 17, 2009 2:59: Tom Stenson: Did you notice the bib at the end of that article? I'm familiar with the

Ask Dr. C

In the following table, Dr. C discusses recording chat sessions.

Your question	Dr. C's reply
Why are chat logs important?	Making chat recordings available allow students to review the discussions that transpired and gives those who were not present a chance to find out what took place. It also means students become active participants in creating the course content. This personal contribution can create greater interest in the course, which may lead to more active participation and a greater sense of community among learners.
Can students record a group chat session? If so, how?	Yes, within group collaboration sessions, students have the same abilities to start and stop the recording of the session as the instructor does. All group members have the Moderator role. One of the group members can start recording the session at any time by clicking the **Begins recording** function.

Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Practice Course.

Chat recordings

- Access the **Group Saturn** recording, change the name of the recording, and permit participants to view it. **Reminder:** You cannot edit the recording properties if you did not access the **Collaboration** tool through the **Control Panel**. You may see **anonymous** instead of the instructor name in the transcript, which can happen when a course is archived and restored.

- Delete one of the recordings in the **Group Jupiter** session.

Best Practice: Chat for Academic Purposes

Students are often familiar with real-time chat tools, such as AIM, but are accustomed to using them for social correspondence. In the social setting, messages can be composed quickly and without reflection.

Using chat for academic purposes requires planning, structure, and moderation of the discussion. Here are some tips for effectively using chat for academic purposes:

- Decide what your objectives are for using chat. How can it assist learners in achieving the overall goals of the course?

- Inform learners of your expectations for how to use the tool.

- Outline the rules in your syllabus, such as use of appropriate language, respect for their fellow classmates, and comments relevant to the topic.

- Consider the number of students who can be meaningfully involved in the chat session. The class can be broken into smaller groups to meet separately.

- Prepare a focused topic in advance for each chat session.

- Monitor the dialogue to keep it on topic.

- Establish a protocol so learners know when another has completed a message. For example, ask learners to add an asterisk (*) to the end of their last sentences.

- Be aware of users who tend not to participate. Is it due to a technological problem or lack of experience? Some learners can type quickly while others type quite slowly. This may affect the frequency of a learner's participation. Is there a way to draw a student into the discussion?

- Summarize the major points at the end of the chat session.

4.0 Keeping Students Informed

Now we return to the course information tools. In this section, you learn to add information to the tools students rely on to stay on track.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this section, you will be able to:

- Create announcements.
- Manage announcements.
- Add a course syllabus.
- Add lessons to the syllabus.
- Add calendar events.
- Add tasks.
- Add staff information.

Adding Announcements

Use the **Announcements** tool to provide students with course reminders and updates. Announcements can contain text, images, and multimedia, as well as links to course content. For example, in an announcement reminding students of a chat session, you can provide a link to the session.

New announcements appear directly below the repositionable bar entitled "New announcements appear below this line." To pin an announcement to the top of the list, drag it above the repositionable bar. This keeps the announcement at the top of the list and prevents new announcements from superseding it.

NOTE: When performing the instructor functions, ensure **Edit Mode** is **ON**.

QUICK STEPS: Creating an Announcement

1. On the **Control Panel**, expand the **Course Tools** section, and select **Announcements**.

2. On the **Announcements** page, click **Create Announcement** on the Action Bar.
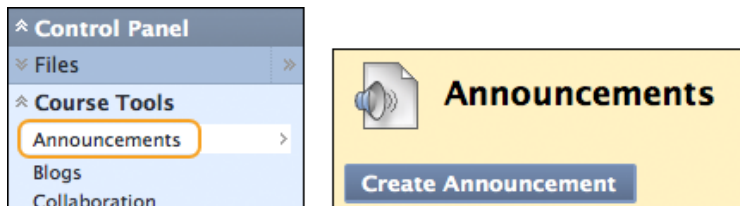
3. On the **Create Announcement** page, type a **Subject** and **Message**. You can use the Text Editor functions to format the text and include files, images, external links, multimedia, and Mashups. Any files uploaded from your computer are saved in Course Files or the Content Collection in the top-level folder.

4. Under **Web Announcement Options**, select

   - **Not Date Restricted**: visible until manually removed, or

   - **Date Restricted**: visible only within selected dates and times.

5. For **Enter Date and Time Restrictions**, you can set announcements to display on a specific date and time and to stop displaying on a specific date and time. Select the **Display After** and **Display Until** check boxes to enable the date and time selections. Type dates and times in the boxes or use the pop-up **Date Selection Calendar** and **Time Selection Menu** to select dates and times. Display restrictions do not affect the announcement availability, only when it appears.

6. Optionally, under **Course Link**, click **Browse** to create a link from the announcement to a course item. Select the course item from the pop-up Course Map.

7. Click **Submit**.

The **Subject** becomes the title of the announcement on the **Announcements** page. In the **Message** text box, you can add text, images, multimedia, and links. Content cannot be uploaded directly into the Text Editor, but must be linked to a file in Course Files.

Select the **Email Announcement** check box to send students an email containing the announcement. The email is sent to all students; even those who chose not to receive announcement notifications through email.

Student View of the Announcements Page

A. A link to an assignment appears under the announcement. Deleting the content deletes the link to the content in the announcement, but the announcement itself remains.

B. Students do not see the repositionable bar, but they do see announcements in the order that you determine.

Managing the Announcements Page

There are four methods for managing announcements.

1. All announcements are visible all of the time, with the most recent on top.
2. Announcements are visible for a specified period of time.
3. Announcements are emailed to students in the course.
4. You customize the display order by dragging announcements to the positions you choose.

Option 1: All announcements are visible all of the time, with the most recent on top.

While creating the announcement, select **Not Date Restricted** and make no changes to the display dates.

All announcements show in the order created, with the most recent on top, for the duration of the course.

Option 2: Announcements are visible for a specified period of time.

While creating the announcement, select **Date Restricted** and select the **Display After** and **Display Until** check boxes and type the dates.

Option 3: Announcements are emailed to students in the course.

While creating the announcement, select the **Email Announcement** check box.

Students in the course receive an email containing the announcement, which ensures they receive the information even if they do not log in to the course.

Option 4: You customize the display order.

After creating announcements and specifying their settings, move announcements to create the display order students see. Use the drag-and-drop function—the double-tipped arrows next to announcements—to reposition them. The Keyboard Accessible Reordering tool on the Action Bar can also be used to reorder announcements.

Drag announcements above the repositionable bar for them to always appear at the top of the list.

Ask Dr. C

In the following table, Dr. C answers questions about the Announcements tool.

Your question	Dr. C's reply
I want to change the display order for my announcements, but the newest addition always appears at the top. Can I reorder them?	New announcements appear directly below the repositionable bar entitled "New announcements appear below this line" but instructors can reorder them. Drag an announcement above the repositionable bar to make it always appear at the top of the list. Students do not see the bar, but do see the announcements in the order that you place them. Changes are reflected on the course **Announcements** page and in the **My Announcements** module within a course and on the **My Institution** tab.
I added an announcement with a Course Link, but the link does not appear in my announcement.	If the link points to a content item that is not available, the link will not appear in the announcement. For instance, if the content has date restrictions, the link does not show until the content is available. You can apply the same date restrictions to the announcement as are applied to the content item.

Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Practice Course.

Use the Announcements tool

- Create an announcement that appears for the duration of the course.

- Create an announcement to remind students of the upcoming test this week.

- Edit an existing announcement's title and change an option.

- Create an announcement and select a date a few days in the future for the **Date After** setting. What happens to this announcement on the main **Announcements** page when viewing with **Edit Mode ON** and **OFF**?

- Reorder the announcements by dragging them to new positions. Place at least one above the repositionable bar.

- Create another new announcement and note where it appears.

Adding the Syllabus

The syllabus is an important reference students routinely consult throughout a course.

You can add a syllabus in two ways. You can upload an existing file or use the Blackboard Learn Syllabus Builder. For both options, you add the syllabus to a course area, such as a Content Area, Learning Module, Lesson Plan, or folder.

Uploading Syllabus Files

You can upload an existing file, such as a syllabus created in Microsoft® Word, PDF, or HTML format. For example, upload your own course syllabus file, as well as department or institution policy documents. The uploaded files appear as links in the course area. We use a Content Area in our example.

QUICK STEPS: Adding an Existing Syllabus File

1. Access or create the Content Area.

2. On the Content Area's Action Bar, point to **Build Content** to access the drop-down list and select **Syllabus**.
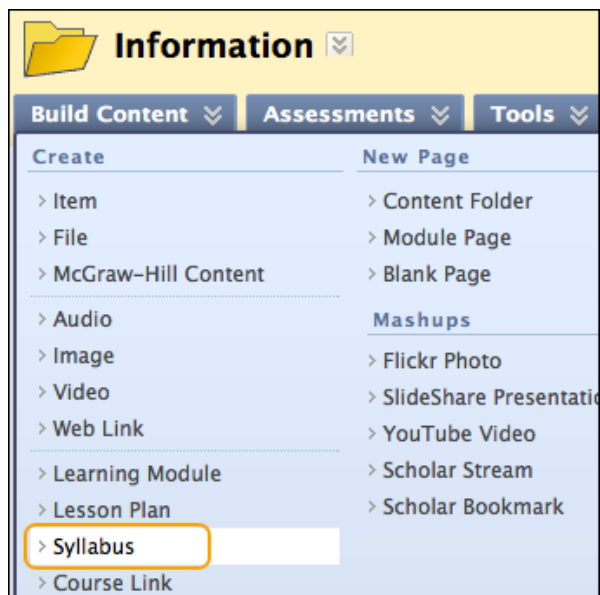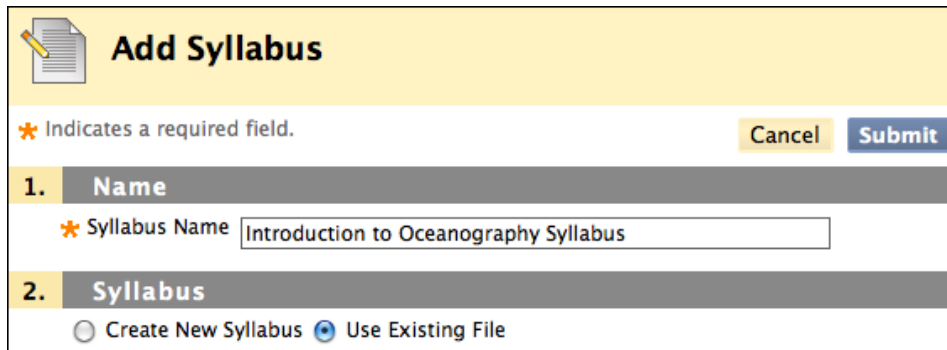
3. On the **Add Syllabus** page, type a **Syllabus Name**.

4. Select the **Use Existing File** option.

   - To upload a file from your computer, click **Browse My Computer**.

   - To upload a file from the course's storage repository:

- o If Course Files is the course's storage repository, click **Browse Course**.

  -OR-

- o If your school licenses content management, click **Browse Content Collection**.

5. Click **Submit**.

6. On the **Edit Item** page, select a color for the **Syllabus Name**, if you want.

7. Optionally, in the **Text** box, type a description or instructions to appear with the syllabus file link. You can use the Text Editor functions to format the text and include files, images, external links, multimedia, and Mashups. Any files uploaded from your computer are saved in Course Files or the Content Collection in the top-level folder.

8. Optionally, under **Attachments**, attach more files.

9. Optionally, type names for the attached files. If link names are not added, the file names are used.

10. To make the syllabus available, select the **Yes** option for **Permit Users to View this Content**.

11. Click **Submit**.

TIP: Additional files can be attached on the next syllabus page.

Note: For **Select Date and Time Restrictions**, you can set your syllabus to display on a specific date and time and to stop displaying on a specific date and time. Select the **Display After** and **Display Until** check boxes to enable the date and time selections. Type dates and times in the boxes or use the pop-up **Date Selection Calendar** and **Time Selection Menu** to select dates and times. Display restrictions do not affect your syllabus's availability, only when it appears.

If a description or instructions are typed in the **Text** box, the text appears in the Content Area following the link to the syllabus file.
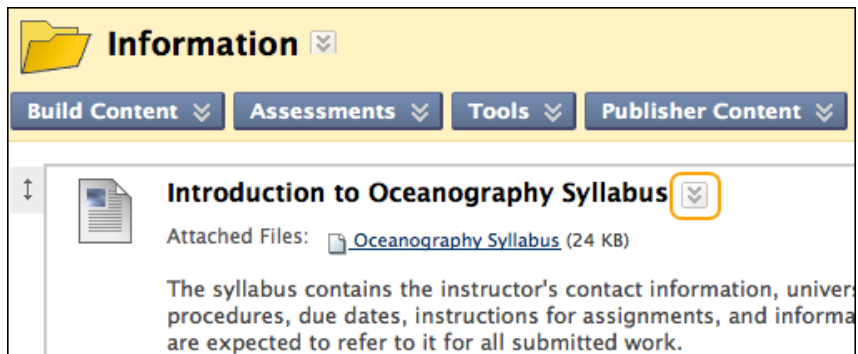
Click the syllabus's Action Link (⌄) to access the contextual menu to upload more files, make changes, or delete the syllabus item.

Using the Syllabus Builder

You can use the Syllabus Builder to create a comprehensive syllabus in a modular format. The Syllabus Builder contains three sections by default: **Description**, **Learning Objectives**, and **Required Materials**. These section headings can be edited to fit your needs. Further customize the syllabus by adding lesson sections and specifying design information.

QUICK STEPS: Using the Syllabus Builder

1. Access or create the Content Area.

2. On the Content Area's Action Bar, point to **Build Content** to access the drop-down list and select **Syllabus**.

3. On the **Add Syllabus** page, type a **Syllabus Name**.

4. Select the **Create New Syllabus** option.

5. Click **Submit**.

6. On the **Syllabus Builder** page, type information in the default **Body** text boxes. You can use the Text Editor functions to format the text and include files, images, external links, multimedia, and Mashups. Any files uploaded from your computer are saved in Class Files or the Content Collection in the top-level folder.

You can edit the **Heading** titles to fit your requirements. You can paste information into the **Body** text boxes from an existing document.

7. Optionally, under **Syllabus Design**, select the **Styles** and **Colors** for the syllabus.

8. Under **Build Lessons**, select the **Create Specified Number of Lesson Shells** option, and type a number.

9. Select the **Yes** option for **Make the Syllabus Available**.

10. Click **Submit**.

Lesson shells can be created later. You can also select not to create lesson shells.

NOTE: For **Select Date and Time Restrictions**, you can set your syllabus to display on a specific date and time and to stop displaying on a specific date and time. Select the **Display After** and **Display Until** check boxes to enable the date and time selections. Type dates and times in the boxes or use the pop-up **Date Selection Calendar** and **Time Selection Menu** to select dates and times. Display restrictions do not affect your syllabus's availability, only when it appears.

Adding Syllabus Lesson Details

Using the Syllabus Builder, you can add lesson details to the syllabus, such as information about each unit or weekly lesson. Lesson details appear at the end of the syllabus.

QUICK STEPS: Adding Syllabus Lesson Details

1. Access the Content Area where the syllabus has been added.

2. Click the syllabus's Action Link ( ) to access the contextual menu.

3. Select **Edit**.

4. On the syllabus page, click a lesson's Action Link ( ).

5. Select **Edit**.
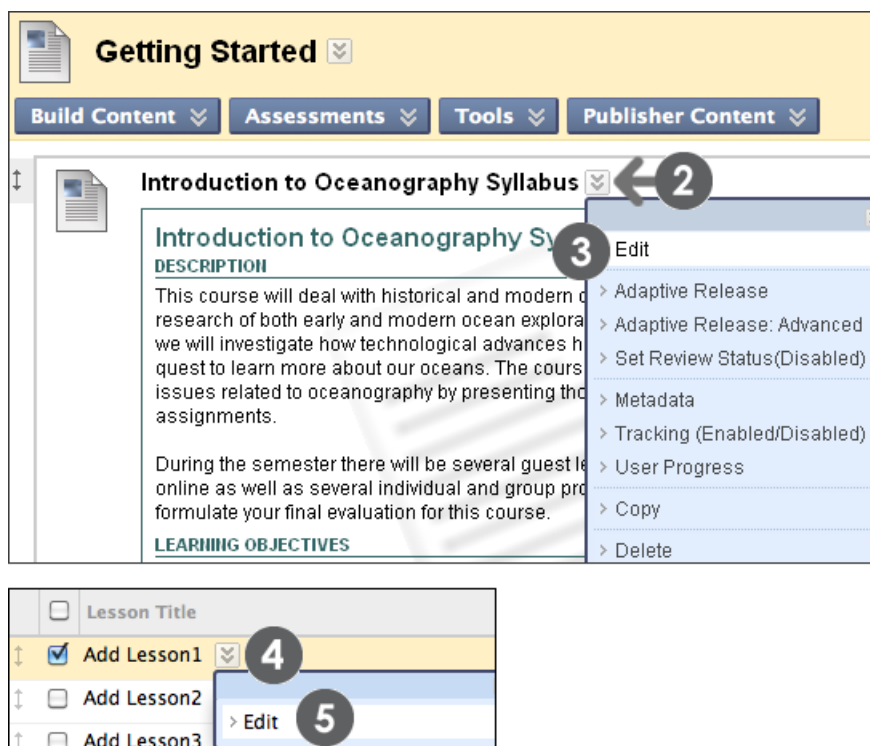
6. On the **Edit Lesson** page, type the lesson title.

7. If applicable, select a date and time when the lesson appears in the syllabus.

8. In the **Lesson Description** text box, type information. You can use the Text Editor functions to format the text and include files, images, external links, multimedia, and Mashups. Any files uploaded from your computer are saved in Course Files or the Content Collection in the top-level folder.

9. Click **Submit**.

Editing the Syllabus and Adding Lessons

At any time, you can edit the syllabus information and add lessons.

A. To edit the syllabus or add lessons, select **Edit** from the syllabus's contextual menu.
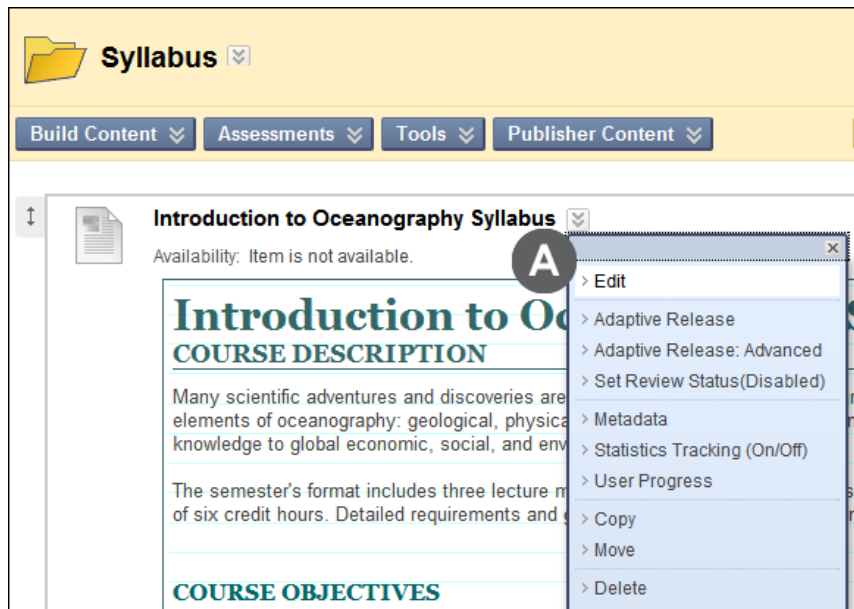
B. If you chose not to add lessons, or to add more lessons, click the **Add Lesson** function on the Action Bar.

C. Click the **Edit Syllabus** function on the Action Bar to edit the Syllabus Name, Headings, Body text, Syllabus Design, and Options, such as availability.
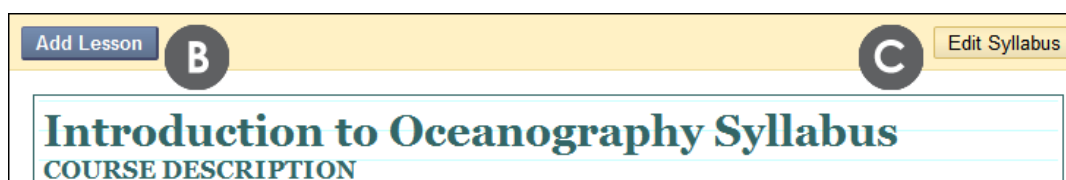
Hands-on Activity

Add a syllabus using the Syllabus Builder

- Select an existing Content Area or create one for your syllabus.
- Create a new syllabus. Complete the default sections and select a design.
- Add three lesson shells.
- Make the syllabus available.
- View your completed syllabus from the Content Area.
- Edit the syllabus to change its availability and add lesson details.

Best Practice: Customize the Online Syllabus

Students in online courses often feel disoriented without the familiar face-to-face introductory explanations during the first day of class. Besides including the basics in your syllabus about grading criteria, course objectives, and department policies, consider adding procedures distinctive to the online environment. For example, include sections for the schedule, an online map, and a participation contract.

The Schedule

- List start and end times for units and provide a weekly overview.
- Specify due dates; consider repeating important due dates on the Calendar, in Announcements, or by making the Notification Modules available on the Home Page.
- Provide students with your real-time office hours in Chat.
- Make expectations clear about how often students are to attend class.

The Map

- Help students use the syllabus as a map or guide to the course. Provide a description of the course layout and where to find each area of the course.
- List special online course procedures, such as where to access lesson material and how to label and submit assignments.
- List where tests are located, and offer practice tests to familiarize students with the interface.

The Contract

Make participation expectations clear:

- Set a minimum number of Discussion Board posts or Chat attendance.
- Let students know you intend to grade on quality, as well as quantity.

Let students know what they can expect from you:

- List your schedule for returning graded work and providing feedback for questions, emails, and discussion posts.
- Let students know how to handle technical difficulties.

Adding Events to the Calendar

Use the Course Calendar to provide students with dates for important events. Course Calendar events appear to all members of the course. Common entries include upcoming tests, due dates for assignments, or special lectures. Alternatively, you can handle due date notifications through the Notification Modules on the course Home Page.

QUICK STEPS: Adding a Calendar Event

1. On the **Control Panel**, expand the **Course Tools** section, and select **Course Calendar**.
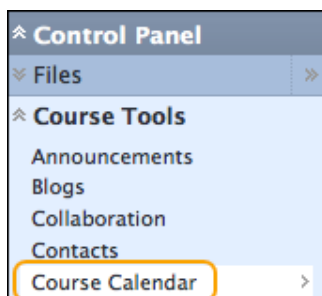
2. On the **Course Calendar** page, select a view: Day, Week, Month, or Year.

3. Click **Create Course Event**.
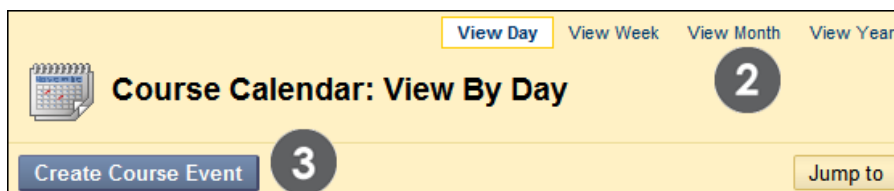
4. On the **Create Course Event** page, type the **Event Name** and **Event Description**. You can use the Text Editor functions to format the text and include files, images, external links, multimedia, and Mashups. Any files uploaded from your computer are saved in Class Files or the Content Collection in the top-level folder.

5. Type the **Event Date**. Optionally, click the pop-up **Date Selection Calendar** to select the date.

6. Type the **Event Start Time** and **Event End Time**. Optionally, click the pop-up **Time Selection Menu** to select the times.

7. Click **Submit**.

Create Course Event

7

Cancel   Submit

1   Event Information

* Event Name   Research Paper Topic Discussion in Chat

Event Description

4

Normal ▼ 3 ▾ Times New Roman ▼ **B** *I* U abe x₂ x² ≡ ≡ ≡ ⅓☰

If you would like help selecting your Research Paper topic, or need help narrowing down the topic, please attend the special Chat session.

▲ Path: body

☐ Save as Reusable Object

2   Event Time

5

6

Event Date   10/26/2008

Event Time   Event Start Time 10:00 AM
              Event End Time 11:00 AM

12:30 AM
01:00 AM
01:30 AM
02:00 AM
02:30 AM
03:00 AM
03:30 AM
04:00 AM
04:30 AM

The **Event Name** appears as the link on the Course Calendar. Click the link to display the **Event Description**. Event Descriptions can include formatted text, links, and images. There is a 4,000-character limit to Event Descriptions.

Ask Dr. C

In the following table, Dr. C discusses students' personal calendars.

Your question	Dr. C's reply
My students sometimes complain their personal calendar entries have disappeared. How can I help them with this problem?	If students access the calendar while in your course, they will only see the entries you have added. If they access the calendar from the **My Institution** tab, it includes the following: • Their personal entries • Entries for all courses in which they are enrolled • Entries for any organizations in which they are enrolled • Institution-wide events

Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Practice Course.

Add the following events to the Calendar

- Add one event to this month's Calendar. Include an **Event Description**.
- Add one event to next month's Calendar.
- View the Calendar by month and year.

Adding Tasks

Use the **Tasks** tool to create a list of tasks students must complete. For example, for larger projects or assignments, create a task list to help keep students on track throughout the process.

Tasks can be assigned a priority of Low, Normal, or High.

QUICK STEPS: Adding a Task

1. On the **Control Panel**, expand the **Course Tools** section, and select **Tasks**.

2. On the **Tasks** page, click **Create Course Task** on the Action Bar.

3. On the **Create Course Task** page, type the **Task Name** and **Description**. You can use the Text Editor functions to format the text and include files, images, external links, multimedia, and Mashups. Any files uploaded from your computer are saved in Course Files or the Content Collection in the top-level folder.

4. Type the **Due Date,** or click the **Date Selection Calendar** to select the date.

5. Under **Task Options**, use the **Priority** drop-down list to select the task priority.

6. Click **Submit**.

Viewing Tasks

By default, tasks are listed from highest priority to lowest—not by date. To view tasks listed by due date click the **Due Date** heading. Use the status columns to view how many students have reported their progress or completed a task.

Use a task's contextual menu to edit or delete the task.

Viewing Task Progress

Click a task title to access the **View Task** page. The **View Task** page displays all students' progress for that task.

Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Practice Course.

Use the Tasks tool

- Add a task and assign it a **Priority** of **Normal**.

- Check student progress for the **Submit Planet Paper Ideas** task. Each student is listed twice because two attempts are allowed for this assignment.

Adding Staff Information

Use the **Contacts** tool to create a profile providing students with your contact information, as well as some personal details and a photo.

You can also create folders to organize profiles for your teaching assistants and guest lecturers. Their contact information is added following the same steps. You can organize the items on the **Contacts** page using the drag-and-drop function. Edit or delete information using each item's contextual menu.

TIP: The recommended image size is 150 by 150 pixels. If you submit a larger image, some distortion may occur.

QUICK STEPS: Adding a Profile

1. On the **Control Panel**, expand the **Course Tools** section, and select **Contacts**.

2. On the **Contacts** page, click **Create Contact** on the Action Bar.

3. On the **Create Contact** page, type your **Profile Information**.

4. Under **Options**, select the **Yes** option for **Make the Profile Available**.

5. Optionally, attach an image and add a personal website.

6. Click **Submit**.

Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Practice Course.

Use the Contacts tool

- Create a profile for yourself.
- In the **Notes** section, include some personal information.
- Create a folder for Guest Lecturers.

5.0 Workshop Wrap Up

In the following table, the communication and course tools presented in this workshop are listed.

▼ Tool	▼ Use
Announcements	Provides students with course-related news, updates, and reminders
Syllabus	Provides a resource students can consult throughout the course for an outline, objectives, policies, participation, and grading criteria
Calendar	Provides students with course events and reminders
Tasks	Provides students with a list of tasks they must complete
Roster	View a list of course members
Contacts	Provides students with profiles of course staff
Email	Send email to course members' external email addresses
Messages	Send messages that students access within their courses, and ensure privacy for all course members
My Institution tab	Allows students to view information and use tools across courses
Chat	For real-time communication that is simple to use and ideal for students with slower connections

Spotlight on Your Course

We have explored the course tools Blackboard Learn offers for course information and communication, either asynchronously or in real-time. Take a few moments to consider how you can use these tools in your course.

Which course information tools will you use?

- Will you post regular, timely announcements to keep your students up-to-date?
- Will you use an existing syllabus or create one with the Syllabus Builder?
- Will you add all due dates to the Course Calendar? Have you considered making the Course Calendar the course timeline? Alternatively, will you use the Notification Modules to inform students of important dates and deadlines?
- Will you add tasks for your students to complete? Will you require students to report their progress?
- Will you add some personal information to your course Contacts page?

Which course communication tools will you use?

- Will you use the Blackboard Learn Email tool?
- Or is the Messages tool and its additional privacy a better fit for your course?

Will you use the real-time communication tools to increase participation?

- Will you offer real-time office hours in Chat?
- Will you use small group activities in your course and recommend that groups meet in chat sessions? Will you attend these sessions?
- Will you offer chat sessions for questions and concerns?
- Will you offer general chat sessions with no date restrictions so students can meet whenever they like?
- Will you record chat sessions?