Fostering Interaction Using Blackboard Communication Tools

Interaction has been shown to be a core component of engaging online learning experiences and catalyst for developing and sustaining online learning communities. Blackboard offers a number of communication tools that faculty can utilize to foster interaction in the learning environment.

- Synchronous vs. Asynchronous Interaction
- Asynchronous Blackboard Communication Tools
- Synchronous Blackboard Communication Tools
- Bibliography of Recommended Sources for Further Reference

Synchronous vs. Asynchronous Communication

Whereas synchronous interactions take place in real-time, asynchronous interactions span geographic and temporal constraints, allowing individuals the opportunity to reflect and form more coherent communications.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Synchronous Communication</th>
<th>Asynchronous Communication</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 or more individuals communicating simultaneously</td>
<td>2 or more individuals communicating independent of time or location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brings individuals together in real-time</td>
<td>Spans geographic or time constraints</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spontaneous</td>
<td>More deliberate / methodical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediate feedback</td>
<td>Delayed feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quickest, most active users participate most</td>
<td>Equal voice to all participants</td>
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Asynchronous Blackboard Communication Tools

Announcements

By default, the Announcements area is your site's entry point, and this prominence makes the Announcements area a useful communication tool. If you want to remind students of important information or alert them to updates you have made to the Blackboard site, you can place that information here. You can add a link to a specific area, tool, folder, or piece of content in an Announcement, directing students to the current task at hand. Encouraging your students to check Announcements for the latest course-related information is a good alternative to using email for these sorts of updates.

Discussion Board

The discussion tools provided by Blackboard can enrich communication in the web-enhanced traditional classroom as well as in the online venue. These tools provide faculty with a wealth of
opportunities for building course communities, encouraging academic discussion outside the classroom and collecting assignments electronically.

Asynchronous discussion resembles an electronic bulletin board, where users post their messages when they have time. Other users enter the discussion according to their own schedules. In an asynchronous discussion board, a forum is a general topic for discussion. A thread is subordinate discussion within the forum.

**Embedded Media**

An increasing number of online media services allow for embedding of media into other Web sites. Blackboard supports such embed code from many popular online media services, such as: YouTube, Google Video, and Jing. Many embeddable media sources can be embedded in the HTML code view when adding an item to Blackboard.

**E-mail**

The Blackboard e-mail tool is designed to help faculty communicate with students, fellow staff members and TA’s. The this tool allows faculty to send e-mails to the official WU email addresses of select students, TA’s or entire class. It is not necessary for the faculty member to know the email address of the individual receiving the email. A copy of each message sent from Blackboard is automatically also delivered to the sender's email account.

**Wimba Voice**

Wimba Voice is one component of the full Wimba Collaboration Suite that integrates with Blackboard and provides the ability to add audio to any number of items and activities in Blackboard. Voice discussion boards, voice email, and voice presentations are among the various components of Wimba Voice that can be used to enrich other text-only communications.

**Synchronous Blackboard Communication Tools**

**Wimba Classroom**

Wimba Classroom is an online collaboration tool that integrates with Blackboard and allows educators and students to engage in meaningful and memorable interactions by combining interactive technologies with instructional best practices.

**Virtual Classroom & Lightweight Chat**

The Virtual Classroom is the built-in synchronous communication tool in Blackboard including text chat and virtual whiteboard, and breakout session capabilities. The tool however does not support audio or video communications.

The Lightweight Chat tool is similar in many ways to the Virtual Classroom but does not include the following tools: Course Map, Whiteboard, Ask Question, & Breakout Sessions.
Bibliography of Recommended Sources for Further Reference

The following sources offer further information concerning fostering interaction in online learning environments.


For more information . . .

Additional support for Blackboard tools can be found at http://esupport.wilmu.edu, by clicking on the Help! button in Blackboard, and in the User Manual linked from the Control Panel in Blackboard.

This handout modified from NIU tutorial on Blackboard Communication tools:
http://www.niu.edu/blackboard/resources/interaction.shtml