

Blackboard 8.0 is Coming

The Ins and Outs of the Upgrade

MEREDITH RENDALL
meredith.rendall@nyu.edu

In the fall of 2002, NYU introduced Blackboard as the University's learning management system (LMS). Today, more than 45,000 NYU faculty members and students use Blackboard in their classes each semester. This past summer, ITS began implementing an upgrade of Blackboard to a newer version. Pending successful performance testing, Blackboard 8.0 will be available for the Spring 2009 semester, providing NYU community members an LMS with greater functionality and improved performance.

Faculty will continue to have access to four semesters' worth of their course content, starting with Fall 2007. Access to the current version of Blackboard will be retired at the close of the Fall 2008 term. To help faculty members prepare for this transition, and to help ensure that content from previous semesters is archived, ITS is offering preview sessions and hands-on training in the use of the new Blackboard system.

Transition Assistance

ITS will archive all Fall 2008 courses and make their content available by the end of January 2009. One way to ensure that your course content is successfully migrated to the new version of Blackboard is to use the Course Health Check tool (see

page 7). Available on your Course Control Panel, the Course Health Check identifies and repairs certain errors in the course's content. Though it isn't necessary to use the Course Health Check, it will help prepare your content for migration and ensure that your course is ready to be archived. If you plan on using the Course Health Check, keep in mind that the process must be completed by December 23rd, 2008.

To make the transition to the new version of Blackboard as smooth as possible, ITS is using a multifaceted approach to sharing information related to the upgrade. Regularly scheduled Blackboard 8.0 preview sessions (walk-ins are welcome) began in early October and will continue through January 30, 2009. Hands-on training sessions (registration is required) will be held mid-November through the end of February. Blackboard users should visit the ITS Blackboard Training page at www.nyu.edu/its/classes/blackboard to view the full schedule of classes and register for hands-on training.

In addition to these preview and hands-on training sessions, more Blackboard 8.0 support materials can be found through the AskITS knowledge base (AskITS.nyu.edu). ITS has also created an ITS Blackboard Upgrade blog (blogs.nyu.edu/its/blackboard/news); interested

Meredith Rendall is a Faculty
Technology Specialist within ITS
Academic Computing Services.

**Announcements**

[VIEW TODAY](#) [VIEW LAST 7 DAYS](#) [VIEW LAST 30 DAYS](#) [VIEW ALL](#)

October 24, 2008 - October 31, 2008

 **Fri, Oct 31, 2008 -- Welcome to Blackboard 8.0!**

We would like to introduce the new version of the Blackboard Learning Management System at New York University. Blackboard version 8.0.

Group trainings begin on Nov. 18th and continue until Feb. 27th '09.

The new Blackboard Announcements screen.

Date	Thread	Author	Status	Unread Posts	Total Posts
10/31/08 11:42 AM	Thoughts on Reading 1	Sarah Smith	Published	0	1

The Discussion Board in Blackboard 8.0 (Instructor's View).

readers can subscribe to the RSS feed or register to receive new blog posts via email.

NYU community members interested in more particular information regarding Blackboard may also wish to join the ITS Blackboard Users group. On this self-moderated forum, people from the NYU community share ideas and tips on using Blackboard and provide feedback on some of the new features introduced in the upgrade. Those interested in participating in this forum should send email with their name and preferred email address to blackboard.users@nyu.edu.

What to Expect

The process for most common activities will remain largely unchanged in Blackboard 8.0, though some incremental enhancements, such as bug fixes and faster, more reliable system performance, should be noticeable. Instructors who upload and display content, communicate with students using email and announcements, and assess student work with assignments, tests, and surveys will find that the methods

are mostly identical in the new Blackboard.

The two major exceptions to this are the Grade Center (previously the Gradebook) and the Discussion Board. The Grade Center will have several new enhancements, giving faculty a more flexible and extensible grade-tracking experience. Among these improvements are:

- Individual assignments graded by response instead of student.
- Feedback to students sent via email directly from the Grade Center.
- Use of preferred grading practices within the Grade Center.
- Interim grades no longer calculated with not-as-yet-submitted assignments.

It is important to remember that Blackboard grades are not grades of record. ITS is collaborating with the Office of the University Registrar to develop a web-based grade submission system.

The Discussion Board will retain much of its previous functionality for moderated threaded discussions, but its interface will be improved. It will also allow students

and instructors to subscribe to individual forums or threads in order to receive automatic alerts about new posts, and to rate posts with an easy-to-use star system. In addition, it will give instructors the ability to grade discussion board posts.

Additional Functionality

Blackboard 8.0 is compatible with Internet Explorer 6 and 7, Firefox 2.0 (on both PCs and Macs), and Safari. In the currently used version of Blackboard, pages display information in these browsers, but not all functionality is available. After the upgrade, all features will be fully functional in these three browsers.

Instructors will also have the ability to embed multimedia directly into Blackboard pages, rather than having to include such files as attachments. Additionally, tools can be added directly to content areas. For instance, instructors can add a discussion board forum directly underneath a particular piece of course material, so that students can post to the discussion board without leaving the content area.

Last Name	First Name	First test with r	Wk 1 Assign	Pre-term surve	1st Self & Peer	Weighted Total
Smith	Sarah	10.00	12.00	✓	1.50 (C)	-
Garcia	Chris	15.00	20.00	-	1.00 (F)	-
Clark	Alex	-	0.00	✓	2.00 (A+)	-

The Blackboard 8.0 Grade Center.

The Adaptive Release feature permits course instructors to limit what each student sees based on pre-established criteria. For example, students working on different group assignments can access materials related to their projects and only their projects; likewise, course instructors can limit access to resources until earlier materials have been downloaded by the student, or limit access based on a particular grade.

The option to communicate with students via email will appear in two new locations. When creating an announcement, the instructor will have the option of having it sent via email to his or her students, eliminating the need for students to log in to the Blackboard course site to read the announcement. Additionally, there will be an option to send email to students directly from the Grade Center.

Perhaps the widest reaching fix, the WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) text editor will now be available in most content and tool areas. Using the text editor, one can customize the appearance and presentation of content pages to a much higher degree, and easily embed multimedia announcements on the front page of a Blackboard course site, as well. Instead of posting a welcome greeting in text, instructors will now be able to greet their students, give instructions, or deliver an entire lecture in a pre-recorded audio file.

The Upgrade and You

While the new version of Blackboard 8.0 will provide many of the same features as past versions, it offers added enhancements and much greater flexibility in communication, multimedia, and the Grade Center. To learn more, please join us at one of the Blackboard 8.0 preview sessions or attend our hands-on training. For additional assistance, visit AskITS.nyu.edu and the Blackboard Upgrade website (www.nyu.edu/its/blackboard/upgrade). §

Course Health Check Tool

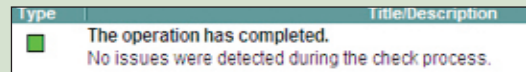
By using the Course Health check tool in the current version of Blackboard before December 23, 2008, you can help ensure that your course content is successfully migrated to the new version. In the Control Panel for your course, click on the **Course Health Check** option in the **Course Tools** area.



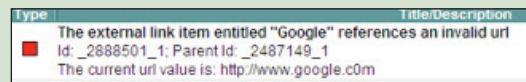
In the next screen, you will see the options to check **External Links** or to complete an **Invalid Character Check**.

External Link Check:

The external link check will test all URLs in your course site to ensure they are pointing to a valid webpage. After running the External Link Check, you will receive one of two screens. If all URLs are valid, you will see a success screen with a green square. However, if



any invalid URLs were detected you will be shown their exact location in your course site. You can then amend the URL in the content area and run the External Link Check again to confirm that the issue was removed.



Invalid Character Check:

The invalid character check will check four main areas of your course site — Announcements, Content, Discussion Board and Staff Information — to see if any of these areas contain characters which might prevent successful archiving of the site.

After running the Invalid Character Check on any of the four areas, you will again receive one of two screens. If no invalid characters were found, you will see a success screen. If any invalid characters are found, you will be notified. You will notice the **Fix** link to the right of each of the reports. Click the **Fix** link for each issue, and Blackboard will automatically fix the invalid characters and display a notification once the operation has been completed.



Once you run the External Link Check and the Invalid Character Check on each of the four areas (and you no longer receive any error reports), your courses should archive successfully and restore in the new version of Blackboard, 8.0. However, if you cannot fix an error, please contact ITS via the NYU Blackboard help form for further assistance (www.nyu.edu/its/blackboard/bbhelpform.php).

