Getting Started with Blackboard

What is Blackboard?
Blackboard (Bb) is the learning management system for the Virginia Community College System. It is used to allow instructors to easily put their course materials such as a Syllabus, handouts, and assessments online. Bb also has an online grade book (Note: this feature does NOT integrate with SIS/PeopleSoft). Bb is used for all classes including online, hybrid, and face-to-face classes.

Who has access to Blackboard?
All registered students, faculty and staff have access to Blackboard. You may access the system through myGCC – https://gcc.my.vccs.edu or directly at https://learn.vccs.edu.
All active faculty members have course shells on Bb for the current semester. Course shells are created based on the course listings in SIS/PeopleSoft. Semester specific courses remain on Bb for three semesters afterwards. It is the instructor’s responsibility to make course shells available to students by the first day of class for a given semester (see Making Your Course Available later in this manual.)
All active students have access only to their registered Bb courses for the current semester. Student enrollments are updated daily from the SIS/PeopleSoft system. It will typically take 24 hours for new student enrollment in SIS/PeopleSoft to be replicated in Bb.

Where can Faculty find Blackboard support?
Your local college help desk is a good place to start. Many also have dedicated Faculty & Staff help pages.
Online directions and training tutorials are also available on the Blackboard Help site – https://help.blackboard.com.

Where can students find Blackboard support?
The first stop should be your local college help desk page (https://www.germanna.edu/distance-learning/help-desk/).
Online help documents and tutorials for students are also available on the Blackboard Help site—https://help.blackboard.com.
General layout of the Blackboard Desktop

1. **My Blackboard** – A menu to quickly access elements of all your classes at once: Discussion Posts, Grades, Calendar, Retention Center.

2. **Blackboard Tabs** – Navigation between main areas of Blackboard. Your School tab is always on the far left. If you work with multiple schools, these will appear in alphabetical order.

3. **My Blackboard Courses Module** – Will contain all classes you are enrolled in. You can modify some settings here including groups classes by term.

4. **Other Modules** – Will contain various information and allow you access other resources: course evaluations, Hoonuit, etc...

5. **Log Out** button – Be sure you click this before you close your browser.
My Blackboard

My Blackboard consolidates much of your information into a single drop down access point. To get started simply click on your name at the top of the screen. This area is also called the Global Navigation in other Blackboard documentation or training.

The RED number beside your name will tell you how many updates have occurred in your classes. These can be new discussion posts, or items that need grading.

Clicking on your name will bring up the My Blackboard drop down. Here you have access to:

1. **User Menu**, access your courses, organizations.
2. **Additional School Links** and your Personal Blackboard display settings.
3. **Tool Menu**, open tools to view course activity (such as Discussion Posts), your calendar, grades and more.
4. **Notifications** of new activity.

Click on any Class or Organization link to go there, or click on one of the **My Blackboard Tools** in the Tool Menu for more options (Below).
General layout of the Blackboard Class Screen

1. Blackboard Tabs – Navigation between main areas of Blackboard
2. Breadcrumbs – While in your course use these instead of the browser’s Back button to navigate back. Use the drop down arrow to go to another course.
3. Edit Mode – Needs to be ON to see hidden items, add content, or modify properties. OFF will let you see your course similar to the way your students will see it.
4. Student Preview Mode – Use this to see your class as your students do. Test how your class looks and functions. For more information see Student Preview Mode later in this manual.
5. Action button – Buttons like these will help you do things in your course
6. Course Menu – For navigating through your course. This is the only way students have to navigate your course. Here you may access all content areas and can include links to course tools such as Discussion Boards.
7. Course Control Panel – This is an instructor only area that will allow you to change how your course works, what tools are available to students, and set up your grade book and perform other instructor tasks.
Content Menu

The content menu is topped by a row of icons:

1. **Display Course Menu in a Window** – This will pop out a separate window to show your menu in a cascade of folders and items. This allows you or your students to see all the content for express navigation.

2. **Refresh** – If you make a change to your items and don’t see it yet, clicking this will force the view to refresh.

3. **Keyboard Accessible Reordering** – This is an accessibility tool for mobility impairments, you can use this change the order of the items in your menu from a dialog box or if you don’t want to use the drag & drop handles.

4. The **Plus Icon** will allow you to add items to your course menu.

Your Course Title is the top text, the small triangle to the right will allow you to collapse (hide) the entire menu vertically.

Course Menu Notes

A. The Double Arrow to the left is the drag/drop handle to allow you to reorder items with the mouse.

B. The slashed box icon denotes a hidden item. Students will not see this item until to make it visible to them.

C. The dotted box icon denotes an empty item. Once you add content it will become visible to students.

D. This is this is the Drop Arrow that denotes operations possible. In the Content Menu, you can Rename, Hide/Show, or Delete the menu items.
Adding an Item to your Content Menu

1. Go to your course with Edit Mode turned On.
2. Hover over the Plus icon above the course title.
3. Click the type of item you are adding to your listing.
   Note: These are separated by type of menu item
   - Content Area
   - Module Page
   - Blank Page
   - Tool Link
   - Web Link
   - Course Link
   - Sub header
   - Divider

4. Type in the name and select the tool area, add the website link, or choose the design elements to add to the menu listing.
5. Make sure to check the box, “Available to Users”, if you want it to be visible to your students.
6. Click the ‘Submit’ button.

Notes:
*New menu items typically appear at the bottom of the list, so you will need to use the positioning handles to move them around.
*A divider is a solid line used to separate groups of like menu items.
Adding an Announcement

1. If needed, select Announcements from the Course Menu.
2. Click the ‘Create Announcement’ button at the top of the screen.
3. Enter the heading for the announcement in the Subject field.
4. Select a color for the announcement name (optional)
5. Use the text editor box to type the announcement message.
6. Use the Duration setting to make the announcement A) Permanent (‘Not Date Restricted’ – the default) or B) ‘Date Restricted’. If you choose Date Restricted use the Display Until and Display After checkboxes and date fields to choose the date and time restrictions. *Note: If you choose ‘Date Restricted’ at least one of the date settings must be used.
7. To send the announcement as an email to the students’ @email.vccs.edu address, clicking the box beside ‘Email Announcement’. *Note: This sends an email immediately whether or not the announcement is available yet.
8. You may provide a Course Link in the announcement (optional) – an example of this would be a link to a quiz in an announcement about that quiz being available.
9. Click the ‘Submit’ button.

- To lock an announcement to the top of the screen, click on the handle and drag it above the line that says, “New announcements appear below this line.”
- By default announcements show newest first.
Post your Syllabus (You may want to post your syllabus as both a MS Word document and a pdf)

1. Go to the ‘Syllabus’ content area in your Blackboard course. (or the content area where you post your syllabus and related information)

2. Click on the ‘Build Content’ button – Then choose either ‘Item’ or ‘File’. If you choose ‘Item’ you can include supporting text such as extra instructions or comments with your syllabus document. If you use ‘File’ you can attach a single file with no extra wording.

   If you use **Item:**

   3. Give the Item a name, such as Syllabus or Syllabus Fall 2017, etc...

   4. Type in your supporting text in the Text Editor

   5. Attachments – There are two methods for attaching a file:
      
      a. Use the ‘Browse My Computer’ button to locate your file. Select it and click the ‘Open’ button.
      
      b. Drag a file from your computer and drop it in the dotted area.

      Your file will be listed in the Attachments section. You can add more than one file if necessary.

   6. Set viewing options and Click the ‘Submit’ button.

   If you use **File:**

   3. Give the Item a name, such as Syllabus or Syllabus Fall 2017, etc...

   4. You can only use the ‘Browse My Computer’ button to locate your file. Select it and click the ‘Open’ button.
5. Set viewing options and Click the ‘Submit’ button.

Make your Course Available

All courses should be available by the first day the class meets. For distance learning classes that means by the first day of the semester.

1. Go to your course and locate the Control Panel in the lower-left.
2. Click on ‘Customization’ -> ‘Properties’
3. Under ‘Set Availability’ choose ‘Yes’ to make the course available.
4. Click the ‘Submit’ button.

To make your course Unavailable after grades have been turned in, follow the same procedure, choosing ‘No’.

NOTE: the Qwickly tool on the GCC tab allows you to make multiple courses (un)available at once.
View Students Enrolled in the course

Students are enrolled into your Blackboard course via an integration tool with SIS. When students register and enroll in your course in SIS, they will be added to your Blackboard course. When students drop your course or are withdrawn in SIS, they will be disabled in your Blackboard course (no longer able to access it and they will not show anywhere in it). **All enrollment changes take place within 4 – 24 hours.**

1. Go to your course Control Panel
2. Click on ‘Course Tools’ -> ‘Manage Users (New)’
3. You will see a list of all users in your course.
4. See Below: You may export a list of users to Excel or simply print one.
5. You may also change your view of the list to show users by various roles: Student, Teaching Assistant, etc.
6. Changes made here are logged—Look under ‘Options’

**Note: The SIS student roster in Faculty Center is considered the official roster. For discrepancies contact your BB administrator—keeping in mind the timing above.**

If you wish to add a supplemental Instructor or Teaching Assistant, you may do so from the Manage Users (New) tool yourself or you may contact your Blackboard Administrator.
Students, however, **MUST** be enrolled or removed **only** through SIS.

**Helpful Tips and Other Resources**

**View your Course as a Student – Student Preview Mode**

To enter **Student Preview Mode**, Click the icon in the Upper Right of your course, near the edit mode button.

You are shown in a Banner Image (A) that you are in Student Preview mode.

Note ‘Settings’ (B) and ‘Exit Preview’ (C) buttons.—Click the ‘Exit Preview’ button to return to Normal mode.

When you exit Student Preview Mode, you may be prompted to Save your Data or to Delete it.

**Other Resources:**

**Hoonuit** – A great tool for learning little bits of information at a time through instructional videos.

**Assignments** – Allows students to submit work in a variety of file formats to you. Using this feature student work is automatically entered into the Grade Center for you to grade, markup, and give feedback, eliminating the need for students to carry work into class or email it to you. The SafeAssign tool can also be added to check for plagiarism and allow a report to be viewed by both you and your student.

**Grade Center** – An online grading tool. You can use columns created by Blackboard (Assignments, Tests/Quizzes, Discussions, Wikis, Journals) or create your own columns. You can also calculate grades using total, average, and weighted grades.
Discussion Board – Help students communicate with each other, the instructor, and establish an online community. This tool can be used to continue discussions outside of class or even allow students to ask each other for help.