Creating an online course where users spend their time engaged in learning and interaction relies on establishing a course structure where content is easy to identify, navigation is intuitive, and tool placement fits in logically with the course design. Organizing all the elements of an online course so that students and instructors consistently have a positive experience requires up-front planning and ongoing adjustments throughout the run of the course.

ISSUES AND ANSWERS

Issue: Students are having a hard time finding tools and content in the course.

Answer: Navigate as a student would to “test” your folder structure in your course. Turn off tools that are not being used so students don’t run into any dead ends. Make Course Menu names relevant and meaningful to your audience. Keep folder names consistent and relevant.

LINKS

Syllabus Builder Flash Tutorial
http://www.blackboard.com/corp/objects/images/quicktutorials/syllabusbuilder.swf
ISSUES AND ANSWERS

Issue: How can color be used affectively in an online course?

Answer: Color can be used to create associations among content items. For example, one color can be selected for the heading of every content page in one unit and a different color selected for another unit, while a third color can be used for the headings of all assignments. Do be aware that 15 percent of people have some form of color-blindness and have trouble detecting the difference between red/green, green/black or blue/brown. Consider using a combination of color-coding and text descriptions for association.

Issue: Students report that they are not seeing the newest material posted in the course.

Answer: Remind students to click the “Refresh” link at the bottom of the menu so that the latest updates are displayed.

LINKS

Advanced Course Menu Flash Tutorial
http://www.blackboard.com/products/quicktutorials/CourseMenu.swf

Tool Linking Flash Tutorial
http://www.blackboard.com/products/quicktutorials/ToolLinking.swf

Teaching and Learning Tools Flash Tutorial
http://www.blackboard.com/corp/objects/images/quicktutorials/teachlearntools.swf

DESIGNING FOR STUDENTS

Course Design

As the course is built, design issues need to be considered so that the course is attractive to students and so that they always know where they are and can navigate easily. The Course Menu can be set to default to Quick View or Detailed View. The Quick View can be displayed as buttons or as text. The color of the background and the text for each menu style can also be selected. Keep in mind users with accessibility needs when designing the appearance of the course. For example, buttons are easier than small text to click on for people with mobility issues. Be sure to choose a color scheme for the Course Menu that has adequate contrast so the text is readable.

Another way to create an attractive personalized course setting and provide information to students is to upload a customized Course Banner to your course. A unique Course Banner used on the course entry page will instantly tell students which course they are in (they might have several Blackboard courses). Include the course name, the course section, and instructor’s name on the banner. Match the color scheme of the Course Menu to that of the Course Banner to create an inviting course environment.

ENABLING AND MANAGING TOOLS

Course Menu • Manage Tool Panel • Tool Area

Blackboard has a wealth of tools available for instructors and students that can be used for a variety of purposes in support of teaching and learning online. Tools can be made available to different types of users such as students, guests and observers. Individual tools can be turned on or off in Manage Tools on the Control Panel.

Tools that are made available in a course can be added to the Course Menu as individual items or as a group in a Tool Panel. There are three tools that can be added to the Course Menu: Course Map, Communication Tools and Course Tools. To add one or more, go to Control Panel > Course Design > Manage Tool Panel. The Tool Panel and the tools listed in it can be renamed so that they make sense to the users when viewed on the Course Menu or on the Course Map. Only the tools that have been turned on will appear to students when they view the Tools page or the Communication page.

To streamline the Course Menu and integrate Blackboard tools in the course content itself, remove tools from the Course Menu. Tools do not have to appear on the Course Menu to be available in the course, as long as they are turned on in Manage Tools. Embed the tools that have been turned on for the course within the content by creating a tool link. Add a link to a tool by selecting an appropriate place in the course content, such as the beginning or the end of a unit from the Course Menu. In Edit View, select Tool from the dropdown menu and click Go. From the list of tools, select a course tool or tool area (such as Communication Tools) or Observer Tools to add any tools that have been made available for Observers (anyone who is not a course member).

Tool linking creates a seamless experience for students because content and tools that are related to each other can be found in the same folder or Content Area. Adding a particular tool to a specific content page directly targets student action throughout the course. Participation and interaction can be integrated with other course materials providing a purposeful and stimulating learning environment.

For example, placing the Discussion Board tool on a page within a Learning Unit at a point where students have been asked to interact after reading and visiting links on previous pages will provide an opportunity to record their thoughts and ideas within the context of their exploration of the material.