



# Center for Teaching and Learning

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## Blackboard Communication Tools 2009

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# Communication Tools

## Blackboard 8

### Communication Tools

This handout provides instructions about how to utilize the communication and social networking tools available in Blackboard. Blackboard includes asynchronous communication tools such as email and the discussion board, and synchronous tools like the Blackboard collaboration tools and Wimba Classroom tool. The group and wiki tools support collaborative learning activities and make it easy for the students to work on group projects. The Blackboard communication and social networking tools enhance communication among students and make it easier for instructors and students to communicate online.

#### 1. Email

An email distribution list is automatically created within your Blackboard course container. To send an email within Blackboard, simply click on the **Email** link from the main course navigation menu. Emails can be sent to individual users or to groups of users within the course. Emails sent from within Blackboard are sent to the participant's DU email.

#### 2. Internal Messages

Blackboard also offers an internal course communication tool which functions as an internal email account within Blackboard. All messages are sent and received inside the Blackboard course and are not delivered to the recipients' external email address. To pick up or send messages, click on **Messages** from the **Communication** link on the main course menu.

### Discussion Board

The Discussion Board is an asynchronous communication tool that allows students and instructors to participate in online discussions without requiring all class participants to be online at the same time. Conversations are grouped in threads that contain a main posting and all related replies.

Instructors can use the discussion board in Blackboard to:

- Continue class discussions outside of class.
- Promote an online community.
- Develop team or individual student facilitated discussions.
- Post and discuss case studies.
- Post student papers for peer evaluation and critique.
- Post homework questions.
- Provide a public forum for students to post questions.
- Provide a forum for a guest Speaker Q & A.
- Create an online social forum for the course.

To add this type of communication to your Blackboard course, you have to first create a **Forum** (the question or idea that you want to base the discussion around).

**Discussion Board**

Forum Search

| Display Order | Forum          | Total Posts | Unread Posts | Total Participants |        |        |        |      |
|---------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|--------------------|--------|--------|--------|------|
| 1             | Practice Forum | 1           | 1            | 1                  | Modify | Manage | Remove | Copy |

Use this forum to practice using the discussion board.

OK

[Click here to return to the top of the document](#)

## Creating a Discussion Forum

1. Click the Discussion Board link from the main course menu. Instructors will see a button for adding forums at the top of the screen.
2. Click the Forum icon. Clicking on a forum will also bring up a new interface.
3. Enter the forum's name.
4. Enter a Description of the forum and choose the forum Settings (see below).
5. Click Submit.

## Forum Settings

Each forum you create may have different forum settings based on the purpose of the forum. Below are descriptions of each setting.

### 1. Allow Anonymous Posts

If you plan to grade participation in the forum, it's best to avoid this. However, this may be a good option in a particular forum where you want an honest answer from students.

### 2. Allow Author to Remove Own Posts

Previously, this was risky if the author had any replies - they all disappeared as well. "All Posts" here means that risk is still present. Choose "Posts with no replies" to avoid potential difficulties.

### 3. Allow Author to Modify Own Published Posts

Go ahead and check this one so that users can correct their own typos, etc.

### 4. Allow Post Tagging

Instructors can create and apply text labels of their own choosing to messages in a forum; other Discussion Board users can read, filter, and search messages using the tags, but cannot create new ones. Tags allow arbitrary message grouping independent of thread or thread status. **TIP:** For faster Discussion Board page loading, turn tagging off.

### 5. Allow Users to Reply with Quote

Allow users to include the text of the original message in any replies to that message.

### 6. Allow File Attachments

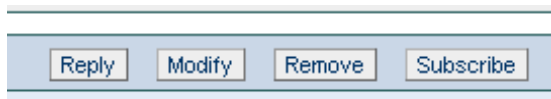
This setting is automatically checked.

### 7. Allow Members to Create New Threads

This setting is automatically checked, but you may want to carefully consider how you want to manage the discussion board before setting it up. For more control of the Discussion Board, instructors may want to create the first thread in each forum, and then have students respond to that thread. Always encourage students to write new subject lines.

### 8. Subscribe

This setting will allow users to click a button that tells Blackboard to notify them by email each time a new post is added to the thread. This is a good reason to initiate the thread in a forum, so that users only have to subscribe once for a given topic. The result of checking this box in the Forum Settings is a button that appears along with others in the Thread Detail, depending on what you have checked.



### 9. Allow Members to Rate Posts

Post rating allows users to rate posts in the forum on a scale of one to five stars as a form of peer review. Again, this is an attempt to match some of the features seen in cyberspace, but peer rating can be used to pedagogical advantage, perhaps as part of the grade you give.



### 10. Force Moderation of Posts

Moderation refers to the screening of posts before they are viewable by the rest of the users. Forums on the World Wide Web are often moderated to prevent cranky users from posting inappropriate messages (e.g., with foul language, etc.). Forum moderating probably isn't necessary, but this feature does have some pedagogical uses. For example, instructors may want to delegate responsibility for reviewing posts to a student Moderator, who could review submitted posts and decide whether to "publish" them. When moderation is checked in the Forum Settings, the tool titled **Moderate Forum** appears at the top of the Thread Detail.

### 11. Grade

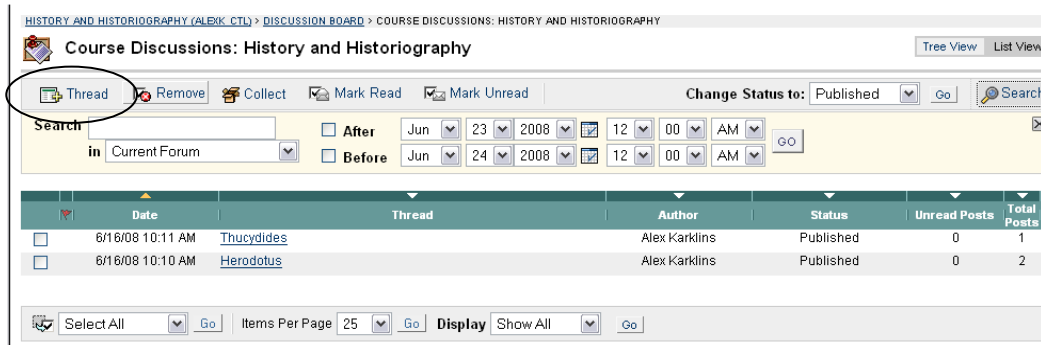
Instructors may choose to grade a forum or to enable thread grading within the forum. Notice the difference in how the two appear for the instructor on the main Discussion Board page; the forum where the forum is being graded includes a Grade Center icon and the Grade Center icon appears for each individual thread if you choose the Grade thread option. The screen shot is an example of a Graded Forum.

| Display Order | Forum   | Total Posts | Unread Posts | Total Participants | Grade   |
|---------------|---|-------------|--------------|--------------------|---|
| 1             | Grade Forum<br>This is an example of a graded <b>Forum</b> , notice the <b>Gradebook</b> icon within the forum. | 3           | 0            | 2                  |  |
| 2             | Rate Post Forum<br>This is an example of a forum where students can reate a post.                               | 5           | 2            | 2                  | -   |

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## Reading & Posting Messages to the Discussion Board

Once a discussion forum has been created, students can read and post threads in the forum. The screenshot below shows a forum that includes threads.



1. Click the **Thread** button to add a new thread to the forum.
2. To read a message, click on the subject name of the thread. This will open up a new screen that will allow you to reply to the previous message.
3. To reply to a message, click the **Reply** button within a thread to respond. (If you would like to see the original post when writing your message, click on the **Show Original Post** link. If the original post appears and you would like to hide it, click the **Hide the Original Post** link)
4. If you would like to add a file to your post, click **Attach File** link. You will now be able to search for the file you would like to add by clicking the **Browse** button.
5. To post a message anonymously, mark the **anonymous** box located at the bottom of the message.
6. Type in your message and click Submit.

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## Collaboration Tools

The collaboration tools in Blackboard provide a synchronous communication area that enable users to participate in online collaborations with instructor and students. The collaboration area includes **Virtual Classroom** and **Chat** tools. Click on the **Communication** link on the main course menu and then the **Collaboration** link to access the real-time communication tools.

### What is Chat?

- A tool that allows the instructor and students to participant in real time text-based discussions.
- Lightweight chat works similar to an instant messenger.
- Instructors can record and archive chat sessions for later viewing when using this tool.

### Chat Uses

- 24/7 Student Lounge
- Peer to peer mentoring
- Student-led topic discussion
- Virtual Office Hours
- Guest speaker/Subject Expert chat sessions

### What is the Virtual Classroom?

The Virtual Classroom consists of all the functionality included in the Lightweight Chat plus it includes a whiteboard and other features that may be used during online collaboration sessions.

### Virtual Classroom Uses

- Live classroom discussions
- User group breakout sessions
- View course content
- Office hour type questions/answer forums
- Guest Speaker discussions/presentations
- Exam review

**Tip:** Make sure to click the archive button if you want your collaboration session archived.

## Collaboration Sessions

Each course begins with two default Collaboration Sessions. The Lecture Hall is the default Virtual Classroom, and Office Hours is the default Lightweight Chat. Instructors can schedule new Collaboration Sessions and make changes to those already scheduled from this page.



### Collaboration Sessions

| Session Name | Tool              | Start Date | End Date |      |        |        |
|--------------|-------------------|------------|----------|------|--------|--------|
| Lecture Hall | Virtual Classroom |            |          | Join | Manage | Remove |
| Office Hours | Chat              |            |          | Join | Manage | Remove |

### Creating a Collaboration Session

1. Click on **Collaboration** from the Course Tools area within the course Control Panel.
2. Click **Add Collaboration Session**. The Add Collaboration Session page will open.
3. Name your Session, select the availability dates, and choose the Collaboration Tool (Lightweight Chat or Virtual Classroom).
4. Click **Submit**.
5. Users click the **Join** button next to the session to participate in the Lightweight chat or Virtual Classroom.

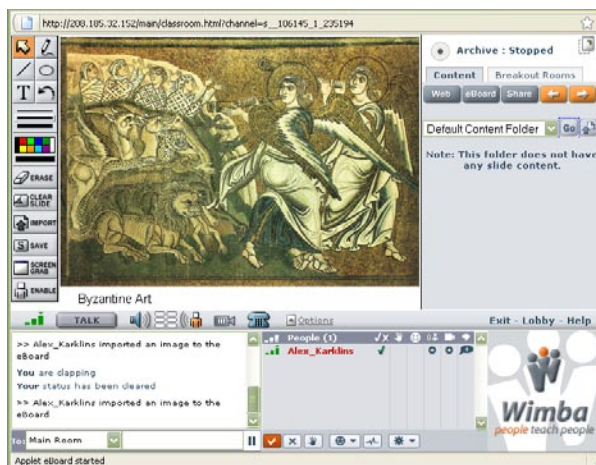
## Tips and Tricks when using the Collaboration Tool

- The Collaboration Tools are Java applications and may initially take a few moments to load into a browser window. Before developing assignments that require the Collaboration Tools, schedule a test session to confirm that everyone can access the tools. Students must have a Java enabled browser.
- Due to the synchronous nature of the Collaboration Tools, multiple users must participate at the same time. Be sure to notify students of a scheduled Collaboration session to ensure attendance. It is also helpful to give the students an agenda ahead of time.
- Sometimes a Collaboration session can be overwhelming if there are too many users. Consider grouping students into several small groups to keep the conversation manageable.

**Note:** The Java Plug-in for Windows is required for the Virtual Classroom and Chat to run. This plug-in can be downloaded from the page that appears when a user joins a Collaboration Session. You will need to restart your computer after installing the plug-in.

## Wimba Classroom

Wimba Classroom is a synchronous collaboration tool developed by Horizon Wimba. Wimba Classroom supports **multi-way audio (VOIP), text chat, application sharing, polling, video, and content display**. Wimba Classroom goes beyond what is available in the collaboration tools bundled with Blackboard. Wimba Classroom can be used for virtual guest speakers, online office hours, exam reviews, and distance learning. E-mail [blackboard@du.edu](mailto:blackboard@du.edu) to request access to Wimba Classroom and to schedule training or to obtain a Presenter Guide. An example of the Wimba Classroom interface can be seen below:



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## Group Pages

Creating groups for your course can give an added dimension to student interaction and course discussions, as well as give students tools to collaborate online on cooperative learning projects. Blackboard groups have their own self-contained e-mail, discussion groups, collaboration and file exchange area.

## Creating Groups in Blackboard using Advanced Group Management tool

### Create a Group

1. Select the **Advanced Group Management** link within the **Course Tools** section of your course Control Panel.
2. Click the **Add Group** button.
3. Enter a group name, description, and enable the group options.
4. Click Submit and OK.

### Add Members to a Group

1. Select the checkbox next to the group you want to add members to and then click on the View/Assign Users button.
2. Click the **Modify** button and select which users from the class you wish to add to that group. Click the **Randomize** button to assign your group members randomly based the number of students to be assigned to each group.
3. Click **Submit**.

### Creating Groups in Blackboard using the Manage Groups option

#### Create a Group

1. Select the **Manage Groups** option within the User Management section of your Control Panel.
2. Click the **Add Group** button.
3. On the **Add Group** page select a group name, description, and various options.
4. Click Submit and OK.



#### Manage Groups

Add Group

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Group 1</b>  | <span style="border: 1px solid #ccc; border-radius: 10px; padding: 2px 5px;">Modify</span> <span style="border: 1px solid #ccc; border-radius: 10px; padding: 2px 5px;">Remove</span> |
| <div style="display: flex; gap: 5px;"> <span> Group File Exchange</span> <span> Group Discussion Board</span> <span> Group Virtual Classroom</span> <span><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Group Email</span> </div> |   |
| <b>Group 2</b>  | <span style="border: 1px solid #ccc; border-radius: 10px; padding: 2px 5px;">Modify</span> <span style="border: 1px solid #ccc; border-radius: 10px; padding: 2px 5px;">Remove</span> |
| <div style="display: flex; gap: 5px;"> <span> Group File Exchange</span> <span> Group Discussion Board</span> <span> Group Virtual Classroom</span> <span><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Group Email</span> </div> |   |

OK

Once a Group has been created, students must be added to the group.

#### Steps to Add Members to a Group

1. Click the **Modify** button next to the group name.
2. Select **Add Users** to the Group option.
3. Click on the **Search** button to display a list of all students in the course.
4. Click the box under Add next to the names of the students you wish to add to that particular group.
5. Click Submit.

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## Wiki Tool

### What's a Wiki?

A Wiki is a collaborative website that can be edited by anyone who has access to it. Two significant Wiki features are that users can add text and multimedia directly onto their site without knowing a programming language or using web design software, and anyone with access can add, change, or delete information on the Wiki. Each course has one Central Course Wiki and an unlimited number of Group Wikis.

### Course Wiki

The Course Wiki Site is associated with a course and is accessed through the Course Tools link on the main course menu. Each Blackboard course container has a group website that all students have access to. With appropriate permissions users will be able to view and possibly edit the contents of the course site. A Wiki

Course Site is commonly used to create a knowledge base or set of shared resources to supplement the course documents. If editing is enabled, students will be able to contribute content and share knowledge with the rest of the class. Instructors are also using the Course Wiki Sites to create **online sign-up sheets**. For example, instructors use this tool to create a sign-up sheet which allows students to use the course Wiki to sign-up for dates and times for presentations.

### Configuring a Course Wiki site

1. Access the Course Wiki through the Control Panel.
2. Click on the **Configure Wiki Tool** link in the **Course Tools** section of the Control Panel.
3. This tool will allow you to determine whether **students can edit the Wiki**, a student can **purge Wiki pages**, or **comment on the site**.
4. Select the **Edit Dates** for the course Wiki site. Specify a start and/or stop date for the period of time when students can edit the course Wiki Site. **Note:** By default there are no date restrictions placed on editing if it is enabled.
5. Select the **View Dates** for the course Wiki site. Set the start and/or stop dates for student access to the course Wiki Site.
6. You can also select how **Public References to Students** will be displayed (Username, Person Name or Both Names).

### Group Wikis

Group Wikis allow instructors the ability to incorporate educational Wikis into their courses to facilitate group work. Instructors can assign students the task of creating a Wiki within Blackboard and the instructor can assess each student's individual contributions to the sites. Each student can add content, edit others' contributions, and reformat layout as he desires, but a full history of the revisions is maintained and accessible. Determining what and how much to add or revise is part of the group process. The Group Wiki Sites appear alongside other course documents.

### Creating Group Wiki Sites

A Group Wiki Site is created by adding a special kind of Content Type with a course Content Area such as Assignments or Course Documents.

1. Access the **Course Control Panel**.
2. Choose the **Content Area** (i.e. Course Documents, Assignments, Websites, etc.) where you wish to create the Group Wiki Site.
3. Select **Wiki** item from the drop down list in the right corner of the Tool Bar and click **Go**.

### Configuring Group Wiki Site

Once you have accessed the **Create Wiki Group Site** page you will need to complete the information required to configure it for use.

1. Choose a name for your Wiki Site and briefly describe or give instructions on the topic or assignment that is to be presented as a Wiki Site.
2. You will need to select **Group Members** for this Wiki. Group Members can be added as groups already established within the course or as individual course members. After selecting the Group or individuals to add to the Wiki, click on the arrow between the two screens and then check to make sure they appear in the Column on right side of the screen.
3. You can also remove an individual or a group by clicking on the group or individual, and then clicking the x that appears between the two screens.
4. Instructors are able to control three different forms of access: Visibility, Edit Dates, and View Dates.
5. A Gradebook item can be created to correspond with this Wiki site. Enter the required information to add this item to your course Grade Center.
6. Click the Submit button to finish creating the group Wiki site.

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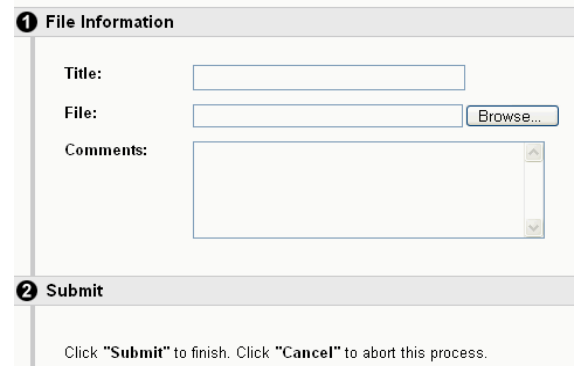
## Digital Dropbox

The Digital Drop Box is a tool that the instructor and students can use to exchange files. The Digital Drop Box works by uploading a file from a disk or a computer to a depository. Files can be sent back and forth from the Instructor's Drop Box to the Drop Box of other users in the course.

### Submitting Files with the Digital Drop (students)

1. Click on the **Course Tools** link from the main menu on the Blackboard course home page
2. Click on Digital Dropbox link
3. Click the **Send File** button
4. In the File Information area, add a title (see below)
5. Click on the **Browse** button and locate the file
6. Add comments (optional)
7. Click **Submit**

**Important:** Make sure to tell your students click on the **Send** button and not the **Add** button to submit the file to you. Adding a file simply means that the student can save their file(s) to the server, and files will only be visible to the student. To avoid confusion, you may want to use the Send Homework option instead of the Digital Dropbox option.



The screenshot shows a two-step form for submitting a file. Step 1, titled "File Information", contains three fields: "Title:" with a text input box, "File:" with a text input box and a "Browse..." button to its right, and "Comments:" with a larger text area. Step 2, titled "Submit", contains a single line of text: "Click 'Submit' to finish. Click 'Cancel' to abort this process."

### Retrieving Files from the Digital Dropbox (Instructor)

1. Go to the course Control Panel
2. Click on **Digital Dropbox Manager**
3. Select files to review.
4. Download the files to a folder on your computer.
5. Instructors may use the digital dropbox manager to send reviewed files back to the student.

### Send Homework

The Send Homework option provides an alternative for students to submit files to the instructor's Digital Dropbox. The Send Homework option was developed to avoid confusion associated with the current Add and Send File options available in the existing Digital Dropbox. The Send Homework tool will only Send/Submit a file to the instructor's Digital Dropbox. The Send Homework tool is located under Course Tools on the main Blackboard course menu.

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## Blackboard Help and Resources

### Instructor Support Options:

- [DU Bb Instructor Support](#)  
This web page provides important information about teaching with Blackboard at DU
- [Tutorials & Handouts](#)  
This page includes tutorials on many important Blackboard topics including How to Create a Faculty Homepage, Assignment Manager, Grade Center, and more. You will also find PDF handouts
- [Knowledge Base](#)  
Have a Blackboard question? Use the Knowledge Base to find the solution
- E-mail: [blackboard@du.edu](mailto:blackboard@du.edu)
- Click on the **Manual** button in your course Control Panel
- Call the Center for Teaching & Learning at 303.871.2084 with questions about Blackboard or to schedule one-on-one Blackboard training.

### Student Support Options:

- Blackboard Support website - <http://ctl.du.edu/support/blackboard/Students>
- E-mail: [support@du.edu](mailto:support@du.edu)
- Click on the Blackboard **Manual** under Tools on the main course menu
- Call the Helpdesk at 303.871.4700.

### Educational Technology Resources:

#### DU Portfolio Community (<http://portfolio.du.edu>)

All DU students, instructors and staff may use DU Portfolio Community to create electronic portfolios. Contact the Center for Teaching & Learning at x12084 or email [portfolio@du.edu](mailto:portfolio@du.edu) to schedule an orientation or download a user guide from the Resources portfolio.

#### DU CourseMedia™ (<http://coursemedia.du.edu>)

DU CourseMedia™ is a course media management system that helps instructors organize and present media materials (images, video and audio). Instructors can create media galleries that can be accessed by their students online. Instructors have access to large collection of art and world history images, library reserve videos and audio works. Contact the Center for Teaching & Learning at x12084 or email [coursemedia@du.edu](mailto:coursemedia@du.edu) to request an orientation to DU CourseMedia™.

#### Microsoft Office Applications

Visit the UTS training web site (<http://www.du.edu/uts/training/>)

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