

Communicating Within Blackboard Learn

Interacting with your students is an important part of their learning experience. Blackboard provides several tools that allow you to communicate with your students in a variety of ways, so you can tailor your approach based on the purpose and content of your message.

Blackboard Help article: <https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Instructor/Interact>

Course Announcements

Announcements within your course allow you to post updates and potentially time sensitive information to your students. Some common purposes include posting exam schedules, due date reminders, changes to your syllabus, or corrections of materials.

The Announcements tool allows you to set display dates for future events and has the option to send the announcement as an email to your students to increase the visibility of your message.

Whenever a student logs in for the first time after a new announcement is posted, it will appear when they enter the course before the course content page. After the student dismisses the announcement and navigates to a different part of the course, it won't appear subsequent times they access the course.

After initial dismissal, active announcements are accessible for students through the link in the course menu, as well as in their Activity Stream.

As the instructor, you are able to add, edit, and delete announcements from the Announcements tool. Navigate to your course, and locate the tool link under the Communication header in the course menu on the left side of the page.

To edit or delete an existing announcement, click on the chevron and select the appropriate action.

To create a new announcement, click the Create Announcement button. Enter a title for your announcement in the Subject field.

The Message field has a rich text editor. Anytime you see this toolbar, look for the double arrows button. If the arrows are facing down, you can click on them to expand the editor menu to get more options for editing the text.

You can set display date restrictions to schedule when an announcement will start and when it will end. If you would like an email version of the announcement to be sent out when it becomes available, check the box next to Email Announcement.

The option to add a course link embeds a link at the end of the announcement message, enabling you to accurately direct students to the item or location you are referencing in your announcement.

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Blackboard Help article: <https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Instructor/Interact/Announcements>

Course Tools

There are two different tools within Blackboard courses that allow you to send messages directly to your students. Your campus may have enabled one or both of these tools, so if you only see one, it is likely not a technical issue but a purposeful choice made by your campus.

Send Email

Send Email is a built in tool that can be used to communicate through email with specific users in your class. The contacts list is particular to each individual course and cannot cross multiple course shells.

This tool's functionality is similar to an email client, but has the added benefit of automatic contact grouping. You have the option to send an email to all users in your course, specific groups, user roles, or individual users. An additional benefit is that you do not need to switch to your external email client, nor do you need to copy out or save student contact information.

When you send an email through this tool, it is important to note that it is not an actual email client. Your sent messages will not be stored by this tool, and any replies to your messages will go to your external email client inbox.

To send an email, navigate into your course. In the course menu, under Communication, you will see the "Email" option. This links to the tool. If we click on All Users, you'll see that the recipients list is already filled out. Note the From field is autofilled with your email address. This is important to note because it is the Reply To email address. As I mentioned, replies will go to that email address, not your Blackboard account.

Let's take a look at sending an email out to a single or multiple select users. On this page, a box appears listing available users in the course in the "Available to Select" box. Select a user, then click the right facing arrow to move them over to the "Selected" box. Only users in this box will receive this message. To undo, select the user and then click the left facing arrow to put them back in the left hand box.

The Message field of your email message has a rich text editor. This is the same editor we saw in the Announcements tool, and you will see it in the discussion board as well.

A copy of the email you are sending out will be sent to the email address linked to your Blackboard account, so that you have a record of what was sent. You also have the option to attach files in your email.

Blackboard Help article: <https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Instructor/Interact/Email>

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Course Messages

Course Messages, similar to the Send Email tool, is a built-in feature in your course that allows you to send individual or group messages directly to students in your course. Unlike the Send Email tool, the messages remain within your course; an Inbox and Sent folder are accessible, and students reply directly within the course itself, rather than a third party tool.

To access this tool, navigate into your course and click on Course Tools > Course Messages. You can also add this link to the course menu if you would like it to remain static for you alone or you and students.

The functionality operates similar to the Send Email tool, where you select the recipients from your course list and compose your message. There is also a rich text toolbar, and you can attach files.

Please note that all Course Messages live within the course itself.

Blackboard Help article:

https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Instructor/Interact/Messages/Send_Messages

Notifications

Blackboard displays notifications directly on the website, but can also push out notifications via email or to the phone app. Updating your notification settings allows you to control what you see and what you receive as an email notification. Every campus has customized their Blackboard environment, so the extent to which you are able to customize your notification settings will vary depending on what your campus has chosen. This is set globally by your campus administrator.

If you are able to edit your settings, you can access it by clicking on your name in the upper right corner of the page. This drops down the Global Navigation menu. Click on Settings, and then Edit Notification Settings. You can edit your settings globally, or by individual courses.

Please note that students are also able to customize their notification preferences as well, if enabled by your campus. It's important to note that you cannot override their preferences. This is where Send Email, course messages, and Announcements come in handy; it allows you to ensure that your message is being sent directly to the student.

Blackboard Help article:

https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Instructor/Courses/Set_Up_Notifications/Notifications_Settings