

Understanding the
Change from
Blackboard Academic
Suite 7.3 to
Blackboard Learn 9.0

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Introduction.....	1
Product Naming and Terminology.....	1
Removed Features.....	1
System Wide Improvements	2
Gained.....	2
Adaptive Release	3
Gained.....	3
Announcements.....	3
Gained.....	3
Lost	3
Assignments.....	4
Gained.....	4
Lost	4
Blogs, Journals and Wikis.....	5
Changed	5
Lost	5
Course Navigation and Content Management.....	5
Gained.....	5
Discussions.....	6
Gained.....	6
External Links.....	6
Gained.....	7
Glossary	7
Gained.....	7
Gradebook is now Grade Center.....	8
Gained.....	9
Grade Center – My Grades.....	9
Gained.....	9
Groups.....	9
Gained.....	9
Learning Modules.....	10
Gained.....	10
My Places	10
Gained.....	10
Tasks.....	11
Tests, Surveys and Questions.....	11
Gained.....	11
What’s New.....	11
Gained.....	11
Tracking Reports	11
Text Editor.....	11
Gained.....	11

Introduction

This document is designed to give the users a comprehensive look at the features and functions of Blackboard Learn and how they compare to the Blackboard Academic Suite.

The document includes a review of new features, a list of features from Academic Suite that do not appear in Blackboard Learn, and notes on the changes to features that appear in both. The main focus is to provide a complete comparison of functions from Academic Suite to Blackboard Learn. The features explained in this document cover those that are available but have significant changes and those that have been modified but are still similar to the previous release of Blackboard.

This document is a work in progress as it is currently being used for internal purposes.

Product Naming and Terminology

Blackboard Learn is the new name of the Blackboard Academic Suite.

Removed Features

The following features are no longer provided in Blackboard Learn:

- **Electric Blackboard:** Students can use Journals to complete these same tasks – it is also much more full featured than the Electric Blackboard tool
- **Digital Dropbox:** More robust Assignments tool and the Group File Exchange meets the needs of individual users and groups for completing and managing course work.
- **Student Homepages:** The new Blogs tool enables students to express their thoughts and reflect on learning within a course. The My Places tool allows Student to post their avatar system-wide (instead of limited to the course environment) and includes additional functionality, a customizable set of links to frequently accessed information, as well as tools to personalize a user's own experience.

System Wide Improvements

All users will enjoy a number of changes in Blackboard which impact the entire system.

Gained

Accessibility Improvements

Improvements to accessibility ensure that all users, including those with assistive technologies, find the product easy to use. These changes are, for the most part, under-the-covers and utilize a combination of CSS (Cascading Style Sheets) and semantic markup, such as well formed HTML. There are also a few features that appear to users, such as keyboard re-ordering and accepted personal styles

Embedded Help

Embedded help throughout Blackboard helps users access the features of Blackboard easily. The personal setting to hide or show help until the user chooses to call upon it again helps users from both perspectives: it removes text from the application that may be distracting, or it adds text to the application that helps them without forcing them to leave what they are doing. Institutions also have the option to customize this help text to meet their specific needs.

New User Interface Design

Users will enjoy not only a new look, but advanced user interface functionality such as drag and drop, inline edit capabilities and consolidated page layouts.

Fewer Clicks Everywhere

Users will enjoy using fewer clicks to navigate the system and complete tasks. Most actions within the system displayed a confirmation page when an action was performed. In the newest release, confirmations are displayed within the page (inline receipts) where the action is performed for more seamless workflows.

Adaptive Release

The function of Adaptive Release for course content is the same as the previous release with a few minor enhancements and an improved user experience.

Gained

Content Notifications

Students are notified when content is made available via Adaptive Release.

Fewer Clicks to Create and Manage Adaptive Release Rules

Managing adaptive release rules is immediately visible in the contextual menu.

Announcements

The features in the Announcements tool are very similar to those in previous releases of Blackboard Learn. While the announcements filter has been removed, faculty and administrators will enjoy a number of new flexible options for displaying announcements.

Gained

Multiple Display Options

Announcements can be displayed on both a Course Announcements page, a portal Announcements module and in a course specific Announcements module giving the instructors added flexibility over how the information is presented.

Priority Ordering

Instructors have the ability to re-order the display of announcements so the most important information will appear first.

Options to only Display Course Announcements

Instructors may select to only display course announcements in their course, and not display system announcements. This enables Instructors to reserve course announcements for pertinent information and reduces the noise level of announcements within the course.

Advanced Filtering Options

Advanced filtering options to display All, Course only, and System only announcements enable users to easily find important announcements and recover critical details.

Notifications

Notifications of new Course Announcements will appear on users' dashboards and may be sent via email according to the users personal preferences.

Lost

- Announcement Filter

Users are no longer able to view just the announcements posted from the current day. The increased flexibility provided with new reordering capabilities will ensure that students are getting the most important information and are not missing announcements due to date filters.

- Announcement text in email

Email notifications for announcements include a link to the announcement, but do not include the full body of the announcement text.

Assignments

Users will enjoy a number of new enhancements to the Assignments feature, such as the ability for students to submit multiple attempts of an assignment when the Instructor would like to see iterative progress. Instructors can also allow students to turn in additional attempts of an assignment for exceptional cases or submissions. Additionally, faculty have more flexibility when it comes to submitting grades for their students.

Gained

Multiple Attempts

Instructors can allow students Multiple Attempts at the same assignment. The instructor can grade each attempt individually. This promotes the learning process and allows instructors to track progress.

Additional Attempts

Instructors have the ability to give specific students an additional attempt at an assignment in order to accommodate extenuating circumstances.

Submission Field

Students have access to a submission field in addition to attachments to provide text and links to online documents and websites.

Submission History

The Submission History provides a quick recap of the submission content, feedback, comments, grades and participants of each submission. This allows students to see what they have completed and allows instructors to view the progress made throughout the lifecycle of the assignment.

Release Assignments to Groups

The Assignments feature has been expanded to Groups so that a set of students can work together on one deliverable.

Group Grades

If a Group completes an Assignment, the instructor can grade one student's submission and submit the same grade to all students within the Group. The instructor also has the ability to provide each student an individual grade overriding the group grade.

Lost

- Digital Drop Box

The functions of the new Assignment tool made the Digital Drop Box obsolete. The workflows in the new Assignment tool enable users to accomplish the same tasks as the Digital Drop Box.

Blogs, Journals and Wikis

Blogs are an effective means of sharing knowledge and materials created and collected by the group with the rest of the course. Multiple blog types, including course, group and individual blogs are available. Instructors can assign a journal to each user in a course or course group that is accessible by only the user and the instructor. Journal entries can also be made available to the rest of the users in a course.

Changed

Blogs and Journals are newly designed in the latest release and are now part of the base product. Wikis are currently not a part of this release but will be coming in a later version.

If you have been using the Learning Objects Teams LX or Journals LX in your courses (the wiki and blog tools respectively) they will no longer be available.

Lost

- Teams LX (wikis)

At this time, this feature is being considered for a later release.

Course Navigation and Content Management

All users will enjoy a number of new enhancements and a new user experience in Course Navigation and Content Management.

Gained

Easily Accessible Control Panel

All options in the Control Panel are now available from the main course menu. Instructors no longer have to navigate to a separate area of the course to access these options.

In-line Add, Edit, and Drag and Drop

Inline actions and drag and drop results in quicker Course Menu set up and management; instructors no longer have to navigate to multiple areas of the course to access these controls and they can complete each action with fewer clicks.

Display of Tool Links is not dependent on Tool Availability

Tool availability is no longer linked to the display of tool links in course content areas, on tools page or in the course menu. Available tools can be displayed in a content area, on the tools page, in the course menu or in any combination of the three options. The display of the link to Instructors (in the Edit – ON view) is independent of the availability of the tool.

Presentation Options

Items in specific content areas can be displayed in “Icon View”, “Icon with Text” or “Text Only” for increased flexibility in course creation. This increased flexibility for content presentation allows Instructors to build course content areas that suit their unique pedagogical needs.

Course Module Pages

Course module pages provide the instructor with another way to present course related information to students. When building or updating a course Instructors should keep in mind

this new page type, the kind of material that can be added to it and the personalization options available for students if they enable it.

Reorganization of Course Management Actions

Course Management features, such as the Control Panel and action bars, have been reorganized to align with the day-to-day tasks performed by instructors, increasing efficiency and becoming more task-appropriate.

Edit Mode for Additional Tools

Edit Mode now provides the instructor with access to management capabilities for additional tools such as the discussion board, calendar and announcements rather than requiring them to go to the control panel.

Hidden Content Areas

Empty content areas will be hidden from the student view of a course, which allows the instructor to build out the course content while only displaying areas that contain information pertinent to students. Students will not waste time clicking on empty folders to see if it contains content.

Dividers and Sub-Headers

Instructors now have additional organizational elements in the course menu that enable easy restructuring of the menu in a way that matches the presentation of the course material.

Notifications

Personal notifications provide direct navigation to specific content from within the course, Community Engagement, and/or users' email.

Tools Panel

There is no longer a separate Tools panel in the Course Menu. "Course Tools" and "Communication Tools" have been combined into a single Tools area that appears within the default Course Menu. This enables faculty to have more flexibility over tool management and presentation of tools in the course menu than previously available.

Tool Management

Tool management for content tools, communication tools, and building block tools has been combined into a single interface. This will improve Instructor efficiency because all the tools can be managed from a single, easy to use area.

Discussions

The function of Discussions is the same as the previous release of the product; all users will enjoy an improved user experience.

Gained

Notifications

Users may receive notifications of new Discussion Board posting activity. In-system notifications, such as in the What's New module, include links directly to the forum.

External Links

The function of External Links is the same as the previous release of the product; all users will enjoy an improved user experience.

Gained

Adding External Links to the Course Menu

Instructors can manage External Links that appear in the course menu using inline options; they no longer have to navigate to a separate area.

Glossary

The function of the Glossary is the same as the previous release of the product; all users will enjoy an improved user experience.

Gained

Easier Glossary Entry

An improved workflow enables Instructors to add entries to the Glossary with more ease and fewer mouse clicks.

Gradebook is now Grade Center

Almost entirely redesigned, and newly named, the Grade Center exhibits new capabilities and vast improvements over the previous Gradebook. Some of the new features or improvements include the following:

- A redesigned tool bar through which multiple functions are possible
- The ability to create and print Reports to hand out to Students
- Inline editing from the main Grade Center screen: the ability to enter grades directly through the Grade Center spreadsheet
- New grade calculations, Average grade and Minimum/Maximum grade, and improvements to the creation of Weighted grades and Total points grade
- Smart Views -- the ability to categorize Students into groupings based on selected criteria. These views can be displayed in the Grade Center.
- A multitude of ways to customize the display of the Grade Center
- The ability to create Grading Schema: multiple grading scales that match Assessment grades to chosen grade displays, such as text or percent grades

Grade Center main page

The Action Bar on the Grade Center main page contains multiple functions within several grouped sub menus, including the following:

- Adding columns
- Managing Grading Periods
- Smart Views
- Emailing Students
- Creating Reports
- Viewing Grade History

Within the Grade Center spreadsheet, it is possible to enter results, such as scores, percentages, or other forms of grading, into the spreadsheet itself. In the various Columns, cells, and rows, the Instructor can quickly perform multiple functions that formerly required multiple clicks and subsequent navigation to other pages.

Reports

Through the Grade Center, an Instructor may create a Report that displays various grade and Student information. A Report could be used, for example, as a mid-term progress report. The Instructor can control what grades are displayed in the Report as well as what student information appears. A signature line and any comments can be added. Reports can then be printed from the screen and distributed.

Grade Calculations

In the Grade Center, an Instructor can calculate grades by combining multiple Columns to attain performance results, such as class averages, final grades that are based on a weighted scale, or total points, and so on. These include **Weighted** grade, **Total** points grade, **Average** grade, and **Minimum/Maximum** grade. Each of these functions allows the Instructor to choose the Columns included, such as all Columns from a Grading Period, all Columns, or selected Columns.

Smart Views

Instructors have the ability to customize the Grade Center to display a subset of Students based on selected criteria. Called **Smart Views** these customized displays can be saved and used again. Students can be sorted based on Course, Group, performance measurements, or other criteria. Once built and saved, Smart Views become a selectable list item on the **Current View** drop-down menu of the Grade Center page, enabling easy navigation from one view to another.

Gained

Grade Center Row Display

The Grade Center structures itself automatically to the available browser space but the user can define a minimum number of rows to display regardless of browser size or screen resolution.

Action Bar Menu Items

Action Bar options have been organized to fall in line with the task oriented categorization of action bars across the system. Instructors should be informed of the changes to the action bar menu and the increases in efficiency gained by task oriented organization and naming standards.

Grade Center – My Grades

The function of the My Grades feature is the same as the previous release of the product; users should be made aware of the new notifications feature.

Gained

Notifications of New Grades

Students will receive notifications of new or changed grades posted by the Instructor.

Groups

Users will enjoy a new Groups tool which includes robust, flexible features and an improved user interface.

Gained

Group Creation Options

There are more ways to create groups with Blackboard Learn. Students can sign up for groups they would like to join. Alternatively, Instructors can create sets of related groups and manually enroll users or randomly distribute all students amongst the groups.

Student Created Groups

Students have the ability to create their own groups that other students can sign up for without any involvement by the instructor.

Bulk Management of Groups

Instructors can manage groups and their properties in bulk upon group creation.

Quick Access to Group Areas

Students will have access to their group area from the Groups palette in the Course Menu and the Notifications module.

Group Module Page

The group area is a module page that provides access to new and existing group modules. The page also allows group members to add any additional modules that will help with group work.

Customizable Group Area

Groups can customize their group area to create their own space with its own look and feel.

Group Assignments

Instructors can create Assignments to be completed by an entire group and then give one grade for the group while still allowing individual grades to be overwritten. (See the Assignment feature for additional details).

Group Blogs and Journals

Groups can have their own Blog for the rest of the course to view and comment on, or a Journal for private communication within the group.

Group Tasks

Groups can create tasks to track progress of the group deliverables.

What's New Group Modules

Groups will have access to modules that provide group specific data about new material and due dates.

Learning Modules

The function of Learning Modules is the same as the previous release of the product.

Gained

Drag and Drop Reordering

Instructors can easily re-order content items and folders in a Learning Module using the drag and drop feature.

My Places

My Places is a new feature in Blackboard Learn that will provide users with quick access to frequently visited links and personal settings management. All users should be educated about the following new features.

Gained

One Click Access to Common Links and Preferences

Users can navigate to commonly accessed places within the system, such as courses they teach or participate in, without having to return to a common starting point.

Customizable List of Commonly Accessed Links

Users can define which links are displayed in My Places. These may include: Courses, Organizations and Bookmarks. The types of links available depend on the institution's Blackboard licenses.

Quick Access to Personal Settings

Users can access personal settings such as email and privacy settings in one click, no matter where they are in the system.

Personal Avatar Image

Users can upload or select an approved personal image to display within My Places, Blogs and Journals. If avatars are enabled by the System Administrator, the additional function will include policies for image selection and upload.

Tasks

The Tasks feature is the same as in previous releases of the product.

Tests, Surveys and Questions

The function of the Tests, Surveys and Questions feature is the same as the previous release of the product; all users will enjoy an improved user experience.

Gained

Question Reordering

Instructors can re-order questions in a test or survey using the new drag and drop feature.

Fewer Clicks in All Workflows

Instructors will enjoy more efficient workflows with fewer clicks for creating, managing, and deploying tests and surveys.

What's New

The What's New module in Blackboard Learn has a has been enhanced to provide users with easier access to notifications and new content.

Gained

Course and Organization Info

In previous releases the module displayed new content that had been added to courses in which the user was enrolled. In Blackboard Learn, the What's New Module shows new Course and Organization content, providing links directly to the item; performance has also been enhanced for this feature.

Tracking Reports

The usability of the Tracking Reports feature has been greatly improved in Blackboard Learn. Please note that this feature was formerly referred to as Course Statistics.

Text Editor

The user experience has improved and the Text Editor includes several enhancements.

Gained

Accessibility improvements

Users requiring assistive technology can easily and quickly access the text area of the Text Editor.

Availability

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The Text Editor is now available in more areas of courses.

HTML Markup Validation

Users can quickly run a check against the HTML markup included in the VTBE to ensure accuracy.