Intro to Participating in "Live" Bb Course Sessions: The Virtual Classroom and the Lightweight Chat

Blackboard 6 features 2 collaboration tools that allow students and instructors to hold real-time classroom sessions online. Both are accessed from your Blackboard course under the **Communication** tab in the **Collaboration** section.

The first tool is the **Virtual Classroom**; it includes a white board application (basically, you sketch something, your classmates see it) and a "group browser" (you can share a website as a starting point for a class discussion) in addition to a text messaging board. You can also access a map of your course's Blackboard website in this mode.

The Virtual Classroom requires a fast network connection for optimum use (users on slow dialup connections may have difficulties). The second tool, the **Lightweight Chat,** is an alternative for collaboration when network speed is an issue or no frills are required. It provides a simple text-based chat tool.

System Requirements for these Tools:

Acceptable operating systems: Windows 98, 2000, NT, ME, XP; MacOS 8.x, MacOS 9.x, Mac OSX. *NOTE:* For best performance when using these collaboration tools Macintosh computer users should upgrade to Mac OSX v10.2.

Connection Speed: A 56K modem connection or greater (e.g. cable modem, DSL, or T1 network access) is best.

Browser/Settings: You will want to use a recent version Internet Explorer or Netscape (download from http://www.microsoft.com or http://home.netscape.com). *Please note that the AOL browser and other customized browsers accompanying internet service providers are not compatible with Blackboard.* Also, Netscape or IE must be configured so the following are enabled:

- java
- javascript
- cookies

These features are enabled by default for recent browser versions, but check your browser's preferences if you have difficulties.

Windows Special Needs: The **Java 2 Run Time Environment** (version 1.4.1 or higher) is required in order to use the Collaboration Tools. This plug-in may be downloaded from the page that appears when you join a Collaboration Session (or from http://downloads-zdnet.com.com/3000-2417-10105088.html) but it is also included on the CD distributed with your course materials. Please note that if

you are upgrading to a later release of the JRE you should first *uninstall* any previous version.

Uninstall Instructions:
JRE 1.4.x plugin is now supported by the Blackboard Learning System. All Windows end users should move to this version of the plugin. It is important that users do not install JRE 1.4.1 on top of JRE 1.3.1. Please follow the instructions below for a successful installation:

Step 1 Close all applications.
Step 2 Uninstall the current Java Plugin. Open the Control Panel > go to Add/Remove Programs > remove Java 2 Runtime Environment
Step 3 Open the Blackboard Learning System and launch the Collaboration Tool. If the system is running Internet Explorer, the new JRE 1.4.1 plugin will automatically install. If the system is running Netscape, the user will need to manually download the executable from the plugin download page (select the link from the Collaboration Tool launch page) and open the file to launch the installation.

Mac Special Needs: Mac OS 8 & 9 users using Netscape may need to download and install **Java MRJ 2.2.5** (**http://www.apple.com/java**) and the Netscape **Mozilla MRJ plug-in** (**http://www.mozilla.org/oji/MRJPlugin.html**). Mac OS 8/9 users should use the **Accessible Version** of the Collaboration Tools (a link appears on the launch page, which opens when "Join" is selected on from Collaboration Sessions). This link will open the Accessible version of the Virtual Classroom, which resembles the Lightweight Chat. (Links to items that appear in the Virtual Classroom, such as items in the Course Map and Group Browser, will appear in this version. Documents created on the Whiteboard may be viewed if the instructor takes a snapshot of them, using the Snapshot button on the Whiteboard action bar. A link will be created for users to view the snapshot.)

Problems? If you have difficulties using the Collaboration Tools and have followed the above recommendations, call 803-777-1800 or go to http://cshelpdesk.csd.sc.edu to place a request for assistance. Please provide your Bb username and the course code/section number to expedite assistance. NOTE: Please be aware that in some instances corporate or personal computer firewalls may interfere with your ability to use the collaboration tools.

Using the Collaboration Tools:

Following is a discussion of the basics you will need to participate in a Virtual Classroom or Lightweight Chat session.

⇒   **For an in-depth discussion of Blackboard's Collaboration tools,** refer to Blackboard's very detailed Student Manual for Bb Version 6**:**

http://company.blackboard.com/docs/cp/learning_system/release6/student/

- Select the **Contents** link in the upper left frame
- Select "Introduction and Table of Contents"
- Select "Table of Contents"
- In the right frame, under "Chapter 4 - Communication" you will find the following links:

              Collaboration Tools
              Virtual Classroom
                      Menu Bar
                      Classroom Tool box
                      Whiteboard
                      Group Browser
                      Course Map
                      Ask QuestionQuestion Inbox
              Lightweight Chat
                      Private Messages
                      User Information
                      Session Archives

The Virtual Classroom:

IMPORTANT: You should attempt to open a Virtual Classroom or Lightweight Chat session **BEFORE** your instructor schedules a session to be sure your computer and connection are working properly with the Blackboard collaboration tools.

To begin a Virtual Classroom session, login to Blackboard and select your course. On the left side of the screen, click on the "Communication" bar. Next, select "Collaboration Tools". You will see something similar to the following (you may see more than two sessions if your professor has created additional meeting places):

At this screen you will see all Virtual Classroom and Lightweight Chat sessions created for your course. The "Show All" filter is the default and shows you all sessions, both active and inactive, current and any already created to be available in the future for your course. You will also see any old Sessions that have been archived for later review, if any exist; you can just click on "Archives" to access session archives. For details on working with Session Archives, see **Accessing Collaboration Session Archives** at the conclusion of this document.

To join a session, just click on the **Join** button next to the Virtual Classroom session you wish to enter. In this example, "Lecture Hall" is the only VC session available.

NOTE: The first time you JOIN a Virtual Classroom session it may take several minutes for the session to open because the software must be downloaded from Blackboard that will allow you to participate.

When the session opens, you will see something similar to the following, except it will show your name as having joined the session:
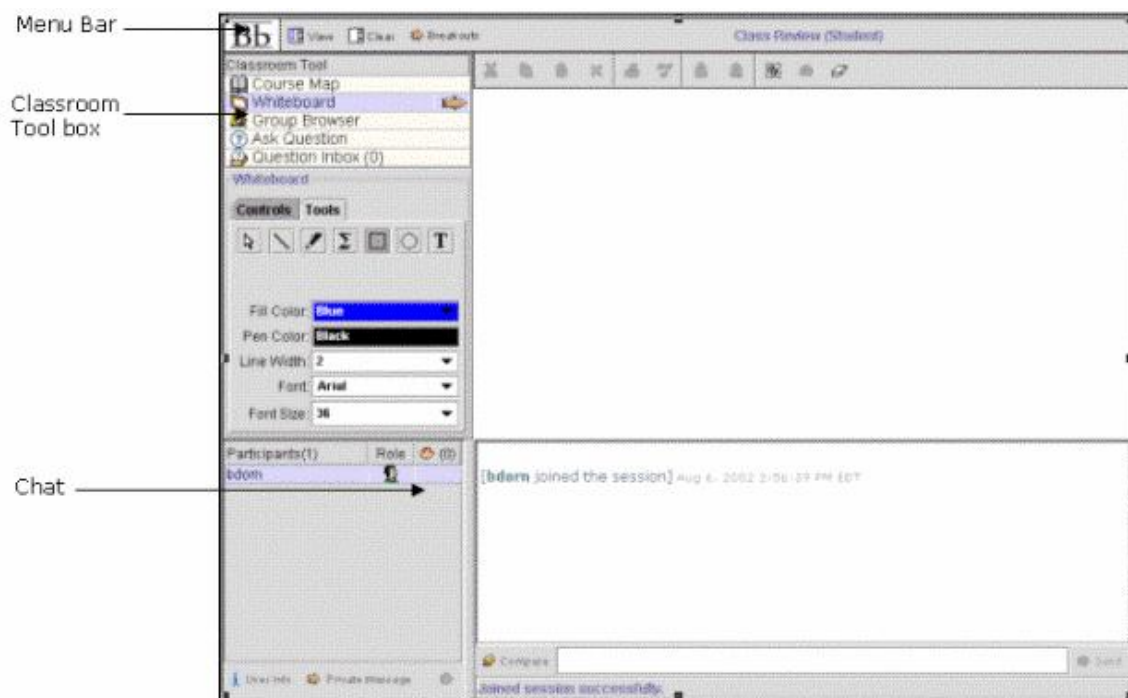
This screen provides access to all of the functions available to users in the Virtual Chat. From here you can ask questions, respond to your classmates in the chat forum, draw on the whiteboard, and participate in breakout sessions. The Instructor establishes which tools are available to a user in the VC.

NOTE: If you "mouse over" (just place your cursor over an item, but do not press a mouse button) an option in the VC screen, most browsers will display a definition for that icon's function (for example, in the White Board, tools, mousing

over the Pen Icon creates a pop-up box labeled "Marker" to describe what that tool does.

Using the Chat Board: To send a message to the session, just type in your message in the Compose field at the bottom of the screen and hit Send. You will see your message pop up in the chat window just above the Compose field. See the graphic below.

NOTE: Depending on how your instructor set up this feature, you may need to ask permission before you can participate. To request to be made active in the Session by your instructor, click on the Hand icon at bottom left of the screen.
To clear out messages in your chat window, press the Clear icon in the menu bar at the top of your screen. See the graphic below.
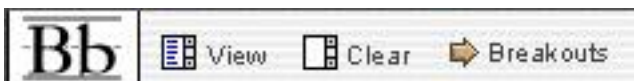
*Sending Private Messages:* If you want to send a private message to another Session participant:

1. Click on the Private Message icon at the bottom left of your screen.
2. Type your question in the Compose text box that will pop up and press Send.

You can opt to have these messages displayed inline with other chat messages you are receiving, or to have them display in a separate frame (select the View icon, pictured above in the Bb Menu Bar, to make your selection).

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Participating in Breakout Sessions: Users whose status is active can create breakout sessions (a session on a related topic, for example) by clicking on the Breakout icon in the Bb Menu Bar (see graphic above) and then selecting users from the pop-up menu to participate in the breakout session. Others can only join in this discussion if they are included in it by the user who creates it. Users in the Breakout session remain active in the main VC session, and if the Breakout session is closed users remain active in the main session. Users who enter a Breakout session are still active in the main Virtual Classroom Session. To request information on Session participants, click on the User Info icon at the bottom left of the screen (pictured below).

Classroom Toolbox: If granted access to these tools by your Instructor, you can use the Whiteboard, access Web sites, view the course map to your course, ask questions, and view questions/responses. To begin using an item in the Toolbox, just click on the name of the tool. Below is a graphic of the Classroom Toolbox menu.
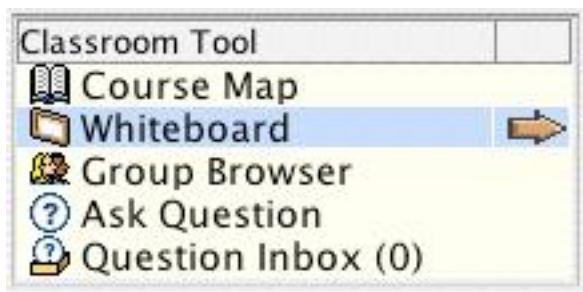
Following are graphics illustrating and explaining the Classroom Tools available in the Virtual Classroom.

Classroom Tool

📖 Course Map
📁 **Whiteboard** ➡️
👥 Group Browser
❓ Ask Question
❓ Question Inbox (0)

Whiteboard

| Controls | **Tools** |

↖️ ╲ ✏️ Σ ☐ ◯ **T**

Fill Color: Blue ▾
Pen Color: Black ▾
Line Width: 2 ▾
Font: Arial ▾
Font Size: 36 ▾

The Whiteboard:

The Whiteboard lets you present different types of graphic information; using the tools in the Whiteboard palette you can draw, type text, and present equations.

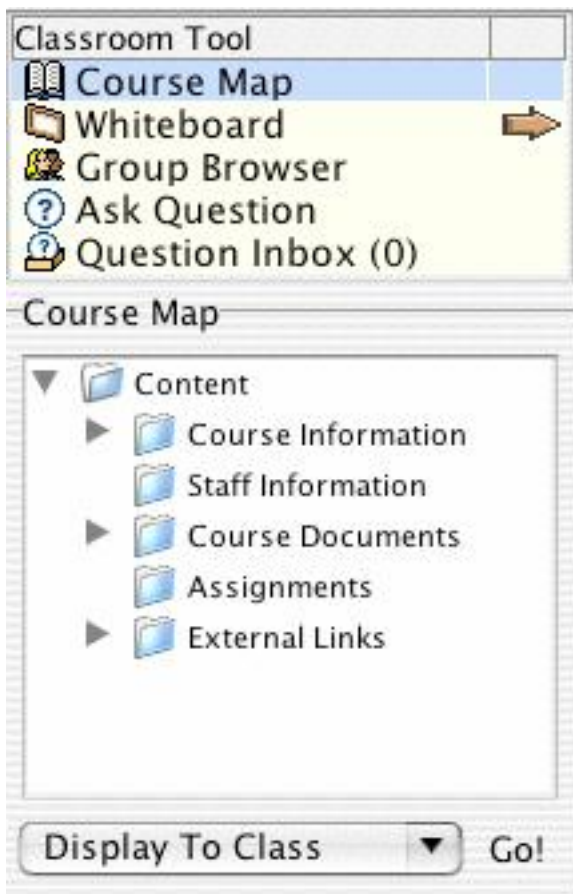NOTE: Your instructor may not make this tool available in your session.

Classroom Tool

- 📖 Course Map
- 📁 Whiteboard ➡️
- 👥 **Group Browser**
- ❓ Ask Question
- 📇 Question Inbox (0)

Group Browser

Enter Address:

[   ]

[Display To Class ▼] G

The Group Browser:

This feature lets you collaboratively browse the Web with your classmates. Just enter a URL in the Enter Address box on the left and click GO. URLs used in the session will be recorded in the archive if one is created.

NOTE: Your instructor may not make this tool available in your session.

Classroom Tool

- 📖 **Course Map**
- 📁 Whiteboard ➡️
- 👥 Group Browser
- ❓ Ask Question
- 📇 Question Inbox (0)

Course Map

- ▼ 📁 Content
  - ▶ 📁 Course Information
  - 📁 Staff Information
  - ▶ 📁 Course Documents
  - 📁 Assignments
  - ▶ 📁 External Links

[Display To Class ▼] Go!

The Course Map:

This feature provides access to the Course Contents of your course while in the Virtual classroom.

By default, only the Instructor has access to operate the Course Map.

Content will appear in the Course Map box that opens at the left when this option is selected.

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Classroom Tool

- 📖 Course Map
- 🗀 Whiteboard ➡
- 👥 Group Browser
- ❓ Ask Question
- 📖 Question Inbox (0)

Ask Question

Enter Question:

✏ Compose   ➡ Send

Ask a Question:

You can ask questions of your instructor during the session using this option. Just click on the Compose on the left (by the pencil icon), type your question in the pop-up box, and hit Send. As you and your classmates submit questions, your instructor (and others if permitted) can view and respond to them.

Classroom Tool

- 📖 Course Map
- 🗀 Whiteboard ➡
- 👥 Group Browser
- ❓ Ask Question
- 📖 Question Inbox (0)

Question Inbox

↩ ✖ ☐ Show unanswered only

From	↩

Question:

Question Inbox:

 Here you can see the questions posted (from Ask a Question) to the session, and you can respond to them.

Leaving a Virtual Classroom Session:

To leave a Session, just close the browser window. You will be returned to your Blackboard class window. Anyone still logged into the Virtual Classroom session will receive a message (with a time/date stamp) stating that you have left the session.

Lightweight Chat

IMPORTANT: You should attempt to open a Virtual Classroom or Lightweight Chat session **BEFORE** your instructor schedules a session to be sure your computer and connection are working properly with the Blackboard collaboration tools.

The Lightweight Chat is essentially the basic chat interface available in the Virtual Classroom (no whiteboard, no other classroom tools). Because it is a less intensive application, it loads faster and is a more appropriate tool for chat sessions where some participants may be on slow modem (56K) connections.

To begin a Lightweight Chat session, login to Blackboard and select your course. On the left side of the screen, click on the "Communication" bar. Next, select "Collaboration Tools". You will see something similar to the following (you may see more than two session names listed if your professor has created additional meeting places):

At this screen you will see all Virtual Classroom and Lightweight Chat sessions created for your course. The "Show All" filter is the default and shows you all sessions, both active and inactive, current and any already created to be available in the future for your course. You will also see any old Sessions that have been archived for later review, if any exist; you can just click on "Archives" to access session archives (more details on accessing session archives is available under **Accessing Collaboration Session Archives** at the conclusion of this document).

Next, click the **Join** button next to the Lightweight Chat session you wish to enter. In this example, "Office Hours" is the only LC session available.

NOTE: The first time you JOIN a Lightweight Chat session it may take several minutes for the session to open because the software must be downloaded from Blackboard that will allow you to participate.

After you Join the appropriate Lightweight Chat session, you will see a screen similar to the following, except it will show your name as having just joined the session.
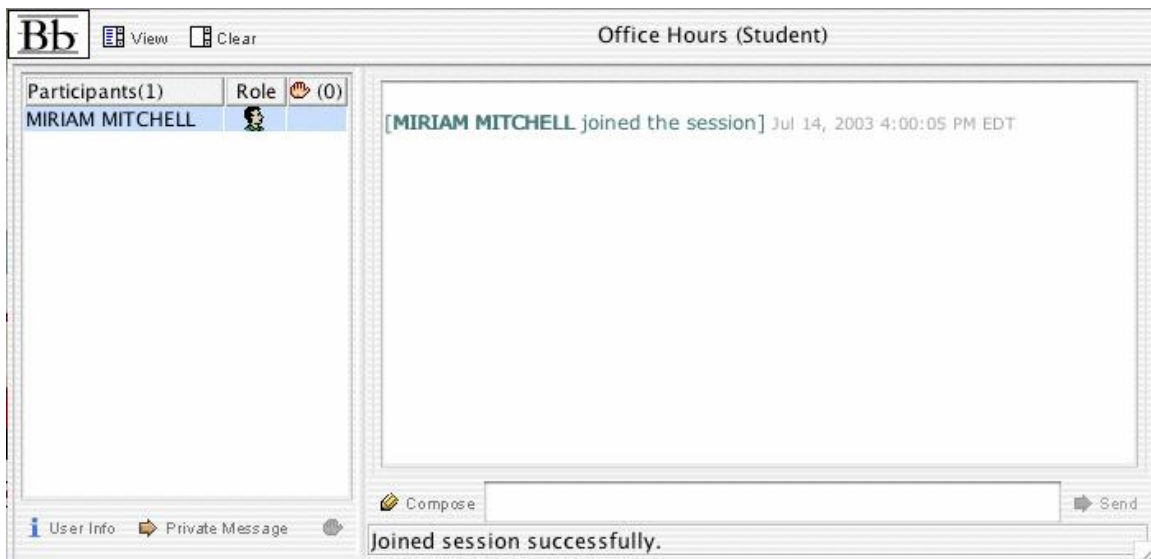
Using the Chat Board: To send a message to the session, just type in your message in the Compose field at the bottom of the screen and hit Send. You will see your message pop up in the chat window just above the Compose field. See the graphic which follows.

NOTE: Depending on how your instructor set up this feature, you may need to ask permission (to be given active status) before you can participate.

Request to be made active: To request to be made active in the Session by your instructor, click on the Hand icon at bottom left of the screen (illustrated below).

Getting User Info: For information on any of the participants in the Session, just click on the User Info icon (illustrated above).

Sending Private Messages: If you want to send a private message to another Session participant: (1) Click on the Private Message icon at the bottom left of your screen (see illustration above), (2) Type your question in the Compose text box that will pop up and press Send.

Displaying Private Messages: You can opt to have these private messages displayed inline with other chat messages you are receiving, or to have them display in a separate frame (select the View icon, pictured below in the Bb Menu Bar, to make your selection – pictured below).

Clearing Messages from Chat Window: To clear out messages in your chat window, press the Clear icon in the Bb menu bar at the top of your screen (see graphic below).

Leaving a Lightweight Chat Session:

To leave a Session, just close the chat window in your browser. You will be returned to your Blackboard course window. Anyone still logged into the chat

session will receive a message (with a time/date stamp) stating that you have left the session.

Accessing Collaboration Session Archives:

The Session Archives allows you to review the discussions and questions raised during a previous Collaboration Session. The archive must be made available by the Instructor for users to view it.

To access an archived session, go to **Communication**, then **Collaboration Tools**, then click on **Archives** next to a Virtual Classroom Session. See the illustration following.

To Access an Archived Session: Click on the session name in the Archive Name column. The Archive page for that session will appear. The page will show the various questions and responses logged during the chat session, as well as display hotlinks (with info on the user who posted it) contributed during the Session.

To Search for an Archive: Click on the Archive Name or Creation Date option in the Search by: field. Enter the name of the archive or the date it was created in the field below and click Search.

To Return to the Collaboration Session Page: Click on "Back to the Collaboration Sessions."