

## **Blackboard Communication Tools**

### **Email, Discussion Groups, Assignments, Digital Drop Box, and Live Chat**

The World Wide Web, email, and online discussions are wonderful tools that allow very useful types of interaction with students. Your challenge is to manage the interaction effectively. If electronic communication tools are used without proper planning and clear guidelines chaos may ensue.

To avoid becoming the computer help desk for your class, or turning your class into How to Use the Internet 101, refer your students to <http://www.sc.edu/studentit> . Tell students to call the Computer Services help desk at 777-1800 if they have problems connecting to the Internet, logging on to Blackboard, using Gamecock email, or resetting their password on VIP.

### **Avoiding the pitfalls of electronic communication**

- Remember that everyone's default email address in Blackboard is Gamecock email. Students and faculty can enter their preferred email address by clicking the Personal Information link on the My USC screen. Tell your students this!
- If you ask students to submit assignments via email or the digital drop box set strict guidelines for naming documents and email messages. Make sure students include the name of the assignment and their full name! Post specific instructions on Blackboard.
- Decide on and get agreement from your students regarding file formats. For example, decide that all documents exchanged electronically will be in Microsoft Word format. Post specific instructions on Blackboard.
- Make sure you have CURRENT virus checking software on your computer and update it FREQUENTLY. This applies to your home computer as well. For more information click the link on the Blackboard log in screen, or go to <http://www.sc.edu/ars/virus/>
- Poll your students regarding their experience in using electronic communication tools. For example, ask how many of them have ever used email attachments. You can conduct the poll by creating a survey in Blackboard. Also, you may find that some students in your class who have good computer skills are willing to help those who do not.
- Avoid graded online activities that have to be completed the first day of class. Give your students a couple of days to settle in and yourself time to assess their skill levels.
- Manage students' expectation regarding email responses. For example, tell them that they can normally expect a reply within 24 hours, not including weekends. By the same token, do not assume that all of your students check and read their email every thirty minutes, or even every day.

- Avoid making yourself the sole point of communication for the class. Create activities that will encourage the students to "talk" to each other. For example you can have students create, monitor, and summarize discussions. Your role can then be to provide feedback, rather than reading every single discussion board message.
- If you decide to try online chat sessions keep the groups small, and if you have no prior experience, practice a little first. Students with very slow Internet connections may experience problems.

## Blackboard Communication Tools

Section	Description
<a href="#">Announcements</a>	Provides details for posting important information about the course, such as assignment due dates, content changes or guest speakers.
<a href="#">Course Calendar</a>	Provides all the details for posting course-related events on a Calendar.
<a href="#">Staff Information</a>	Describes how to post information about Instructors, Teaching Assistants, and guest speakers for the course.
<a href="#">Tasks</a>	Explains how to organize course projects, priorities, and details.
<a href="#">Discussion Boards</a>	Details how users participate in an online Discussion Board.
<a href="#">Send Email</a>	Provides information on how to send email to other participants or groups of participants within a course.
<a href="#">Collaboration</a>	Explains the Virtual Classroom and Lightweight Chat, which enable users to participate in an on-line collaboration with Instructor and Students.
<a href="#">Digital Drop Box</a>	Provides information for exchanging files between the Instructor and course participants.

### Announcements

You can recover class time usually spent making announcements by posting announcements and other information to Blackboard. Online announcements are also a good way to communicate with students between class meetings. Be sure to remind students to log in and check for new information frequently.

To post an announcement:

- Click the Control Panel link.
- Click Announcements under Course Tools.
- Click Add Announcement.
- Type a subject and your message (which may contain HTML).
- To make an announcement permanent click the Yes button next to "Always show this announcement" on the course's main page".
- If you want the announcement to contain a link to specific course content, (for example, the syllabus) click the Browse button under #3. This will bring up the Course Map which allows you locate and link to a particular document.
- Click Submit.

### Email

You can send email from within your Blackboard class and students can send email to you. You must use the program you normally use to read email sent to you from Blackboard (for example, Gamecock email or GroupWise). You cannot read email from within Blackboard.

To send email:

- Click the Communication button, and then click Send E-Mail. You will see options on the next screen that allow you to send email to the entire class, or to select individuals or groups.
- Click Select Users.
- Click the check box next to the appropriate name(s).
- Type the subject and text of your message. If you wish to attach a file to the message click the Add button under #4 and browse to find the file, then click Submit.
- Scroll to the bottom of the screen and click Submit. You will receive a receipt telling you the message has been sent.

## **Discussion Board**

The discussion board is an excellent way to add interaction to the online portion of your class. Many faculty find that students who never say a word in class have a lot to contribute to online discussions.

It is best to focus the discussion by posting questions, or by giving students specific assignments such as writing and posting summaries of readings.

You **must** create at least one Forum in the Discussion Board area of your Blackboard class in order for students to be able to post messages. Both you and your students should check the discussion board regularly for new messages.

Information about messages, threads, and discussion forums starts on page 86 in the Instructor Manual.

To create a discussion forum:

- Go to your class and click the Communication button.
- Click Discussion Boards.
- Click Add Forum (students do not have this option).
- Give the forum a title, and type a discussion question or specific instructions in the Description box.
- Select the appropriate Forum Settings (use the check box next to each option).
- Click Submit at the bottom of the screen.

## **From the Blackboard Instructor Manual**

### **Add or Modify Forum**

#### *Overview*

Forums are used to organize threads. While Instructors must create new forums, they can enable other users to manage a forum once it is created. The fields on the Add Forum page and the Modify Forum page are the same. The Add Forum page opens with empty fields while the Modify Forum page opens with a forum already populated.

### *Find this page*

Follow the steps below to open the Add Forum page or Modify Forum page.

- Step 1** Click **Discussion Board** in the Course Tools area of the Control Panel.
- Step 2** Click **Add Forum**. To modify a forum, click **Modify** and the Modify Forum page will appear.

### *Fields*

The table below details the fields on this page.

Field	Description
<b>Forum Information</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	Enter a title. This title will appear as the name of the Discussion Board forum to all users.
<b>Description:</b>	Enter a description of the forum.
<b>Forum Settings:</b>	
Check the appropriate boxes to:	
<p style="text-align: center;">           Allow anonymous posts.            Allow author to edit message after posting.            Allow author to remove his or her posts.            Allow file attachments.            Allow new threads.         </p>	
<b>Forum User Settings</b>	
Highlight a user and click the appropriate button to assign Forum User Settings.	
<b>Normal</b>	Normal settings allow users to read posts and create posts in a forum.
<b>Admin</b>	Assigns forum administrator privileges to a selected user. <p style="text-align: center;">             Permanent Forum Administrator – the person who created the forum. No one can take away these privileges.           </p> <p style="text-align: center;">             Forum Administrator privileges – assigned by the Permanent Forum Administrator. Enables another user to manage the forum.           </p>
<b>Block</b>	Blocks a user from posting to the Discussion Board forum. Only the Forum Administrator or the Permanent Forum Administrator can block a user.
<b>Unblock</b>	Unblocks a blocked user.

### **Post and Reply**

#### Overview

A new post starts a thread. All responses to the post appear in the same thread.

## ***Find this page***

Follow the steps below to open the Add New Thread page.

- Step 3** Click **Discussion Board** from the Communication area.
- Step 4** Click on a forum link to open it.
- Step 5** Click **Add New Thread**.

## ***Fields***

The table below details the fields on the Add New Thread page.

<b>Field</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Message Information</b>	
<b>Current Forum:</b>	The name of the Discussion Board Forum appears in this field.
<b>Date:</b>	The date appears in this field.
<b>Author:</b>	The name of the author appears here.
<b>Subject:</b>	Add a subject for the post.
<b>Message:</b>	Enter a message.
<b>Options</b>	
<b>Post message Anonymous</b>	Select the check box to post an anonymous message. This option may or may not be available depending on the Discussion Forum.
<b>Attachment</b>	Enter the file path or click <b>Browse</b> to locate a file.
<b>Preview</b>	Preview the message as it will appear on the Discussion Board.

## **Managing discussion forums**

The Instructor Manual has tips for managing discussion forums. Topics include:

- Expanding and Collapsing Threads
- Changing the Viewing Options, Sorting, and Searching
- Attaching a File to a Message
- Assigning a Forum Administrator
- Archiving discussions

## **Forums**

### **Overview**

Forums are used to organize discussions on related topics. Students and Instructors click discussion links to access a forum from the main Discussion Board page. When a discussion is started within a forum it is called a thread.

## Find this page

Double-click on a forum link to access a discussion forum. The forum opens and the discussion threads within the forum appear.

## Functions

The table below details the functions available within a forum.

To . . .	click . . .
start a new discussion thread	<a href="#">Add New Thread</a> . The Add Thread page will appear.
view all messages	the <b>View all Messages</b> up arrow. All messages will be shown.
view unread messages	the <b>View Unread Messages</b> down arrow. All unread messages will be shown.
see all the threads and responses	<b>EXPAND ALL (+)</b> . All threads and responses will appear.
see only the threads	<b>COLLAPSE ALL (-)</b> . The topic threads will appear.
read a message	a link to a message. The message will appear along with any available options for modifying the message, removing the message, or responding to the message.
Send an email to the author of a thread	the name of the person. The email program associated with the browser is activated and an email will appear with their name in the To: field.
view tool bar	<a href="#">Options</a> tab. The options tool bar will appear. These options are described in the next table.
archive a Discussion Board thread	<b>Click Here for Archives.</b>
resort the list of messages	the drop-down arrow and select one of the following options to <b>Sort By</b> :  <b>Author</b> : to have the messages sort by author.  <b>Date</b> : to have the messages sort by the earliest date. This is the default.  <b>Subject</b> : to have the messages sort by the subject.

## Options tab

The table below describes the functions available on the Options tab.

To . . .	then . . .
select all threads and posts in the forum	click <b>Select All</b> .
unselect the posts selected	click <b>Unselect All</b> .
unselect the threads and posts that have been selected and select the threads and posts that have not been selected	click <b>Invert</b> .
mark posts as read	select the posts and click <b>Read</b> .
mark posts as unread	select the posts and click <b>Unread</b> .
view multiple threads or posts	select the posts and click <b>Collect</b> .
lock a thread or post	select the post and click <b>Lock</b> . Participants can view but not reply to a post that is locked.  If a thread is locked, all of the posts within the thread are locked. The thread must be unlocked, for the posts within to be unlocked.
unlock a thread or post	select the posts and click <b>Unlock</b> .
remove a thread or post	select the posts and click <b>Remove</b> .

## Forum Options

Blackboard has powerful tools for reading, selecting, and collecting messages. A discussion of these options begins on page 91 of the manual.

## Creating Archives

If you have large numbers of threads or threads with many messages you may want to archive some of the treads in order to make navigating through the discussion groups easier.

## Add Archive

### *Overview*

New archives are created on the Add Archive page. Once a new archive is created, threads can be added through the Modify Archive page.

### *Find this page*

Follow the steps below to open the Add Archive page.

- Step 1**            Click **Discussion Board** in the Course Tools area of the Control Panel.
- Step 2**            Double-click on a forum link.
- Step 3**            Select **Click Here for Archives**.
- Step 4**            Click **Add Archive**.

### *Fields*

The table below details the available fields on this page.

Field	Description
<b>Add Archive</b>	
<b>Archive Title:</b>	Enter a title for the archive.
<b>Description:</b>	Enter a description for the archive.
<b>Available:</b>	Select this option to make this archive available for Students to view.

## Groups

You can divide your class into groups to create smaller, more focused discussions or to facilitate collaborative assignments.

To create groups:

- Go to the Control Panel and click Manage Groups.
- Click Add Group. On the next screen type a name and description for the group and select which communication tools you want the group to have access to under Group Options.
- Click Submit, then click OK on the receipt screen. You will be returned to the Manage Groups screen.
- Click the Modify button next to the name of the group you just created.
- On the next screen click Add Users to Group to enroll students in the group.

### **Assignments and the Digital Drop Box**

The assignments tool and digital drop box are two different ways for students to send you documents electronically. The assignment function allows you to easily create, grade, and make comments on student assignments. Students can submit assignments as file attachments and you can download and delete groups of assignments easily.

Because Blackboard lacks tools to sort items in the Digital Drop Box, or delete multiple items at once we do not recommend using it for large classes or for large numbers of assignments.

When a student selects Digital Drop in the Tools area of a class they will see two buttons. One says "Add File" and the other "Send File". This confuses most people. Students **MUST** use the Send File button to send you a file via the drop box! If you plan to use the drop box, please mention this to your students, or post an announcement about using the drop box.

### **Collaboration Tools**

Synchronous, or "live" chats can be useful for small groups, group "meetings", or online office hours.

Please note the following:

- The chat function in Blackboard is actually a separate Java application. To run this program you must have a Java enabled browser. Current versions of Microsoft Internet Explorer and Netscape should work fine.
- Students and faculty using the chat feature from off campus with a very slow Internet connection may experience problems, or the chat session may fail to start.
- Live chats work best with small groups comprised of individuals who can type!
- If you have no prior online chat experience you might want to practice a little before you attempt a class chat session.

The "Intro to Participating in "Live" Bb Course Sessions" handout developed by Computer Services is an excellent guide for students.

Here are instructions from the Blackboard Instructor Manual that will help you:

- Access and enter the Virtual Classroom application



- Use the Classroom Tools, such as the whiteboard
- Use Lightweight Chat
- Archive Chat sessions

## Virtual Classroom

### Overview

Users can ask questions, draw on the whiteboard, and participate in breakout sessions from the Virtual Classroom. The Session Admin establishes which tools in the Virtual Classroom users can access.

### *Find this page*

Follow the steps below to open the Virtual Classroom.

- Step 1**            Click **Communication** on the Course Menu.
- Step 2**            Select **Collaboration Tools**.
- Step 3**            Click **Join next** to a Virtual Classroom session.

### *Virtual Classroom areas*

The table below details the areas of the Virtual Classroom.

<b>Part</b>	<b>Function</b>
<a href="#">Menu Bar</a>	Allows the Session Admin to control the Virtual Classroom. This includes managing participation, monitoring breakout sessions, and ending the session.
<a href="#">Classroom Tool box</a>	Includes all of the tools used during the Virtual Classroom session. This includes searching for Web sites, asking and answering questions, utilizing the Whiteboard, and accessing the Course Map.
<a href="#">Chat</a>	Allows users to compose messages, raise their hands to ask questions, and activate private messages.


## Whiteboard

### *Overview*

The Whiteboard enables users in a Virtual Classroom to present different types of information as they would on a blackboard in a classroom. Using the tools in the Whiteboard Tools palette, users can draw images, type text, and present equations. The Session Admin determines whether or not this function is made available to users.

## Functions

The table below details the tools available for use on the Whiteboard.

To . . .	click . . .
select an item	<p>the <b>Arrow</b> tool. Then click on an item for selection. The following may be performed on selected items:</p> <p>Enlarge: Click one of the small black boxes that surround the item and drag it to the desired size.</p> <p>Move: Click the item and move it to the desired location.</p> <p>Cut: Click the Whiteboard item. Then click the <b>Cut</b> icon.</p> <p>Copy: Click the Whiteboard item. Then click the <b>Copy</b> icon.</p> <p>Paste: Click the Whiteboard item. Then click the <b>Paste</b> icon.</p> <p>Delete: Click the Whiteboard item. Click on the selected object. Then click the <b>Delete</b> icon.</p> <p>Group items: Click the Whiteboard items. Then click the <b>Group</b> icon.</p> <p>Ungroup: Click a Whiteboard item in a group. Then click the <b>Ungroup</b> icon.</p> <p>Bring front: Click the Whiteboard item. Click on selected object. Then click the <b>Bring to front</b> icon.</p> <p>Bring back: Click the Whiteboard item. Click on selected object. Then click the <b>Send to back</b> icon.</p> <p>Select all figures on the Whiteboard: Click the <b>Selects all Figures</b> icon.</p>
draw free hand	the <b>Pen</b> tool. Choose the color of the pen in the <b>Fill Color</b> drop-down list.
enter text using the keyboard	the text tool ( <b>T</b> ) then the Whiteboard area. A Whiteboard Text Input box appears. Type the text in the box and click <b>Insert</b> . Use the options in the Tools palette to select color, font, and size.
draw a straight line	the <b>Slanted Line</b> tool.
highlight something with an arrow	the <b>Pointer</b> .
draw a square	the <b>Square</b> tool. Choose the color of the square from the <b>Fill Color</b> drop-down list.
draw a circle	the <b>Oval</b> tool. Choose the color of the circle from the <b>Fill Color</b> drop-down list.
input an equation	The Math and Science Equation Editor icon (  ). The Equation Editor will appear. Input the equation and click <b>Insert Equation</b> .

## Chat

### Overview

The Chat allows the users to interact with each other via a text-based chat. Chat is part of the Virtual Classroom. It can also be accessed separately.

### *Find this page*

Follow the steps below to open a Chat:

- Step 1** Click **Communication** on the Course Menu.
- Step 2** Select **Collaboration Tools**.
- Step 3** Click **Join** to next to a Chat session.

### *Functions*

The table below details the functions available in the Chat.

To . . .	then . . .
enter a message for the class to read	Type the message in the <b>Compose</b> field. Click <b>Send</b> . The message will appear in the chat area. There 1000 character limit for chat messages.
become an Active user	Click the hand symbol. A hand appears next to the Username. The Session Admin clicks on the hand to make the user Active.
view user information	Select a Username in the Participant list and then click <a href="#">User Info</a> .
send a private message to a user	Select a Username in the Participant list and then click <a href="#">Private Message</a> .

## Session Archives

### Introduction

Session Archives allow users to review Collaboration Sessions. Sessions are archived by date. Sessions will not appear until the leader of the session has stopped recording.

**Note:** If an Instructor does not stop the archive and exit the Collaboration Session, the archive will not end and no information will be recorded in the Archive Duration column. Only when the leader stops recording or ends the session will the archive stop and the duration display.

### *Find this page*

Follow the steps below to access the Session Archives page.

- Step 1** Open Collaboration in Course Tools on the Control Panel
- Step 2** Click **Archives** for a session.

### Functions

The table below describes the functions available on this page.

To . . .	click . . .
search for an Archive in the Collaboration Session	the <b>Archive Name</b> or <b>Creation Date</b> option in the <b>Search by:</b> field. Enter the name of the archive or the date it was created in the field and click <b>Search</b> .
open an archive	the archive under the Archive name column.
change the name or availability of an archive	<a href="#">Manage</a> . The Archive Properties page will appear.
remove an archive	<b>Remove</b> . This action is irreversible.

## Messages Overview

The Messages feature gives each course a private and secure system for communication that functions similar to email. Keep in mind that Messages cannot be sent or received outside of the users in the course.

Messages are usually accessed through the Communications area of a course. Although, as with most features, the Instructor can restrict access or change the layout of the Course Menu so that Messages are accessible directly.

### *Find this page*

Follow these steps to open the Messages feature.

- Step 1**            Click **Communication** from the Course Menu.
- Step 2**            Click **Messages**.

Instructors can also access Messages from the Control Panel.

### *Functions*

The table below details the functions available on the initial Messages page.

To . . .	click . . .
Open the Inbox to see delivered messages	<a href="#">Inbox</a> . The Inbox folder will open with messages that you have received.
View messages that you sent	<a href="#">Sent</a> . The Sent folder will open with a list of messages that you have sent.
Add a new folder	<a href="#">Add Folder</a> . Folders can be used to organize messages. Note that the system administrator may turn off the ability to add folders.
Change the name of a personal folder	<b>Modify</b> next to a personal folder. It is not possible to modify the Inbox folder or Sent folder.
Delete personal folders	The check box next to each folder that will be deleted. Then click <b>Remove Folder</b> in the action bar. The folders, and any messages in the folders, will be deleted.