Introduction

Today’s students come to VCU with a plethora of technology experiences—most of them have no memory of life before bank cash machines, e-mail and I.M., or electronic card catalogs. They rely on technology for their music (iPods, shared music files), entertainment (video games), communication (cell phones, instant messaging), and information (Internet). Most would not even think of going to the library when Google is so much easier and faster.

This is not to say that your students are technology experts. Most of them know how to do only what they’ve either been shown by their friends, or figured out by poking around the technology on their own. They will know how to type papers, but not necessarily how to use headers and footers or the word count features. Many of them trust spell-check to catch their errors, and don’t realize (or don’t care) that spell check can’t find problems with words such as their, they’re or there. They know how to cut and paste, but may not have been taught, and don’t understand, when this is and is not appropriate.

One of VCU’s responses to these technology-driven students is Blackboard, which facilitates online interaction between you and your students. This guide will help you learn the basics to get a course on the web and create some basic assignments and post grades. We can’t possibly cover all the features of Blackboard in this “quick start” guide. Training is available by going to www.pubinfo.vcu.edu/training/it/search.asp and typing in keyword “Blackboard.” You can explore all the training materials we’ve put online by going to the Content System tab (when you’re logged onto Blackboard), and then click on the Institutional Content link on the left menu panel.

We’ve organized this guide in 3 sections:

- **Chapter 1** (page 2) will help you get a class online.
- **Chapter 2** (page 7) will help you manage your class: posting assignments and grades.
- **Chapter 3** (page 10) will help you learn to use the Content Management System, which allows you to store files online and access them from any computer connected to the Internet (great for accessing presentations from podium computers in classrooms).

We hope you will use this as a point of departure and will use the resources we provide to learn more. Technology is a great tool when used to engage students to explore and learn. Your first place to turn if you need help is the help tab in Blackboard or email blackboard@vcu.edu. You can also contact the Help Desk: (804) 828-2227 or www.ts.vcu.edu/helpdesk.

Most importantly, we want you to know Blackboard well enough to be able to manipulate it to fit your instructional goals as opposed to fitting your goals into Blackboard’s default settings. For more information about training and programs offered by the Center for Teaching Excellence, look for the CTE on the Web at www.vcu.edu/cte.

**Power User Tip:** In the past, when users talked about Blackboard, what they were really referring to was Blackboard’s Learning Management System (LMS). In this guide, we’re attempting to standardize by referring to the class presence as LMS and the Blackboard content system as CMS.
Chapter 1—Going Online

You will find that your students expect that you will, at a minimum, have a presence on Blackboard. Having your course in the Blackboard Learning Management System (LMS) gives students the opportunity to e-mail classmates to exchange notes and ideas, gives them a place to find your syllabus, and contact information/office hours. You can put a simple class announcement up on the LMS in a matter of minutes. Once you see how easy it is, you’ll want to learn more about what you can do with Blackboard.

As long as the student has registered in your class, you’ve created the course, and made it available on the Create Course page (see next page for details), students will automatically be enrolled in your online Blackboard course. Automatic updates to the class rosters are done once a day Monday-Friday, so late adds may not appear for a day or so. Students who think they should be enrolled and do not appear on your roster should check with the Help Desk at (804) 828-2227 for assistance.

First Things First—Login to Blackboard

You will find Blackboard at http://blackboard.vcu.edu. This initial screen will give the some basic system information.

- See System-wide Announcements.
- Get Help.
- Learn when Scheduled Maintenance will occur
- Log on by clicking the Login icon.

Enter your eID (the portion of your VCU e-mail address before the @) and password (the same as your VCU e-mail password) and click on Login. You will see the main splash page.

Power User Tip: It’s very important that you pay attention to the maintenance schedule and make sure you don’t make assignments due during down periods. Regularly scheduled maintenance occurs the second and fourth Friday of each month from 4:00 pm to midnight. We do need to periodically take the system offline to make sure we keep Blackboard as reliable as possible. Occasionally, conditions will require extra maintenance and we will try to give you as much warning as possible.
Navigate in Blackboard

My Faculty Tools is the basic menu for most of what you'll need to do to create a course or learn how to do more in Blackboard.

My Faculty Downloads gives you access to software that can be used to create and enhance your course materials. The materials can then be loaded into Blackboard. For instance, VCU owns a site license for Lesson Builder. Click on that link to learn more.

You can help yourself stay organized by using the Calendar. Simply click on more to add items to the calendar to help you keep track of meetings and remind yourself to post assignments.

Courses you've created will show up on this screen. Click the class title to enter the class space.

Announcements from any classes or organizations you are participating in show up here.

My Courses

Finding Your Courses

Calendar

Organizations

Creating Your Course

Create a Course

Go to the My Faculty Tools menu and click on Create a Course. The easiest way to set up your course is to choose the course from the drop down menu. Choose the correct semester, then click on the next to Create New Course and choose your course from the drop-down menu. Make sure you highlight the correct section. As an alternative, you can manually enter the course information if the course does not appear on the list. Then click on Submit.
You will get a screen that confirms that you’ve created the course. Click on **OK**.

Your course will show up in the **My Courses Window**. The course is listed as **unavailable**. By default, the LMS makes all courses unavailable until you make them available to students. This allows you to do all the initial steps before your students access the course. We’ll show you how to make the course available at the end of this chapter. Click on the name of the course to edit/add content to the course. **The student roster will be updated for a newly created course within 24 hours (Monday-Friday) after the course is created.**

### Navigate Within Your Course

By default, the course opens to the announcement page. This is exactly what the students see when they open a course, except you have access to the magic tool, the **Control Panel**, that allows you to add content to the course. Click on the **Control Panel** to open it.

The **Control Panel** will allow you to edit and manage your course. There are many choices, and we won’t be able to cover all of them. Feel free to poke around here—you won’t break anything, and you may figure out how to do stuff on your own!

The first thing we suggest you do is add your **Staff Information**. This will give your students information about you, your office hours, and your contact information. Click on **Staff Information** to open up that screen...
Tell Students Who You Are

When you click on **Staff Information** on the Control Panel, you’ll get to the Staff Information window. Right now, there’s nothing there, but it’s easy to add your information. Click on **Profile** and you’ll get the profile window.

You can add all your contact information here. If you’d like, also add a picture and a link to your personal web site here as well. Once you’ve added your information, click on **Submit** and you’ll get a receipt that your information has been uploaded. Click on **OK** (twice) to return to the Control Panel.

Make an Announcement

Announcements can be both temporary (“class is cancelled tomorrow”) or permanent (like the “welcome” announcement created here). Click on **Announcements** on the Control Panel, and then on **Add Announcement**. Type in the subject and text of your announcement. If you’d like it to always appear, make sure Yes is selected in the options section, otherwise, chose the dates you’d like the announcement to appear in this section. Once you’re done, click on **Submit**. You’ll get another receipt to show you’ve been successful.
Add Your Syllabus

We will assume that you’ve created your syllabus in another program, such as MS Word. All students are required to have MS Word, so you can safely attach documents you create in Word. Again, from the Control Panel, click on Course Information. From the Course Information page, click on Add Item. You’ll get the Add Item page. You can give the document a name so the students will know what it is. For instance, Syllabus, by typing the name in the box. If you have some information to add about the syllabus—for example, a caveat that it’s subject to change—you can type that in the text box and it will appear with the link to the file.

Then click Browse to locate the file on your computer and add the link by clicking Open. Be sure the button next to “Make the content available” is checked yes so student will be able to see the syllabus. You can also choose some options, such as timing when or how long your file is available, or tracking how many times it’s viewed if you’d like to know if students are actually viewing your document. Again, you’ll get a receipt to confirm that you’ve added your syllabus. Click OK to get back to the Control Panel.

You’ve Got Your Basic Course Presence Online…Almost

(don’t forget to make it available—see next page)

That’s all there is to getting a basic course online. Hopefully, you’ve noticed that there are some similar patterns to each of the tasks we’ve undertaken so far. Most of the rest of the things you can do in the LMS are done in much the same way. As long as you can find the Control Panel, you can do everything else. In the next chapter, we’ll get you started on two of the more advanced features: adding an assignment requiring online submissions, and giving students access to their grades online.

Now you have just one final step...make the course available to your students!

Power User Tip: You can copy a course you’ve already created, either for multiple sections or from semester to semester. This feature will copy all previously loaded course documents. Go to My Faculty Tools and select Copy a Course, and then select the course you wish to copy from the drop-down menu. Remember that it takes 24 hours (Mon-Fri) for the roster to update after you create the new course.
Make Your Course Available to Students

Once you’ve set up your course, the final step is to make it available to students. From the Control Panel, choose Settings (Course Options Section). On the settings menu, choose Course Availability. Then set Make Course Available to Yes. That’s all there is to it!

Chapter 2—More Advanced Features

There are many more things you can do in the LMS than we can possibly cover in this booklet. We hope that this guide will encourage you to poke around in the program yourself, or take one of our many free classes offered throughout the year (visit http://www.pubinfo.vcu.edu/training/it/search.asp and type Blackboard as your keyword to search for an upcoming class).

We start once again at the Control Panel. Remember, you can always access the online help files by clicking on the Help tab at the top of each page.

Adding An Assignment

There are two different ways to add an assignment. If you want to add a general assignment that students hand in during class, you can add that pretty much the same way you added the syllabus: click on the Assignment link on the Control Panel, click on Add Item, and fill out the form on the page.

We’re going to walk you through a second way to add an assignment. This method requires students submit their assignments electronically. It gives you some flexibility with the due date of the assignment, and allow students to submit assignments without printing. Students should know, however, that the LMS only allows them to complete their assignment once.

Click on Assignment from the Control Panel. Now, find Assignment on the drop-down menu and click Go.
You will find the familiar form. Give your assignment a title. If it’s simple, outline the assignment in the text box; more complicated assignments can have a file attached if you want to spell out the assignment in an MS Word document. By default, the assignment is available to students for as long as the course is online. You have the option to limit the dates students are able to see and complete the assignment. Click **Submit** and you’ll get the familiar receipt. Click **Ok** on the receipt to return to the **Control Panel**.

### Make Assignments Available for Specific Dates

#### Find Students’ Uploaded Assignments

Once students have submitted their assignments, you can read them online or print them out. You do this in the Gradebook. From the **Control Panel**, select **Gradebook**.

You will see a list of your students. In this example, two students have already had their assignments graded, one student has not completed the assignment, and one is waiting to be graded as indicated by the ! in the column “First Week Paper.” To read/grade the First Week Paper, click on the “!” to open the **Modify Grades** window.

The student can type a comment for you when they upload their assignment. To read the assignment, click on **View**.
You will get the Grade Assignment page. Here you can:

- **Review your assignment**
- **Clear Attempt:** If a student uploads the wrong assignment or is instructed to do it again, you will need to clear the attempt before they can upload again.
- **Read your student’s paper**
- **Grade the student’s assignment**
- **Give the student feedback:** Anything you write here will be transmitted to the student’s assignment page.
- **Attach a marked-up document.** If you prefer to mark up the student’s paper in Word, you can do that and save the paper as a file, which you can upload with your comments. Students will be able to open the marked up document when they review the results of the assignment.

**Leave yourself a note.** Students will not get these comments, but you can go back and review them at any time. You can attach a document here if you’d like—students will not receive this file.

As soon as you click on Submit, your students will be able to view their grade, feedback, and, if you’ve uploaded a marked-up document, look at that as well. The LMS will give you a confirmation each time you complete a task. Just click on OK and eventually you’ll get back to the Spreadsheet, where you can grade other assignments. When you’re done grading, click OK again to get back to the Control Panel.

As you can see, there are many more things you can do with the Gradebook than we can possibly include in this short guide. We recommend that you explore Bb by using the online Help tab (see page 3 for more details), exploring the Blackboard online FAQ files (faq.vcu.edu/ts/) or by taking a free class (www.pubinfo.vcu.edu/training/it/search.asp - type in “blackboard” as your keyword for your search).

**Power User Tip:** Students can also upload papers using the Digital Dropbox. We recommend that you use Assignments for receiving electronic papers; assignments give you more control over the procedure, and give the automatic feedback to the students.
Chapter 3—The Content Management System

The Content Management System (CMS) allows you to store your files securely online. That means you'll be able to access your files from anywhere you have access to the Internet. You can work on it at your home computer, save your files to the CMS, and then access them on your office or classroom podium computer—any computer connected to the Internet! You can organize your course files to make setting up and managing your LMS courses pain-free. And you can share files with colleagues, both at VCU and anywhere in the world. We’re just covering a few things you can do here. For more, click on the Help tab (see page 3 for a diagram) or attend a training class (go to www.pubinfo.vcu.edu/training/it/search.asp and type in keyword “Blackboard”).

Store Your Files Online

As long as you're logged on to Blackboard (see page 3 for instructions), you can access the CMS by clicking on the Content System tab on Blackboard. The Content System opens your My Content page. You can organize your files just like you would if they were on your computer's hard drive, using folders. For instance, if you wanted to have a folder for each subject area you teach, you could simply create a folder for each.

**Step 1:** Click on **Folder** and you'll get this screen. Type the name of your folder. This screen will also allow you to control your storage options, but in most cases you'll find that the default settings are probably what you want. Once you’ve named your folder, click on **Submit**. Now you can put files in your folder.

**Step 2:** To put files in the folder, double click on the name of the folder to bring up the folder contents. You can see where you are, and navigate the CMS system by using the Location notation. To upload your files, click on **Item**. That will bring up the Add Item page.
Put Files in Folders

Now find your file on your local computer:

**Step 3:** Click on **Browse** and you'll bring up a file menu. Find the file you want to upload, highlight the file, and click on **Open**. The name of your file will appear in the file box in front of the **Browse** button.

Upload Files

**Step 4:** Click on **Submit** to upload your files to the CMS. That’s it!

Working From Another Location

If you’re at another computer, for instance, a podium computer in a classroom, and want to open a file, say, a Powerpoint slideshow, simply navigate back to this spot the same way in CMS: Log on to Blackboard, click on **Content System**, and you’ll see a menu of your folders. Click on the folder, click on a file, and you’ll open your file.

Sharing Files with Students

You can load your files into the content system and then share them with a course. The advantage to doing this is that you don’t actually copy the document into the course, you only have a link to the document. If you edit one document used in several different courses, you only need to save it once in the content management system, and it’s automatically updated in all courses.

From the control panel, select the section you want your document to reside. From this screen, select **Add Item**. At the **Add Item** screen, you can control all aspects of your document: give it a specific name and description for this course, choose when you want students to be able to access it, and track views. To actually add the item to your course, click on **Browse** next to the **Link to Content Collection Item** box. A popup will give you your content management menu. Select radio button next to the item you wish to include in your course and click on **Submit**. You will get a warning window reminding you that by sharing this item, you’re allowing your students to have read-only access to the document. Select **OK**, and then **Submit** on the **Add Item** screen, and you’ve successfully shared your document with your class.