

**First Things You Should Do in Blackboard**

1. Put in your contact information (profile).  
**Control Panel; Staff Information; Add Profile** (or **Modify** the one that is already there if it is a course that was created beforehand), fill in the information; **Submit**.
2. Post your syllabus and policies.  
**Control Panel; Course Information** (or some prefer to put it in **Course Documents**). Here you have several options; you can either do this directly in Blackboard, or create them in Word first, and post the Word files in Blackboard (my preference). **Complete depending on your method.**
3. Correct your email address (and any other personal information you wish).  
When we create courses and users in Blackboard, we have to fill an email address or it won't accept it. Usually we use the dummy email address, [email@email.com](mailto:email@email.com). This needs to be changed (even though you might have put in the correct email address in #1 above).  
**Tools; Personal Information; Edit Personal Information**; correct your email and anything else on this screen that you wish to; **Submit**.
4. Explore your user's manual.  
You have access to both the student and instructor user manuals.  
For students: **Tools; Student Manual**  
For instructors: **Control Panel; Manual** (under *Support* category).  
In both cases, there is a list of topics on the left in outline format that expand and collapse. When you choose a topic on the left by clicking on it, the information about that topic appears on the right.
5. Change your password.  
Initially, we set up instructors with their username being their first name + last initial. The initial password is first name + last initial + 99. For security purposes, you may want to change this.  
**Tools; Personal Information; Change Password**; and like most systems you'll enter a new password and then confirm it; **Submit**. Note that passwords are case sensitive, so it's advisable to use only lower case.
6. Get your students into the course either through Blackboard or using the BEntry program.  
If this is a new student, create a user. If the student is in the system because they took a previous course, enroll them.

New student: **Control Panel; Create User**; fill in the necessary fields (First Name, Last Name, Email, Username, Password, Verify Password, and down near the bottom the role, which defaults to *Student*); **Submit**.

Existing student: **Control Panel; Enroll User; List/Modify Users**; then you can either search by name (first tab), by letter of last name (second tab); once you find the student, click the checkbox by the name; **Submit**.

It's easier to use the BEntry program that was distributed earlier, with directions on its use.

**First Things You Should Have Your Students Do**

1. Have your students correct their email address.  
Again, when students were entered into courses, a dummy email address was assigned. You should post a note telling them to change it. It may also be a good idea to have them put in their correct phone number because so many of the phone numbers in AIX are not correct. If you ever need to call a student, this is a big help. (This information is retained, so once a student enters information

**Tools, Personal Information; Edit Personal Information;** make any corrections to email and phone;  
**Submit**

2. Have them do a *Discussion Board* exercise involving (at least) posting a message and replying to someone else's message.

This will make sure that they know how to post and reply to messages on the discussion board.

3. If you are going to have students use the *Digital Drop Box* to submit written assignments, have them send you a Word document at the beginning of the course.

This will make sure that they know how to do this and that they are sending you a file in the correct format. Many of our students confuse Microsoft Works (or worse, WordPad) with Microsoft Office, so they may think they are sending a Word file when they aren't. It is possible in Microsoft Works, and most other programs such as WordPerfect, to save a file as a Word document, and this is discussed in the student orientation notes. Essentially, they just have to choose **File, Save As...**, and change the type of file at the bottom of the save dialog box to Word.

4. DL Courses and Attendance. All of the VLC courses have an "ice-breaker" assignment such as a discussion board assignment, submitting a short written assignment through the drop box, etc. You should require that your students complete such an assignment before officially recognizing the student as having "entered" the class and signing financial aid forms. This provides a standard way of counting students needed for auditing purposes.

### Things You Will Need To Do During the Course

1. Make announcements.

Announcements are the first thing your student sees when they log in to a course.

**Control Panel; Announcements** (under *Course Tools*); **Add Announcement**; add a title and type the message; choose options; **Submit**. To remove change or modify, follow the same path to the announcements, and then choose either **Modify** or **Remove**.

2. Add content.

Normally, you're going to do this in **Assignments, Course Information, or Course Documents** (through the **Control Panel**). You have the choice of create content directly in Blackboard, or doing your work in Word, and adding the document with your course. It's a matter of personal preference, but if it's something very long, I like to work in Word, and then add the document with a short description.

You also need to think about breaking up your content into **Folders** instead of making one long page in Blackboard. For example, in many of my courses, I divide the course into modules. In **Assignments**, I create a folder for each module and place the appropriate assignments in each.

3. Start a new discussion forum.

A student can start a new discussion *thread* – a topic within a forum – but only an instructor can start a new forum. You can start a new forum by going to discussion boards either through **Communication; Discussion Boards; Add Forum** or **Control Panel; Discussion Boards; Add Forum**. Then add a title and optional description; choose the options you want; **Submit**.

There are many other options available when working with a forum by clicking **Show Options**. Refer to the manual for in-depth information.

4. Creating links for students.

If you want your students to visit a site outside of Blackboard, you can make it easier for them by creating a link. You can place links at different places in the course, but if you want to keep them together, use the

external links area.

**Control Panel; External Links;** if you want to group them with folders, create the appropriate folders, if not, you can just click on **External Link;** fill in a name; the URL (web address); optional description, and other options (such as having it open in an external window – a new browser window); **Submit.**

Note that you don't have to put links in this area; you can put them in **Assignments, Course Documents,** etc.

You'll also notice the option of creating a **Course Link** in different places. These are links to other areas of the course. For example, you might post an announcement that a new assignment is ready. To make sure the student can find it, one of the options in creating announcement is adding a course link. You would click on the **Browse** button, and a window will open showing the different areas of the course; you would then choose the area in **Assignments** that you want to link to.

5. Dropping students.

**Control Panel; Remove Users from the Course** (under *User Management*); **List/Modify Users,** then you can either search by name (first tab), by letter of last name (second tab), or simply list all of the students (last tab); once the student is found, click the checkbox by the name; scroll down and type **Yes** in the textbox near the bottom of the page; **Submit.** This will remove the student from your course and all records for that student in the course will be lost including the **Gradebook** entries. It **does not** remove the student from all his/her courses or from the system.

6. Posting grades (if you use the online gradebook).

To post grades, you must first create an entry in the gradebook. (The exception is when you deploy a test, in which case, an entry is automatically created.)

**Control Panel; Gradebook** (under *Assessment*); you will then have a series of boxes to fill including the name of the entry, the type of entry (*Assignment* or *Exam*, for example), description, possible points, etc.; **Submit.** To actually enter grades, you can choose to enter either click on the student (a row) and enter grades, or click on a column and enter grades for several students or the entire class. There are many things you can do with the gradebook, so check out the instructor's user manual (discussed earlier).

For students to check grades: **Tools; Check Grades.** (Note that although you see all grades through the control panel, a student sees only his grades.)

7. Creating and deploying quizzes.

This is too detailed to discuss completely here, but you access the testing system through **Control Panel; Test Manager** (or **Pool Manager**) under *Assessment*. Briefly, think of a pool as a test bank. When you create a pool, you're creating a bank of questions that can be used later in one or more test. You don't have to create a pool; you can create a test instead. A pool is just a convenient way of loading many questions and then choosing from the pool to create tests later. In any case, the first step is creating a test. The next step is deploying a test and making it available.

To deploy a test, decide where you want it to go. Most people put quizzes in **Assignments** or **Course Documents.** Let's assume we want to put it in the first.

**Control Panel; Assignments;** choose a folder the folder you want to put it in (optional); **+Test (plus sign** in front of **Test**); choose the test from the list of created tests; **Submit; OK;** you then have the further option to **Modify the test** or **Modify the test options.** The first choice will give you access to the actual test questions where you can make changes. The second choice allows you to set all types of options, such as whether the quiz is timed, are multiple attempts allowed, will the student be allowed to see the correct answers, etc. The most important of these, though, is whether the course is available now. If you simply want to deploy the test, but are not ready for students to take it, keep it unavailable; then, when you're ready, go back to that

quiz, choose **Modify**, and then make it available.

An important note about quizzes: Once a test is made available, a gradebook entry is automatically created for it. When the student takes the test, Blackboard grades it and inserts the grade in the gradebook. If you later decide to make a course unavailable, **all the grades will be lost**. And a further tip: If you're going to have a lot of them, keep quiz titles short. Otherwise, the gradebook becomes hard to use because the columns stretch to fit the title, and you won't be able to view much on the screen.

If you're familiar with ExamView, which is the test generator most textbooks use, and like working with it, version 4 will allow you to export a test to Blackboard format. You can then import into a Blackboard pool, and generate tests from it. See ExamView's help for more information.

### Problems At Least Some of Your Students Will Encounter

#### 1. Trouble logging in.

This can be one of several things. First, make sure the student is enrolled in the course.

**Control Panel; List/Modify Users**, then you can either search by name (first tab), by letter of last name (second tab), or simply list all of the students (last tab).

Another problem students will have is forgetting their username and password. You may need to remind them, although it's in the orientation notes, that the username and password (initially) is their first initial + last name + the last three digits of their social security number and that they should use only lower case.

It's possible for students to change their passwords, although we don't advise it. (**Tools; Personal Information; Edit Personal Information; Change Password**.) Students may forget their password if they change it, or may forget that passwords are case sensitive. You cannot look up a student's password, but you can change it. Find the student (**Control Panel; List/Modify Users**; as discussed above). Once you've found the student, there will be a password button that you can click to reset the student's password.

#### 2. They sent a file through the *Digital Drop Box*, but you didn't get it.

The drop box is very reliable, but there is one thing students forget. When they go to the drop box to submit a file, there are two buttons, **Add** and **Send File**. If they choose **Add**, they're adding the file to their space, but not sending it to you. They should actually use **Send File** and the first time you give them an assignment to use the drop box, you might want to remind them of this. Again, this is discussed in the [online orientation and notes that available to students](#).

#### 3. They were taking an online quiz/test and their system crashed / they were disconnected / power went off / etc., before they could finish it and now they can't get back to it and they have no grade.

If you use online quizzes and tests, one of your options when you deploy that tests is to allow students only one attempt. If something happens to the student's computer, their score will not be recorded, and they won't be able to attempt the quiz again.

Students who are using dial up will often have a problem with their phone disconnecting after a period of inactivity (while they're answering questions). One thing you can advise them to do is to open up a second browser window (on any page other than Blackboard) and periodically switch to that window and click Refresh. This will keep the connection alive.

If you wish to allow them another attempt, clear out their previous attempt.

**Control Panel; Gradebook** (under *Assessment*); in looking at their grades you'll see a little lock icon or a question mark where the student's grade should be; click on it, [click View](#), and then choose **Clear Attempt**. The student should now be able to retake the quiz.

4. The student says they emailed you, but you didn't get an email.

There is a **Send Email** option under **Communication**, *but it does not work*. You should make sure your students understand that they should send you email as they would normally send email to someone else, and **not through Blackboard**.

### Blackboard Inconveniences You're Likely to Run Into

1. Unfortunately, almost everything in Blackboard works on the course level, which leads to inconveniences if you are teaching more than one course at a time. For example, suppose you want to create an announcement that you're going to be out of town on a particular day and you're teaching three DL and hybrid courses. There's no way to create one announcement for all three courses. You must go into each course separately and create an announcement. (You can cut and paste the message text, but it's still aggravating.)
2. If your drop box is full of old student submissions and you're ready to get rid of them, they have to be removed one at a time. You go to the drop box, choose **Remove** for the item to get rid of, confirm that you want to delete it, and then click **OK**. In other words, several steps to get rid of one file. What makes this especially aggravating is that back in version 4, the first one we used at RCC, the instructor's drop box list would have checkboxes so that you select multiple files and delete them all at once. For some reason, this disappeared in version 5 and wasn't put back in for version 6.

A way of deleting everything in the drop box:

**Control Panel, Recycle Course** (under *Course Options*), click checkbox for **Dropbox**, type "Remove" in the little box at the lower right corner of the screen, click **Submit**.

Make sure you want everything in the dropbox to be deleted; there's no recovery from doing this (unless you archive the course first). Also make sure you don't click any of the other options, unless you really want to remove those things from the course.

3. Unlike our folders in Groupwise that allow you to open a file, say a Word document, edit it and save it directly back in that folder, you can't save directly to the drop box. For example, if a student sends you a file and you want to insert comments, you must save it somewhere on your disk, then go into the drop box and send it back to them.

### Tips

1. If you know ahead of time that you're going to use a course over and over, it's best that we set up a build version. Then you can create all the content, quizzes, etc. This build version can then be copied (by a Blackboard system administrator) to a "live" course. This gives you the option of keeping the clean version for later use. We can always copy a course that you've used through a semester, but you'd have to go in and delete the old announcements, gradebook entries that weren't needed, etc.
2. Only Blackboard system administrators can copy and create courses; instructors can't. So you have to let me or Cathy Wallace know when you need this done. Once a course is set up, you're free to do what you want with it.
3. Explore the VLC using the directions I emailed to everyone earlier. There are many courses that have already been developed that you might be able to use instead of starting from scratch. If you find something, let me or Cathy know and we'll download it and set it up for you. Also, find out if your text publisher has a Blackboard course already built. Many of them are starting to do this.
4. When you encounter a problem and correspond with Cathy, Lisa, or me, always include the course and section number so that we can get into that course and see what is going on.