

## About Communication Tools

The following are features by which instructors can communicate to or with students and by which students can communicate with each other, the instructor, or themselves (To Do List).

### Announcements

Instructors can make special announcements to all members of a course. If instructors do not ask students to check the Announcements inventory regularly, they can configure an announcement to pop up as soon as the member logs in to Blackboard Vista 4. Announcements can be configured to remain in the Announcements inventory for selected periods of time.

### Mail

Blackboard Vista 4 has its own internal mail system that works just like email. This allows mail to be archived with all of the course content and stay inside the course without clogging up other email accounts. The mail system can be set up to forward mail to members at external email accounts. Members cannot reply to these alerts. They must log in to Blackboard Vista 4 to reply.

### Calendar

Blackboard Vista 4 contains a calendar that is customized for each individual. The calendar can be used to display course deadlines from all courses, as well as personal engagements. Instructors can select to have an assignment due date display in the member calendars automatically.

### To Do List

All individuals using Blackboard Vista 4 can keep an internal To Do List to help them manage their work and activities. This is a private list and cannot be viewed by any other members.

## About Collaboration Tools

Collaboration tools are features that enable the development and progression of group learning.

### Who's Online

At any given time, an instructor or student can see who else from their course is online and working in Blackboard Vista 4. If another course member is online, they can be invited to "chat" and have a live conversation online.

### Chat

The chat tool allows two or more course members to communicate with each other live via text or audio methods. In the case of a text chat, all members of the chat type their messages and they appear on a single screen immediately, preceded by the name of the individual who sent the message. Chat rooms are often established for small group meetings or for "online office hours" for instructors. Private chat rooms can be assigned to small groups, and individuals can invite other individuals to chat privately as well. It is possible for an entire course to have a chat in which the instructor manages the virtual "pen" or "microphone" so that only one member may type or speak at a time. The chats can be archived for future reference.

### Whiteboard

The group chat rooms have virtual whiteboards available. These are areas of the screen that are designed for drawing, as you would on a whiteboard or chalkboard in a classroom discussion. The mouse is used as the pen and can draw in multiple colors and thicknesses. You can also use

geometric shapes and blocks of typewritten text. Whiteboards are archived with the chats they are associated with.

## **Threaded Discussion**

Blackboard Vista 4 provides the ability to create an infinite number of threaded discussions for asynchronous (not live) communication and conversation. A threaded discussion allows members to post new messages or responded to previous posts (messages). In this way a single conversation can be viewed together. Members can attach files and customize the presentation of the discussion posts to include images and web links.

## **Blog Discussion**

The new blog tool in Blackboard Vista 4 emulates blogs on the World Wide Web by presenting message posts from students and faculty sorted in reverse chronological order. Responses to each post by other course members are linked from the main post as comments. It is not that different than threaded discussions, but merely displays in a slightly different way. RSS feeds and tagging are not available with the Blackboard Vista 4 blog.

## **Journal Discussion**

Many courses have activities where students are required to keep a journal of their reflections on the experiences of the course (or internship). The journal tool in Blackboard Vista 4 allows this activity to happen separately from any threaded discussions or blogs. The format is slightly different and, most importantly, the journal tool allows the journal to made private between the student and instructor(s). No other students in the class can see the journal.