



Blackboard Advisory Group Minutes: 4-05-2006

Perkins Library Breedlove Room 226, 3:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Attending: Greta Boers, Phillip Batton, Wayne Miller, Brian Burton, Denise Comer, Bill Burig, Dan Graham, Susan Shaw, Neal Caidin(convener), Lenore Ramm(note taker).

1. Agenda Tweaking

Went over agenda to gauge interest and determine order of topics for this meeting.

2. Blackboard Upgrade postponed and impact to Brownstone EDU

- Upgrade had been planned from Blackboard 6.2 (our current version) to Blackboard 6.3 for May (Summer term) has been postponed because of performance issues in 6.3 .
- We are now planning to perform an upgrade for Fall, in between Summer and Fall terms by the University calendar (will need input from others; especially as all are not on the same academic calendar. For example : Med School).
- We are assessing the pros and cons for a plan to upgrade to 6.3 with a performance patch from Blackboard, Inc.or skipping a version and going to Blackboard 7.0. With respect to user functionality, 6.3 is a much richer upgrade than 7.0 upgrade. 7.0 includes 6.3 features, adds a couple of minor features, but mostly is an infrastructure upgrade.
- 6.3 and 7.0 version of Blackboard do have some significant differences in look and feel compared to 6.2 PR will need to be done in advance of the release to prepare instructors. Communication also needs to focus on timing of course content planning so that instructors are prepared for appreciable downtime between the terms to perform the upgrade.
- A suggestion was made to consider having a separate server for upgrading. This might help to isolate schools with conflicting schedules, among other benefits. Action – Neal will discuss the idea with a Bb team. The Bb team has had discussions around a pilot server for some time that is similar to this idea.
- Brownstone EDU – (Brownstone is the company; EDU is the software product) is an assessment tool that CIT plans to pilot, plugged into Blackboard. It is believed to be compatible and supported in Blackboard 6.3 but it is unknown how well it works in Blackboard 7.0 and whether Brownstone will support the tool soon in this version. The impact of the Brownstone EDU pilot is a consideration in the upgrade decision. TBD.

3. File Size Quotas

- We are currently piloting the use of file size quotas larger than 5 megabytes with courses that are engaged in the DDI program. These courses are set at a file size quota of 100 megabytes.
- CIT receives individual requests for larger file size quotas from instructors that use Bb course web sites and from leaders of Bb organizations.
- We want to be fair in granting requests and methodical in incrementally exploring the expansion of larger file size quotas for all system users (likely to be at a level less than 100 megabytes). We want to be methodical to insure that the system performance does not degrade significantly as we explore

increasing the limit.

- Outside of the DDI program, we have no methodical way or criteria for approving file size increase requests.
- Feedback from group – seemed like the majority were saying that they are comfortable with Bb Program Manager making the decision for ad hoc requests for larger file size quotas. This is the “Duke Culture” to not have system-wide criteria but for folks to take the initiative to make requests of system owners to advocate for their needs.

3. Optional Topics (Podcasting and Content Systems)

* Interest in the two optional topics appeared to be split, with not sufficient time to fully explore either. We discussed a little of each.

* Podcasting – Feedback requested on an Open Source Initiative to create a podcasting building block that would work within Blackboard. Key concern is that a number of existing podcasting options appear to be available to Duke community. Should we first understand these options before adding another? Lectopia and DukeCast and iTunes are solutions that Duke is using and exploring.

* Content Systems – to manage content at the course level. Feedback asked for suggestions for ways to generate the needs/ requirements that we might have. Feedback included: An education component to this discussion needed to be considered (upon further clarification, this could be as simple as a written description of how such systems could be used; or it could be product demos or other methods of education); and it was suggested that perhaps a good place to start is with soliciting input from IT-type folks from various schools and departments. Another suggestion is to look at the requirements for the content system used to decide on a system for managing Duke web sites (which had been Zope and then changed to Content XML, which has since had a name change). We need to focus first on what people need, rather than finding a tool and working backwards. Another suggestion was to consult with the Data Center for the Census Bureau because handling large data sets would likely have similar issues to handling documents.

4. Parking Lot (spontaneous side conversations not part of the agenda)

- Discussion of how waitlist students are handled in our Blackboard system. Waitlist students, if they drop a course, end up having the system set the state of the student’s roster record for the course to “disabled” (Blackboard system terminology). Disabled status has a benefit in that if the student needs to be re-enabled in the course, all of the student’s work and grades are retained. Nothing is lost. However, the problem is that disabled roster records can not easily be re-enabled and they are invisible to the instructor. So an instructor can not see the roster record, and he can not re-enroll the student himself. The OIT Help Desk needs to be called to re-enroll the student and this process can take up to a day. – CIT (Neal/Lenore) are looking to see if this problem can be addressed with the creation of a building block, aka plug-in or extension to the Blackboard system.