



Blackboard Advisory Group Minutes: 05-23-2007

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

Attending: Dan Graham, Steve Grambow, Andy Keck, Randy Riddle, Greg Fitzmaurice, Shawn Miller, Jennifer Carpenter, Evan, Greta Boers, Lenore Ramm (note taker), Neal Caidin (convener)

1. Overview of Scholar

Scholar is a Blackboard Building Block or plugin, which is a social bookmarking tool and more generally a social networking tool. This means that website bookmarks may be tagged by instructors or students and then organized and shared. This is currently a service that is hosted by Blackboard, Inc. and is nominally free. While users outside of Blackboard are not allowed to create new tags or change existing tags, they can use them.

2. Demo of Scholar

John Morrison, from Blackboard, Inc. did a demo remotely, via webex and telephone. He demonstrated that there are course and user centered pages for accessing the tool and tags may be searched from each of these pages. These searches may be saved. Pages may be tagged as being associated with a particular Blackboard course site, which is one of the primary advantages of this tool. It is not possible to do a systematic search and replace on tags, so some coordination of tag terminology would have to be done within organizations, courses or the university.

3. Reactions to Scholar

The tool seemed fairly intuitive in that the Advisory Group did not request further explanation as to the purpose of Scholar. There are other very similar tools available such as del.icio.us and Connotea (from nature.com). These widely used tools may also be tagged as being applicable to a specific course, but the tag must be entered manually. One of the primary benefits of Scholar is that it integrates with Blackboard, which makes it easy to aggregate tags for a particular course. One concern is that these tools are only as good as their user bases, which are contributing the bookmarks. Since Scholar is new and limits their users, they are lagging behind some of the other public services. Other concerns are that use of Scholar ties us even closer to Blackboard as a whole. The Advisory Group members who seemed to have the most positive reactions had not used any of the other bookmarking tools. While it should be possible to install this and let people use it if they want, it has been demonstrated that too many features can make a course management system seem overwhelming and therefore less effective for most users.