



Blackboard CourseInfo Faculty and Student Survey Fall 2001

Executive Summary

Blackboard CourseInfo has been in use at Duke since Fall 1999, initially as a pilot project. The software version in use during the Fall 2001 semester was CourseInfo 4.0. In preparation for an upgrade to Blackboard 5.5, CourseInfo users were surveyed in December 2001 about their satisfaction with CourseInfo features and support. A total of 866 instructors/TAs and 1847 students received an email invitation to participate in an online CourseInfo survey on 12/10/2001. Responses were collected until 1/9/2002. 140 (16.2%) faculty and 406 (22%) students took at least part of their respective surveys.

This report summarizes the key findings of the faculty and student surveys. You can see the questions used in the faculty survey at: http://cit.duke.edu/cgi-bin/ci_faculty_survey_f2001.pl, and the student survey at http://cit.duke.edu/cgi-bin/ci_student_survey_f2001.pl. The full report of survey responses, including the full-text responses to open-ended questions, can also be downloaded from http://blackboard.duke.edu/fall2001_survey_results_full.pdf (pdf).

Key Findings

The proportions of respondents by school were similar to the proportions of CourseInfo sites by school, with the exception that the proportion of student respondents from Arts and Sciences was substantially lower than the proportion of A&S course sites, and the proportion of student respondents from Engineering was somewhat higher than the proportion of Engineering course sites.

The majority of faculty answering the survey had used CourseInfo for one or two semesters. The majority of students used CourseInfo in 1 to 3 courses. Faculty and students seem to use somewhat different browsers and operating systems to access CourseInfo. While 45% of faculty report using Netscape, only 11% of students did (students mainly used Internet Explorer instead). More faculty than students report using Macintosh and Linux operating systems, but for both faculty and students the dominant operating system in use was some version of Windows.

Faculty reported an average comfort level with basic technologies of 3.75, where 1 = not comfortable and 5 = completely comfortable. With a similar measure, students reported average proficiency with a selection of common technologies of 4.0, where 1 = not proficient and 5 = completely proficient. Faculty often assume students are far more proficient with technology than they are, but results of this survey would suggest that the differences in general are not as great as faculty would assume.

Faculty had several motivations for creating CourseInfo sites, but their motivations were not always reflected in the way in which they used CourseInfo. Many faculty were motivated by a desire to increase student access to information (85%), and the majority of them used CourseInfo's main information-dissemination tools (nearly 90% used Course Documents, Course Information and/or Announcements). Nearly half of respondents (45%) hoped to increase interaction outside of class, yet only 30% used CourseInfo's discussion boards, only 23% used online groups, only 17% used online assessment, and only 3% used virtual chat. Only 31% expressed interest in learning to use CourseInfo communication tools in the future, and only 23% wished to learn more about assessment tools.

With the exception of chat, faculty reported all CourseInfo features they had used as useful to highly useful. Students in general rated the features as somewhat less useful than faculty, but nevertheless rated all features they had used as useful or very useful. Students also rated CourseInfo's ease of use as 4.4 on a 5 point scale (1 = very difficult, 5 = very easy).

In over 80% of the cases for respondents, faculty are involved in maintaining their course sites, and in 60% of cases, the sites are maintained by faculty alone (in another 17% of cases, the instructor and a TA maintain the site). Students report repeatedly, however, that they wish the sites were used more fully, and were updated more frequently. Possibly budgeting time for site updates after the initial set-up is problematic for faculty or TAs maintaining the sites.

The vast majority of faculty (80+%) using CourseInfo report being self-taught, and 57% report little to no interest in attending CourseInfo training sessions. Those interested in attending training sessions reported equal interest in sessions in summer, just before fall term, or scattered throughout the year. Individual training in faculty offices was the most popular of the training options presented.

According to respondents, the top three actions Duke could take to support faculty use of CourseInfo are:

- Automatically create a Blackboard site for every Duke course populated with a course description, staff information, electronic reserves, and a syllabus (56.1%),
- Improve classroom technology to make it easier to present information from a laptop, CD-ROM, or diskette (36.3%), and
- Have staff available to digitize print materials and upload them to my site (35.6%).

Suggestions for improvement from faculty include requests for feature enhancements (e.g., assessment/gradebook improvements, ability to add to multiple course sites simultaneously, easier methods of manipulating documents on the site) and suggestions for process enhancements (e.g., ability to control additions and deletions from course site rosters, better updating of student email addresses within CourseInfo). From faculty open-ended comments it is clear, though, that more faculty education or training about CourseInfo are necessary. Many faculty requests or suggestions are actually already CourseInfo features, just unknown to faculty.

Positive aspects of CourseInfo mentioned by students focused largely on three main areas: the ability to access course-related materials online, the ease of access and ease of use, and the ability to check grades online. Students disliked that so few of their classes used CourseInfo, and, for classes that did use CourseInfo, the professor didn't use more features and update the content more frequently. Students also frequently reported problems opening or viewing uploaded files, very slow loading and printing times for uploaded files, disliked the login system, and had trouble finding course materials within sites due to confusing and redundant site section labeling within CourseInfo.

In summary, faculty and students were positive overall about CourseInfo, specifically mentioning its ease of use and convenience, but all had some suggestions for change. Students particularly remarked on wishing more of their faculty used CourseInfo, or used it more fully. Faculty wished for increased functionality and more flexible use, but overall had positive things to say about CourseInfo. From faculty responses, it appears that faculty use of CourseInfo would be increased by providing several new services: auto-generating a course site for each class, providing staff to create materials for sites, providing staff to maintain sites for faculty, and providing one-on-one CourseInfo assistance in faculty offices upon request. These are options that the Blackboard team can investigate in future semesters. In addition, faculty and students mentioned the slow response time of CourseInfo at times, which should be addressed by the upgrade to Blackboard 5.5 in January 2002.