

CTL Bulletin

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A bi-weekly information sheet by the Center for Teaching and Learning

Emergency Preparedness Through Blackboard

What if next week the NEIU campus had to close for four weeks due to an outbreak of the H1N1 flu? Would the semester be lost for our students? Not necessarily if there was a way to continue class activities without having faculty and students come to campus. About 50% of you are already using Blackboard and would be able to maintain some interaction with your students in an emergency situation such as this. For the other 50% we are offering one-hour training sessions over the next three weeks to get you started with the basics. Here is our training schedule. Workshops are conducted in LIB 349:

		W, 10/7: 4-5pm	R, 10/8: 5-6pm	F, 10/9: 1-2pm
M, 10/12: 9-10am	T, 10/13: 1-2pm	W, 10/14: 4-5pm		
M, 10/19: 9-10am	T, 10/20: 2:30-3:30	W, 10/21: 4-5pm	R, 10/22: 5-6pm	F, 10/23: 1-2pm

These sessions are for those of you who have not used Blackboard before. We will just go over the basics. Please **bring an electronic copy of your syllabi** and any other key documents you want to put online, such as your weekly assignments with instructions. We will help you put these documents into the Blackboard shells that have already been created for your courses and show you how to use the simple Communication functions available in Blackboard. By the end of the workshop, you will have a functioning Blackboard site to help you stay in touch with your students.



If you want to get started on your own, here are a few tips. **For Blackboard novices:** Every course at NEIU has a blank Blackboard course associated with it. You can log into Blackboard easily by logging into *NEIUpport* and clicking the Blackboard icon on the upper right side. You will be logged into Blackboard automatically. If you are not on campus and not accessing *NEIUpport*, you can access Blackboard by going to <http://neiu.blackboard.com>. Your login is the same as for *NEIUpport*.

Once there, you will see your courses listed under "My Courses" on the right side. You might have a long list there, but to find the courses associated with the fall 2009 semester,

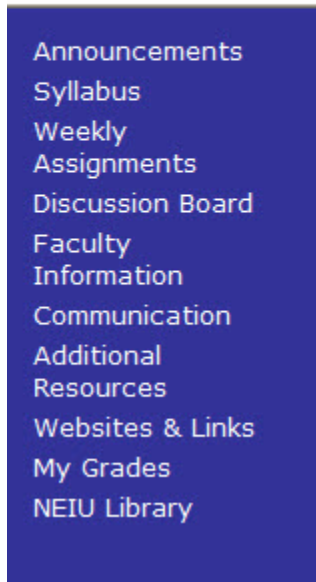
you look for the numbers 201010 before the course name and number. Courses for the spring 2010 semester will start with 201020.

One of the nice features of Blackboard, that even complete novices can use, is that your Blackboard course provides instant access to your student roster and gives you the ability to email all of your students at once. You do this by clicking on Communication on the blue navigation bar, then clicking Send Email. So, should an emergency arise, you can use this feature even without making your course available and still contact your students to give them an update, announcement, etc.

For advanced beginners: If you do want to learn more about Blackboard on your own, visit the Blackboard section of the CTL website (<http://www.neiu.edu/~CTL/blackboard.html>). There you will find tutorials that help you navigate Blackboard, limit the number of courses you see when you log in to Blackboard, how to make your courses available, and other topics.



At minimum, you should consider adding your syllabus and a course schedule with assignments and readings. However, you can get much more creative and add supplemental materials, links to YouTube videos, create discussion forums, student groups, etc.



To ease the anxiety of putting a course on Blackboard, Angela Velez in the CTL has created a course template for faculty members, which takes the time and guesswork out of designing a well-organized course. The navigation menu is slightly different and a bit more intuitive (see example on the left). The course has folders for every week of the semester to which faculty can add information and/or assignments within them. Discussion forums are already established, which includes a virtual office for questions to the faculty member from the students. Any faculty member can get this template loaded into their course by emailing Angela at a-velez4@neiu.edu or calling extension 4497.

Novice or not, Blackboard course announcements can be used wisely in these circumstances as it allows you to create an announcement that is posted in your Blackboard course, but that can also be emailed to all of your students simultaneously.

Using discussion boards is another good idea as learning can still occur when the class is not able to meet face to face. Creating discussion forums by week or by topic is helpful. Discussions can be centered on the weekly theme or the learning objectives for the week. You and your students can take an active role in the discussions so time is not lost. Students are savvy in the Blackboard environment and generally do not have a difficult time figuring out how to navigate it, so that should not be a concern. Having a virtual office is also handy as students can post questions to you there, and you can answer them without having to pick up a phone or have a face to face meeting.

One last tip: It is relatively easy and efficient to collect assignments, grade them, and return them right through your Blackboard course. This feature is covered in one of the tutorials on the CTL website, and you can also get further help with this by contacting the CTL (x4467). Either Angela (x4497) or Marc (x4463) can meet with you individually to teach you more advanced Blackboard skills and/or meet with a department to do the same thing.

All CTL Bulletins are available on our website at: www.neiu.edu/~ctl/