

Upcoming Changes in Blackboard

As you are aware, the University is in the process of adopting a new campus-wide administrative software system (ERP). This new system will affect both administrative and academic functions throughout the university and will greatly enhance the capabilities of our Blackboard Course Management system. In order to keep our Blackboard Faculty Users informed, we have prepared this "O & A":

Q: Why do we need to upgrade our current Blackboard system?

A: Since 2001, NEIU has been using the Basic Edition of Blackboard. Basic Edition is designed for a maximum of only 3,000 users. Because of our steady growth in the use of Blackboard, we have exceeded this amount and will continue to increase our number of users. Blackboard Basic Edition does not have the capability of integrating with the campus ERP system. Many functions, such as creation of Blackboard courses, creation of Blackboard student accounts and enrollment of students in Blackboard courses, have to be done manually. This has made the administration and support of Blackboard an often difficult and time-consuming task.

Q: When will the upgrade take place?

A: We are making Blackboard ready for integrating into the new ERP system by upgrading from Basic Edition to Enterprise Edition. We will begin testing the new Enterprise system later this month on a separate server from our present Blackboard Basic system. **Blackboard courses currently being offered this semester will not be affected.** The current plan is to switch from Basic Edition to Enterprise Edition after the end of Fall, 2005 semester.

Q: Is Blackboard going to be compatible with the new ERP system?

A: Yes. We are pleased that the two final candidates for the NEIU ERP system-- Banner (Sungard/SCT) and PeopleSoft (Oracle)--have the most extensive track record of integration with Blackboard at higher education institutions.

Q: Will the upgrade to Blackboard Enterprise give us more capabilities and features than Blackboard Basic?

A: Yes. However, our ability to start using these capabilities and features depends largely upon how long it takes for Blackboard to be integrated into the new ERP system. We understand that the full implementation of the ERP system throughout all areas of the university may take as long as two years. At the present time, we do not know where the integration with Blackboard will fall within this timeline. In

January, it is possible that users will not notice much difference between the current Blackboard system and the new one.

Q: What are these new features that integration with the ERP system will give us?

A: Information that we have received from Blackboard, Sungard and Oracle indicates that when Blackboard Enterprise is fully integrated with the new ERP, we will have many new capabilities, some of which are listed below.

1. Students will no longer have to create their own Blackboard accounts, as their campus account will also be their Blackboard account. This will eliminate the current problem of students having to keep track of multiple usernames and passwords.
2. Creation of new Blackboard courses and renewal of existing Blackboard courses will occur more rapidly.
3. Registration of students into Blackboard courses will no longer have to be done by faculty or by the students themselves. The ERP will populate Blackboard classes as students add and delete students from the classes when they drop.
4. The Blackboard system will accommodate multiple languages.
5. Information from the Blackboard Grade Book can be fed into the ERP, allowing faculty to send grades without having to enter them multiple times into the system.
6. Statistics and reporting features will be more accurate and enhanced.
7. We will have access to over 100 Blackboard "Building Blocks," which are custom applications that extend the capabilities of the Blackboard Enterprise system. Many of these Building Blocks will be available free of charge to us.

Q: How will I be kept informed on the progress of the Blackboard upgrade?

A: We will keep you informed as to the progress of the Blackboard upgrade and integration through postings on the Blackboard Users Listserv (BITLIST) and on the Blackboard Faculty Support Website at <http://www.neiu.edu/~ctl/blackboard.html>. If you have questions, please contact the Center for Teaching & Learning at extension 4467.

Q: I am not currently on BITLIST. How do I subscribe?

A: Just send an e-mail message, with "Subscribe" as the subject, to bitlist@neiu.edu.

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