

# SIMPLIFYING AND ENHANCING BLACKBOARD FOR STAFF & STUDENTS

Feedback from academic staff and students has shown that there is significant variability across Schools in the structure and organisation of content in Blackboard (Bb) and that both staff and students can sometimes find it hard to place/find teaching resources and materials in the current Bb module layout. In order to assist Schools in the easiest and most effective use of Bb, UCD Teaching and Learning, collaborating with IT Services, has devised a new, simplified Bb module structure (see Figure 1). By providing a level of consistency of navigation across modules and some simple strategies for enhancing student learning via the Bb environment, this new structure should be easier to use for both staff and students. Associated guidelines on good design and organisation of your learning materials have also been prepared to accompany the simplification.

From Summer 2013, **new** Bb modules will default to this new, simplified structure. Module co-ordinators will need to ensure that the content of their modules aligns with the content organisation guidelines (Figure 2).

**Existing** Bb modules will need to be updated by the module co-ordinator to be consistent with both the new structure (Figure 1) and the associated content guidelines (Figure 2). For more detailed instructions on how to update your Bb structure, see <http://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/stepstostructurebb.pdf>

**FIG. 1: THE NEW STRUCTURE AND THE DISTINCT SECTIONS**

**NEW Bb MODULE STRUCTURE**

- Announcements
- Module Information
- Learning Materials
- Assessment
- Module Tools

**The new Bb structure has three distinct sections in the left hand menu.**

**The first section** has two functions (i) it draws students attention to any new 'Announcements', tasks to do and any other updates and ii) it provides an overview of the module information (static information)

**The second section** is focused on the teaching, learning and assessment of the module (dynamic information). The 'Learning Materials' button is the most commonly used button and it should include all the content, teaching activities and related resources. The 'Assessment' button now should include all assignments, examinations and other advice, information and procedures around the module's assessment. If you regularly use a particular teaching approach, you may wish to create a separate button here, i.e. labs (see examples in Figure 3).

**The third section** contains the Tools button functionality. This is now changed to 'Module Tools'. Any additional buttons that you have or want to create, not related to the above two sections, are best placed here, i.e. 'Student Queries', 'E-mail'.

**EXAMPLE OF THE NEW LAYOUT**

(\*Download full instructions on how to apply the new Bb structure from <http://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/stepstostructurebb.pdf> )

**FIG. 2: SUGGESTED CONTENT ORGANISATION GUIDELINES**

**SUGGESTED CONTENT PER BUTTON**

**'ANNOUNCEMENTS' BUTTON:**

- Welcome to module; New 'announcements'; Tasks to do; Alerts; What's new....

**'MODULE INFORMATION':**

- Module Descriptor: Add direct link to current module descriptor by adding in a web-link. To do this: Go to 'Build Content', click web-link, name it, copy in url below but replace the 'MODULECODE' with your real module code, e.g. [https://sisweb.ucd.ie/isis/w\\_sm\\_web\\_inf\\_simple\\_viewer.show\\_module?p\\_code=MODULECODE](https://sisweb.ucd.ie/isis/w_sm_web_inf_simple_viewer.show_module?p_code=MODULECODE)
- Module handbook; Timetable;
- Links to Library Catalogue <http://library.ucd.ie>; Supporting your learning [http://www.ucd.ie/library/supporting\\_you/support\\_learning/](http://www.ucd.ie/library/supporting_you/support_learning/)
- School/programme policies; Overview of assessment details (type, weighting, timing);
- Reading-list for module; Contacts for staff & tutors/teaching assistants; Visual overview of module's concepts (if available).

**'LEARNING MATERIALS' BUTTON:**

- Activities; Notes; Images; Resources; Power-point slides; Case-studies; Videos; Discussion Groups; Blogs; Podcasts; Screencasts; Web-links; Link to articles, etc. (Note: For hyper-links to the articles' or e-books' pdf, see <http://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/Guide76.pdf> for instructions. For more on copyright see <http://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/UCDTLE0051.pdf> )
- In this button the module's content is grouped by, either topics, concepts, activities and/or timescale. Set tasks/activities/assessments for students to do in these groupings. Position related learning materials close to each other.
- Ensure that your learning materials are readily accessible to all students (See <http://www.ucd.ie/teaching/documents/AccessibleBlackboard.pdf>)

**'ASSESSMENT' BUTTON:**

- Synthesis of all assessment tasks for this module; 'My Grades' function (if used); Past papers (if used);
- Individual Safe-Assign and/or Assignment Submission Function (if used); Additional assessment information, such as assessment criteria, assessment rubrics; plagiarism policy; UCD assessment submission cover-page template (or link); UCD policy on late submission (link); School referencing style (if used).

**'MODULE TOOLS' BUTTON:**

- You may have more specifically titled this 'communication' or 'e-mail'. If this is the only functionality of this button then you may wish to retain this title.
- NB: Within this button, hide any Tool Links that you are not using and/or do not want the students to see or use, e.g. students e-mailing each other.

Contact details for any further queries & assistance: Technical advice on Blackboard: [blackboardsupport@ucd.ie](mailto:blackboardsupport@ucd.ie) (716-2008) in IT services; Good practices in module design and teaching/learning activities: UCD Teaching & Learning at [teachingandlearning@ucd.ie](mailto:teachingandlearning@ucd.ie) (716-2034); see <http://www.ucd.ie/teaching/resources/e-learning/>); Making on-line material accessible for all students: [Julie.tonge@ucd.ie](mailto:Julie.tonge@ucd.ie) (716-7179); Formatting a photo: [Vincent.hoban@ucd.ie](mailto:Vincent.hoban@ucd.ie) at Media Services (716-7091).