

Academic Technologies Committee  
Blackboard 8.0 Upgrade Recommendation

At the March, 2008 meeting, Jack Corliss of ITS provided the Committee with an overview of the differences between Blackboard 7.3 (our current version) and 8.0 (the version on our test server). The main impact in upgrading to Blackboard 8.0 is the change in the grade book; the Grade Center in 8.0 offers more spreadsheet features and represents the type of upgrades Blackboard plans to implement over their next several iterations. The Committee agrees there is wisdom in introducing this large piece of the new format now so faculty do not have so much to adjust to in the next upgrade. Additionally, the Self and Peer Assessment feature, along with Scholar (a social bookmarking component) offer Web 2.0 functionality that will prove useful for collaboration. Our recommendation is to proceed with the May upgrade and provide documentation and training on the Grade Center over the summer.

Here are some comments made by Committee members; their answers are based on their personal exploration of 8.0 as well as the overview provided by ITS:

- I. What is your impression of the functionality of the Grade Center?
  - a. After playing around with it for a while, I prefer it over the older system. The flexibility to display/hide columns and to rearrange their order will make my grade input much easier. I also really like having all the names on one page. It takes about 20 minutes to figure everything out (without instructions, just playing around).
  - b. Any new version is always a slight source of confusion, but the added capabilities more than compensate for the small learning curve needed to master this.
  - c. All [faculty I talked to] like the new grade center, specifically the entering grades from main page, and ability to scroll and still see student names
  - d. I support our upgrading to 8.0, though, possibly, without SafeAssign. I think that the obvious improvements in the new Grade Center outweigh the cost of faculty's having to learn to use the new Grade Center.
  - e. The official [department] position on this . . . is to keep up with changing technology and we will learn what we need to regarding upgrades.
  
- II. Will the extent of the change and functionality of the Grade Center be welcome to faculty in your area or a source of confusion?  
Welcome
  
- III. What features in 8.0 would you consider important enough to justify this upgrade? [A few comments directed at these specific features]
  - a. Grade Center: [definitely an improvement]
  - b. Self and Peer Assessment: [great tool for peer reviews]
  - c. SafeAssign: [do not enable until problems are worked out]
  - d. Scholar: [great Web 2.0 potential]
  
- IV. Should we recommend to the ITS Steering Committee that LUC upgrade to 8.0?  
Yes