Chapter 54
Blackboard Learning System on College Campuses

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a synopsis of the Blackboard Learning System (BLS), highlights how the BLS has been used in college campuses, and describes the uses of Blackboard tools based on author's experience in California State University, Long Beach for graduate level courses. Also, this chapter reflects on the author's experiences in developing and facilitating online classroom groups by using Blackboard tools. Topics discussed include the use of electronic bulletin board and virtual chat in creating online classroom groups. Group dynamics and procedures such as group formation, membership, cohesion, the roles of facilitators, and interaction patterns are summarized. The classroom group interaction pattern is discussed using sample online postings. The author describes how Teaching and Learning Cycle (TLC) framework is enhanced with the integration of the Blackboard tools for course management, interaction, and assessment of student progress in learning. Finally, this chapter concludes with advantages, recommendations, and future trends.

INTRODUCTION

The arrival of web-based course design software programs such as Web CT, Blackboard, Mallard, eCollege, and Moodle into college campuses is changing teaching and learning (Derouza & Fleming, 2003; Fredrickson, 1999; Landry & Hartman, 2006; McCollum, 1997). Among these course software programs, Blackboard is by far the easiest interface for course creation (Fredrickson, 1999; Lim, 2001; Landry & Hartman, 2006; Rempel & McMillen, 2008) and for creating online groups across disciplines (Pinch & Graves, 2000; Taylor, 2004). The main focus of this chapter is the Blackboard Learning System (BLS), which was created in an academic setting. For more than a decade, Blackboard Inc. has been flexibly modifying their tools toward meeting the needs

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of adult learners (Blackboard Inc., 2009; DeNeui & Dodge, 2006; McCollum, 1997). The earlier versions of this software were known as Course Info releases (Blackboard Inc., 2001) and the new versions include Blackboard Academic Suite™ Release 8.0 and Blackboard Learn™ Release 9.0 (Blackboard Inc., 2009; Hwang & Arbaugh, 2009; Rempel & McMillen, 2008).

Some of these technology-based pedagogical tools are used to create online groups to increase interaction and mutual collaborations (Taylor, 2004; Wernet, Olliges, & Delicath, 2000). Web based discussion as a teaching strategy is growing in institutions of higher education (Dietz-Uhler & Bishop-Clark, 2001; Pinch & Graves, 2000; Gingerich, Abel, D'Aprix, Nordquist, & Riebschleger, 1999; Huff, 2001; McConnell, l994; Page, Jencius, Rehfuss, Dean, Petruzzi, Olson, & Sager, 2003). Online classroom groups are often formed to enhance subsequent traditional face-to-face meetings (Dietz-Uhler & Bishop-Clark, 2001; Wernet, Olliges, & Delicath, 2000) while others are formed to promote learning and collaboration in distance education classrooms (Johnson & Huff, 2000; Randolph & Krause, 2002). Electronic Bulletin Board (EBB) is most commonly used by educators in higher education (Pinch & Graves, 2000; Randolph & Krause, 2002; Taylor, 2004) to enhance learning and interaction (Page et al., 2003; Pinch & Graves, 2000; Taylor, 2004). Only Page et al. used PalTalk, which is audio conferencing software. Johnson and Huff (2000) used e-mail to interact with on-campus and distance education social work students. They found that students used e-mail more for practical reasons than for academic enrichment. All other studies identified in this section predominantly used text based discussion forums for online group discussions. Randolph and Krause (2002) found that both on-campus and distance education social work students are less likely to use the Internet for mutual support and more likely to use the online tools for individual problem solving and data sharing. Despite the benefits identified by several authors, there is very limited literature that recognizes a classroom as a group (Randolph & Krause, 2002). In addition, literature written on online group dynamics and group processes has been emerging only in recent years (Michinov, Michinov, & Toczek-Capelle, 2004). Therefore, a discussion of online groups is important as this article focuses on online technologies that expand the opportunities to interact and study the group formation, characteristics and dynamics of online classroom groups.

BLACKBOARD LEARNING SYSTEM ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

The BLS has been widely used in college campuses across the globe for both enhancing traditional classrooms with online activities and for offering an entire course online. Several studies offer a perspective on how the BLS has been used in college campuses in both undergraduate and graduate education (DeNeui & Dodge, 2006; De Leng, Dolmans, Muijtjens, & van der Vileuten, 2006; Fredrickson, 1999; Hwang & Arbaugh, 2009; Landry & Hartman, 2006; Lim, 2001; Rempel & McMillen, 2008; Roberts-DeGennaro, Brown, Min, & Siegel, 2005; Santhiveeran, 2002). For example, Lim (2001) used asynchronous communication tools in a course involving laboratory work. Similarly, discussion boards and group pages were used by graduate students in social work to assist students with formulating research problems (Santhiveeran, 2002). In a study of undergraduate medical curriculum, students used the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) to make quality case presentations (De Leng, Dolmans, Muijtjens, & van der Vileuten, 2006). In addition, hyperlinks for library articles during chat sessions supported medical students' problem-based learning process. An announcement tool and discussion forums offered support for graduate social work students while they were doing their internship in human service agencies