

2004-05 Student Technology Fee Project Report

Support for the Blackboard Learning System and Portal

Blackboard Online Learning System

Project Managers: Karen Adsit, Walker Teaching Resource Center; Clint Smullen, Center of Excellence for Computer Applications

Brief Description of the Project

The Student Technology Fee covered the costs of the license for the Blackboard Learning System and the Blackboard Community Portal System to UTC, and a support person dedicated to Blackboard. This specialist managed the Blackboard course delivery system, installed the new release of Blackboard, developed and improved the methods of automating course creation and user registration, and assisted faculty with using Blackboard. In addition, the specialist managed the development of the UTC Blackboard portal, and assisted various groups in the UTC community to utilize the portal to build their communities, including academic and student groups.

This proposal directly addressed several of the Information Technology Enterprise Issues identified by the Technology Committee, and several of the Distance Learning Goals of UTC. The goals for this project were as follows:

1. Maintain the reliability and availability of the web-enabled course management software at UTC
2. Continue to support expanding web-enabled course offerings at UTC
3. Provide better support for the users of the course management system by assigning a full-time support person to Blackboard
4. Provide web-portal software to support improved access to information, enhanced flow of information for various groups at UTC, and a user-customizable view of the UTC online system
5. Evaluate the usefulness of web portal systems at UTC

Project Status

A significant upgrade, from Blackboard 6.0.11 to Blackboard 6.2.23, was accomplished during the 2004-05 year. The users were trained in the use of the new system, new training modules for Blackboard were completed and posted online and in the Blackboard Online class on the system. Blackboard 6.2 was placed in production use for the fall semester of 2005.

In cooperation with the Computer Center, the automation of the creation in Blackboard of classes, student/faculty/staff accounts, and class enrollments has been mostly automated. The only Blackboard operation done by hand is the combining of sections into one Blackboard class and assigning some faculty to their courses. Logins to Blackboard are authenticated through the Onenet system, and will accommodate the single-logon system when it becomes operational. The same user id and password are used for both Blackboard and OneNet. New UT system procedures greatly streamlined the process for new faculty to obtain Blackboard accounts to be ready for the start of the term.

Respondus, a software application that works with Blackboard, was purchased to support faculty creating and managing tests and exams. These tests can then be directly imported into Blackboard or be used independently from the online course management system.

Evaluation of the Blackboard project

The Blackboard system has become an important part of the teaching and learning environment for UTC, and an essential academic resource. Many UTC courses that are not “distance education” use the Blackboard system to provide enhancements to the courses. As UTC expands in distance education offerings, Blackboard will play an even larger role in delivering courses and communities to UTC students. For 2004-05:

- 2190 courses used Blackboard this year.
- The number of courses using Blackboard increased by 70% from last year (from 1295 to 2190).
- In the spring 2005 semester, 43% of all sections offered at UTC used the Blackboard system.
- In the fall of 2004, over 88% of UTC student ids used Blackboard for at least one course.
- Every student, faculty, and staff member at UTC has a Blackboard account.
- In the fall04 semester, 60% of all faculty/staff assigned to teach a class used the Blackboard system; in spring05 64% did so, and in the summer05, 49% used Blackboard.
- 125 organizations have communities defined in the Blackboard portal, representing a steady increase in the number of communities active.
- Twenty-eight faculty have been trained and use the *Respondus* testing system.
- During 2004-05, the Online Technologies Coordinator serviced over 1700 telephone calls and over 1960 emails for direct user support about the Blackboard system, in addition to other maintenance, security and inter-office email and calls.
- The UTC Help Desk handled 59 calls related to Blackboard; about 1/4 of these were UTCID and Onenet password problems.
- The Blackboard system was available over 99% of the time it was scheduled for use. The Blackboard system had a higher reliability than did the network and the authentication service providing access to it.
- The Faculty Senate elections were held using the Blackboard system to authenticate and manage the voting.
- The Teaching Resource Center offered 41 classes related to using Blackboard; these were attended by 153 people. 328 contact hours of Blackboard-related instruction were delivered.
- The Teaching Resource Center provided 86 consultations on Blackboard.

Blackboard Usage Statistics

Fall 2004	
Available Classes	881
Active Users	
Faculty/Staff	343
Students	8188
Active Orgs	80

Spring 2005	
Available Classes	1009
Active Users	
Faculty/Staff	378
Students	7621
Active Orgs	120

Summer 2005	
Available Classes	300
Active Users	
Faculty/Staff	176
Students	2721
Active Orgs	125

Financial Report (July 1, 2004 – June 30, 2005)

Online Technologies Coordinator

Salary	\$ 46,560
Benefits	\$ 18,747
BB license, Respondus	\$ 78,136
Telephone	\$ 350
Training for Coordinator.....	\$ 2,238
Total expenditures	\$146,031
Technology Fees requested	\$137,900
Deficit	\$ 8,131*
Technology Fees deposited	\$156,647
Surplus	\$ 10,616**

* Deficit is 5.9% of requested funds, due to our inability to accurately estimate benefits charged to account and a salary increase.

** Amount remaining in account E04-0156-021

Resources from other Departments

The Help Desk provides the initial level of primary support for faculty and students (especially for those with username and password problems). The Walker Teaching Resource Center (Karen Adsit, Charles Hart, and Marcus Myers) and Clint Smullen and Mike Ward (CECA) spend a portion of their time supporting the Blackboard system. The Walker Teaching Resource Center provides all faculty training and there is a small portion of funds expended from that department's account for copying of Blackboard training handouts.

Concern

We have a concern regarding the use of Blackboard. The Blackboard software, hardware and support are funded by the Student Tech Fee, as are the UTC network, Internet access, HelpDesk, software licenses, many Library holdings, etc. It is our understanding that students enrolled in several online courses (e.g. those offered through the "Engineering Management Online" program) do not pay any Student Tech Fees. Hence the students enrolled in other programs subsidize (through their Tech Fee payments) the students enrolled in the courses where the Tech Fee is not charged. This seems unfair at the least. Should the practice spread, it is unsustainable. Sufficient revenue must come from somewhere to keep Blackboard etc. operational and supported. Expanding the use by those who do not contribute towards keeping these resources operational is bad policy. We recommend that all students pay the Student Tech Fee. We further recommend that in any future negotiations involving distance education, the Information Technology Council be involved to ensure that the needed technology resources are available to fulfill the requirements.

August 30, 2005