Blackboard Learn Ultra: Communication Tools

Overview
Blackboard Learn Ultra has a number of tools designed to build student engagement within your online course.

Discussions about course content and Conversations about assignments are two ways for students to communicate with each other in Blackboard Learn Ultra.

Journals are an option for ongoing private communication between faculty and students, such as reflections or ongoing individual projects.

Announcements are a tool for faculty to communicate with all enrolled students at once, while the Messages feature is an option for faculty to communicate privately with an individual student.

Additional Resources from Blackboard Help
Blackboard describes different methods of student interaction in their Help pages. This document outlines a number of communication recommendations about when to use each type: Interact with Students. Note that not all tools listed on this page are currently available in Learn Ultra.
Discussions

Discussions create engagement among students as they interact with the course learning objectives. Discussions offer faculty the option to provide graded feedback.

Discussions can be added to the main Course Content page and moved into a Folder or Learning Module. There is no longer a distinction between forums and threads—the whole discussion is in one place. When creating a new Discussion, you can adjust the following settings:

- **Display on Course Content page (selected by default):** If unselected, the only way for students to see the Discussion is through the Discussions header.
- **Post first (unselected by default):** If you select this option, students have to create their own post first before seeing anyone else’s responses.
- **Grade discussion (unselected by default):** Select to add to the Gradebook.

When Discussions are first created, they are hidden from students by default.

**Example: Discussions**

In this example, a Discussion called Introduce Yourself has been created to give students an opportunity to get to know each other at the beginning of the course. It was moved into a folder called Welcome and made visible to students, where anyone enrolled can respond to student replies or add their own reply as well.

![Discussion Example]

**Additional Resources**

Blackboard Help [ULTRA: Develop successful discussions](#)

Blackboard Help [ULTRA: About Discussions](#) – creating, responding, and grading Discussions

Idaho State University presentation on [Breaking the Humdrum](#) of discussions
Conversations

**Conversations** are a new feature in Learn Ultra that can be added to specific content, such as Documents, Assignments, Tests, and group work.

These are a non-graded feature allowing all enrolled course members to discuss the content, ask questions, or share resources. Conversations are similar to a Q&A Forum about the assignment, where other students, TAs, and the instructor can contribute.

**Example: Conversations**

Adding a Conversation can be done as you create the content or after it’s already been created. In this example, Conversations were added to an existing course document about navigating the course; allowing students to ask questions about using Blackboard Learn by clicking on the dialogue bubbles in the upper right corner of the image.

Once a student has posted a Conversation, a blue dialogue bubble appears next to the assignment. Click there to open the assignment and then the dialogue bubble to see the student’s question.

Any replies to the question are visible by anyone enrolled in the course.

**Additional Resources from Blackboard Help**

- **ULTRA: Discussions or Conversations?**
- **ULTRA: Conversations** – enabling and accessing Conversations
Journals

Journals are a space where students can communicate privately with faculty. Some suggested uses for Journals include self-reflections, project updates, or even as a type of formative assessment. Journal entries are created solely for communication purposes by default, but in the settings instructors can choose to provide a grade for entries.

Example: Journal

In this example, Journal 1 has been added to the Welcome folder as a space where the student can share their goals for the course. Click on this header and select Participation to comment on their entry, add a new entry, and provide optional grading feedback as well.

Additional Resources from Blackboard Help

ULTRA: Journals
Announcements

Using Blackboard’s **Announcements** feature allows faculty to communicate with all users enrolled in a course at once. Reminders about due dates, updates to the syllabus or schedule, and clarifications around assignments are potential reasons for sending or scheduling an Announcement.

Two options available for Announcements are to send an email copy to all recipients and to schedule announcements for a future date. If announcements are scheduled for later, email copies cannot be sent.

**Example: Announcements**

The image below shows the creation of an Announcement. The three required fields for an Announcement are Title, Recipients, and Message (the text to share with the class).

If you are ready to send it immediately, save the Announcement and use the Post Now button under the Status column.

**Additional Resources from Blackboard Help**

ULTRA: [Announcements](#)
Messages

Messages are a new feature in Learn Ultra that keeps private communications with students within the Blackboard LMS platform. Messages allows you to contact individual or multiple students from inside your course to alert them to a missed deadline or to check in on a project.

Students can also create messages to one or more people enrolled in the class.

After choosing the recipient(s) and writing your message, there are two additional options. The first option allows you to send an email copy of the message. Students are not able to reply to you by email. Enabling second option allows students to respond directly to the message from within the course.

Example: Messages

To create a message and access new messages, click on the envelope icon in the header menu.

The Message below alerts the student to a missed deadline and gives them a chance to send a response message within the Learn Ultra course.

Additional Resources from Blackboard Help
ULTRA: Messages