BlackBoard Complaints

1. Faculty cannot see what the students see.

This could have been addressed by allocating an account for each course, but ITS has refused to do this, citing a licensing issue as the reason. Not being able to see what the students see can lead to a many other problems:

Example: A faculty member creates an assignment and posts the assignment with a due date. Students are not provided with this date. They can see the assignment but not when it is due. If we had access to a student view, we could see that limitation. However, even if we could, it creates another difficulty. It forces us to both configure the assignment with a due date and then record the due date in the assignment. Once you record the date two places, it is inevitable that they will be inconsistent and create obvious problems.

2. Students cannot "resubmit" an assignment a second time if they have made an improvement before the due date.

Faculty can override this limitation by manually clearing the assignment. Some faculty may want it this way, but others would rather that the students be allowed to clear out the original assignment themselves. Again, this points to the general inflexibility of BlackBoard.

In addition, BlackBoard changes the name of the submitted assignment file. This has immense negative consequences in CS courses, as the submitted file(s) cannot be compiled and run by the professor to see if they work!

3. Cannot merge two sections together.

This is a much broader issue where BlackBoard provides no economy in offering multiple sections of a course. It may be that one could use groups to manage what faculty want, but the course setup provided to us precludes that. This appears to be a local configuration problem, because we have evidence from faculty at other (local) institutions that confirm that this is certainly possible.

4. Online testing/quizzing does not allow for regrading of questions.

If a faculty member determines that a question should allow for other answers or that he/she simply made a mistake in defining the answer key, the faculty member must manually go through the tests, regrade those questions and change the grade.

5. There are many problems with testing/quizzes.

When you configure a test, the rules for taking the test (time limit, etc.) are not made available to the student until after they start the test. If you time the test, it still only

shows them how long they have been working, not how much time is left. If the faculty member forgets to actually put the time limit a second place in the text of the test, students don't know how long they have to take the test.

6. After the assignment due date has passed, it disappears from the students' view.

Students who miss class due to an excusable absence (or not) might completely miss the fact that they missed the assignment. Moreover, students cannot go back and look at previous assignments for studying purposes (if they have not saved the assignment on their own computer, for example).

7. Cannot copy assignments from one course/section to another.

If you externally link an assignment to your page, the link can be copied, but then it isn't treated as an assignment and is not put into the grade book.

8. There are serious issues with the GradeBook.

The GradeBook feature is very primitive. The training provided to us on using the GradeBook was basically to download our grades to Excel. This is problematic when grade manangement constitutes one of the few things for which faculty are actually trying to use BlackBoard.

Entering grades takes a lifetime! Each time a grade is modified there is a 10-30 second wait as the entire grade sheet is posted and retrieved again with each change. A faculty member with 100 students would take almost an hour just to type in the scores.

Finally, Like WebCT, there is no tie from the BlackBoard GradeBook to Banner's GradeBook. That would obviously hugely decrease data entry problems, and save money and time.

General Comments:

The limitations here are simply not present in other systems. It is hard to understand how a company that has been doing this for this long could have everything so backwards. Which has to beg the question whether it is the product or our implementation. Several faculty have spent significant hours trying to research answers to these questions.

It appears that many other universities have solved many (but not all) of these difficulties by increasing BlackBoard's functionality through the use of add-on software, which are known in Blackboard parlance as "building blocks". For example, it is possible to interface blackboard with WebAssign (an assignment/grading package currently used extensively in PCSE, as well as several other departments). In this case, all of the WebAssign grades, or even the entire WebAssign GradeBook itself (which, incidentally,

puts BlackBoard's GradeBook to shame), can be integrated into BlackBoard. In addition, almost all of the major textbook publishers have packages that can be interfaced with blackboard as well, like ThomsonNOW, for example.

Blackboard has a nice search facility for finding building blocks that might be useful to us at CNU. It also is possible to search for ones that are FREEWARE! Here are a few that are interesting, based on some of the comments made above:

a) The Blackboard Building Block for Google Scholar enables Blackboard users to easily leverage the Google Scholar application and content from within the Blackboard Learning System™. Specifically, this Building Block enables Blackboard instructors to: - construct queries for their students to execute in Google Scholar, and - browse Google Scholar from within their course environment and contextually add content directly from Google Scholar INTO their course with a single click.

b) CourseFeed is a free building block that combines learning content from Blackboard with the Facebook social network. Students go to class to both socialize and learn. By introducing Blackboard learning content into the already thriving Facebook social network students stay better informed and connected to their courses. All of this is done through a safe and secure building block that NEVER requires students to hand over Blackboard login credentials.

c) Dot Kadoo for Dot Edu integrates Kadoo's social sharing platform into your Blackboard environment. Kadoo is FREE to users, who get 10GBs of free space from which they can manage, store and selectively share any type of file. With Kadoo, students can share more with fellow students and their instructors. Users can also create study groups from kadoo.

These systems should be a win-win for faculty and students, but BlackBoard comes far short of hitting the target. Free tools like Moodle do a much better job, even though they are not perfect either.

An example of how Moodle's design is different and how it impacts the student, is that in Moodle, a student sees a collation of assignments from all of their courses in one window. As soon as a faculty member makes a change by posting an assignment, it shows up in the GradeBook, the student's upcoming "events" list, and the student's calendar. There is no additional effort for the faculty, and lots of positive consequences for the student. In addition, every time a faculty member makes a change to a course site, there is a window posting the last changes that have been made so students know how to be informed of the latest changes.