Tips for (re)organising your unit Blackboard site

It is common for students to comment on a unit’s Blackboard site organisation in evaluations. When unit sites in a course are set up in a standardised way, the layout becomes familiar to students and they can confidently and quickly find the materials and activities they need. This impacts positively on their learning experience. Each School has a template for all Blackboard unit sites that contains essential elements to support Technology Enhanced Learning. The template is either loaded into unit sites automatically or can be provided by your School’s Senior Learning Designer. The advice below guides you in a review of your unit site to ensure it still aligns with those templates.

**Organisation and Appearance**

- Upon entry to your unit site, students will see the Announcements page. Post a welcome here and any guidance for using the site that you want students to see immediately.
- Include an Acknowledgement of Country, which has been provided in your unit. If you can’t find it, the information and instructions are in the Blackboard Staff Support tab.
- Identify the ways that you and your students will interact. These may include groups, blogs and discussion boards. Make sure these are available and visible to students.
- Check that contact details for all teaching staff and tutors are up to date with preferred communication times and contact methods.

**Learning Resources and Activities**

- Create your learning resources and organise them by modules, topics, or weeks. Label them so students know what is coming next and provide a brief overview of each.
- Use a consistent style, including font styles, colours and naming conventions.
- Provide a variety of content and materials (video, text, images etc.). Make your writing accessible by using short sentences and paragraphs, avoiding acronyms and clearly explaining abbreviations.
- Check that the content is up to date, and that all links are working. Label every link so students know what they are opening.
- Ensure that content conforms to accessibility standards, e.g. use of headings and sub-headings, alternative text labelling of images and tables.
- Provide brief text or post a video to explain how each learning resource and activity (e.g. recordings, live sessions, discussion boards) supports unit learning outcomes.
- Clearly state how you expect students to engage. Post guidelines either on the Announcements page or in a clearly-labelled folder (e.g. ‘Start Here’ or ‘Unit Essentials’) about engaging with the site, and participating in online discussions and working groups.
Assessment and Feedback

- There is an Assessment link in the navigation menu. Keep all assessment information in this one spot. You can link to this area from other folders in the site.

- Give clear information about assessment and submission requirements. If you have varied any assessments due to COVID-19, ensure that you have created an announcement explaining all changes to students. Provide submission links if possible.

- Explain which online assessment tools will be used and link students to information about these (e.g. Cadmus, Turnitin) to familiarise themselves ahead of time.

- Explain ECU’s approach to Academic Integrity and show students where they can access referencing guides, Academic Skills Centre services and the Academic Integrity Module.

Learner Support

- All Blackboard sites include a link to student support at the top of the page (above).

- The Blackboard Unit template includes links to the Academic Skills site, the Student Support Intranet, the Blackboard help site, and other support services offered at the University.

- Familiarise yourself with the range of support available to students so you can refer students to it as needed. Point students to specific COVID19 resources to support their learning off campus during this time.

- Describe how the different kinds of support can help with your unit and direct students to the related links.

- Alert students to where they can get help with using technology including Blackboard, discussion boards, Blackboard Collaborate, Panopto or other tools you may use. If students are logged into Blackboard, they can get help here.

- Introduce students to the Academic Skills Centre for unit-specific assistance, numeracy, communication and language skills, academic and study skills. Highlight the Library services and guides that can help with digital literacy, study essentials and information essentials for research.

- Provide information about Learning Assessment Plans (LAP) with links to disability support and accessibility services.

Where to get help

To better understand how to use the Blackboard Unit Template, or for support with designing or facilitating online learning, contact your School’s Senior Learning Designer.

For training or support in using Blackboard or tools and functions in your unit site, contact eLearning Training & Support: elearningtraining@ecu.edu.au or 6304 2255