Anyone can place content into their Blackboard course, but every faculty member should ask themselves this important question: "Does the content I place into my course enhance teaching and learning?"

Questions to Ask Ourselves

1. How do people learn?
2. What should be learned?
3. How should online courses be designed?
4. How will we know if learning occurs?

How Do People Learn? - Learning Theories

There are many different learning theories that explain how people learn.

Constructivism
From our experience we construct our own understanding of the world around us. Each of us generate our own rules and models that make sense based on our experiences. Learning, therefore, is simply the process of adjusting our mental models to accommodate new experiences.

Behaviorism
Animal and human learning only focuses on objectively observable behaviors and discounts mental activities. Learning is nothing more than the acquisition of new behavior.

Piaget's Developmental Theory
A developing child builds cognitive structures--in other words, mental "maps," schemes, or networked concepts for understanding and responding to physical experiences within his or her environment. A child's cognitive structure increases in sophistication with development, moving from a few innate reflexes such as crying and suckling to highly-complex mental activities.

Neuroscience
The human nervous system and the brain are the biological basis of
Brain-Based Learning
As long as the brain (structure and function) is not prohibited from fulfilling its normal processes, learning will occur.

Learning Styles
Emphasizes the fact that individuals perceive and process information in very different ways. This implies that how much individuals learn has more to do with whether the educational experience is geared toward their particular style of learning than whether or not they are "smart."

Multiple Intelligences
The theory of multiple human intelligences was developed by psychologist Howard Gardner, suggests there are at least seven ways that people have of perceiving and understanding the world. He labels each of these ways as distinct "intelligence"--in other words, a set of skills allowing individuals to find and resolve genuine problems they face.

Right Brain/Left Brain Thinking
The structure and functions of the mind suggests that the two different sides of the brain control two different "modes" of thinking. It also suggests that each of us prefers one mode over the other.

Communities of Practice
This approach views learning as an act of membership in a "community of practice." The theory seeks to understand both the structure of communities and how learning occurs in them.

Control Theory
Motivation proposed by William Glasser contends that behavior is never caused by a response to an outside stimulus. Instead, the control theory states that behavior is inspired by what a person wants most at any given time: survival, love, power, freedom, or any other basic human need.

Observational Learning
Also called social learning theory, occurs when an observer's behavior changes after viewing the behavior of a model. An observer's behavior can be affected by the positive or negative consequences--called vicarious reinforcement or vicarious punishment--of a model's behavior.

Vygotsky and Social Cognition
Asserts that culture is the prime determinant of individual development. Humans are the only species to have created culture, and every human child develops in the context of a culture. Therefore, a child's learning
development is affected in ways large and small by the culture--including the culture of family environment--in which he or she is enmeshed.

More information is located at Funderstanding's About Learning/Theories.

Now that we know how people learn, let's look at ways to create course content that uses some of these learning theories.

**Getting Started**

**What Should Be Learned?**
That is for you to determine. It is important to give your students direction and goals. Blackboard's Course Information section is the location for placing your course syllabus, goals and objectives, outline, and course schedule.

**How Should Online Courses Be Designed?**
Instructional design is very important when developing online education. The role of the instructor and the design of the online course plays an important role in learning. "Materials themselves do not teach but provide a medium that with appropriate use can support learning." (Oliver, Herrington, and Omari, 1996). To read more about instructional design, go to the Instructional Design Tips provided by Blackboard.

**How Can We Facilitate Learning, and How Will We Know if Learning Occurs?**
An online course used to supplement a lecture has different parameters than a true distance learning course. Since an online supplemental course allows the instructor to conduct testing in the classroom, the instructor does not have to rely on Blackboard tools to assess his/her students. Here are some tips on how to use Blackboard to enhance teaching and learning:

- **Syllabus** It is very important to have your syllabus list every aspect of your course (topics for discussion, expectations for participation, student assessment, and a detailed outline of the material).
• **Content Separation**  Create a calendar of course readings and assignments for the entire course, then separate your content into weeks or by learning topics. For example, if your course is five weeks in duration, then create a folder for each week. In each folder add the content for the week; this will help guide your students through the course.
• **Redundancy**  When it comes to learning objectives, redundancy is a good thing! The syllabus is not the only place to list the learning objectives for the course; you can also place them within the content area. It is OK to be redundant with learning objectives in your course materials. At the beginning of each content area list the goals and assignments that pertain to the material.

• **Promote Communities**  Since distance education implies that the students are not in the same location when learning, it is important to give them a sense of community. Create a discussion topic for the students to introduce themselves to the class. Require them to fill out their Home Page form in Blackboard. Require your
students to discuss the course material each week. Just like the learning objectives, provide questions to facilitate communication in the discussion area. The student can be required to answer each question and to respond to three other student's responses.

• **Place Self-Tests After Each Main Topic**  This method can improve your students understanding and can also provide information that will help you determine if your students are learning before they attempt the examinations.

• **Give Your Students an Assignment**  Within Blackboard you can allow students to download files that you have posted, work within groups to complete a task, and then upload the file to Blackboard for your review. Students are able to work in groups within Blackboard and use group discussion boards, chat rooms, white boards, email, and the Digital Drop Box. You can also choose to view the course statistics, which allows you to see what material student(s) have viewed.

You may view this demo in the **Blackboard** course (How to Create
Pedagogical Courses in Blackboard) as a guest. Go to the Blackboard site and click on the Guest Login Only button. On the login page that appears, click on the Preview button in the section where it says, "You can access as a guest by clicking the "Preview" button below." Once you have entered Blackboard as a guest, then click on the Courses tab. From within the Courses tab, perform a Course Search for PedCourse, and then click on the Preview button on the right side of the link to the course.

More Information

Q: What other materials are available for development support?