

Blackboard at Duke – Summary Report

September 2006

Growth of Blackboard

Blackboard has grown substantially since it was first introduced at Duke. The number of active course sites has grown from approximately 700 in Fall 2002 to nearly 1350 in Spring 2005 and will likely exceed 1500 courses in Fall 2006. There will likely be 2600 courses created in Blackboard through our automated or request process. About 58% of all Blackboard course shells created are made active (Figure 1).

Available Blackboard Course Sites

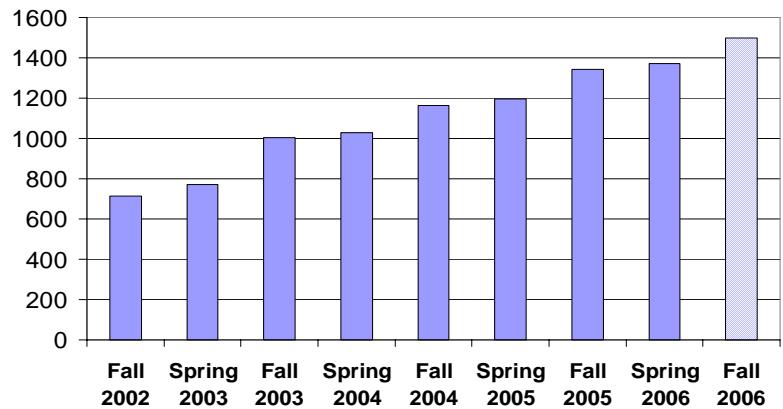


Figure 1 - Growth in Blackboard Use

In tandem with this growth in the number of course sites, the amount of disk space needed to house the Blackboard courses has also grown from only a few gigabytes in 2001 to over 170 GB by Fall 2005 (Figure 2).

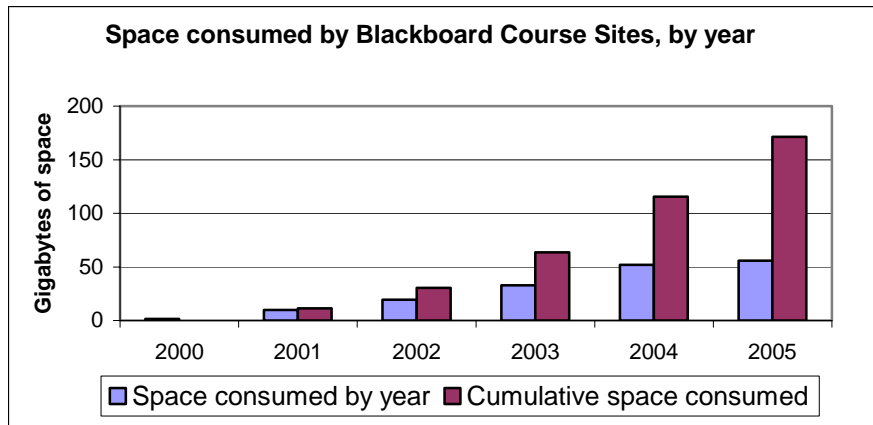


Figure 2 - Disk space consumed by Blackboard courses

Student and Faculty Perspectives

In spring 2006 an online survey was made available to all faculty and students in all active Blackboard course sites. Approximately 600 out of 10,700 students and 30 out of 1642 instructors responded. Due to the relatively small number of instructor respondents, the comments from instructors are unlikely to be representative of the broader opinions and needs of faculty. The primary purpose of these surveys is to gain insight into what students and faculty like about

Blackboard and what changes or additional features they would suggest. Some highlights and interesting findings from these surveys include the following:

- Nearly all student respondents express a wish for faculty to use Blackboard to post grades and feedback throughout the semester and to use Blackboard in other ways to provide more immediate feedback (problem sets with solutions, self-graded quizzes, practice tests, etc.).
- More students expressed interested in the availability of wiki tools than blog tools in Blackboard (51% vs. 33%). The faculty who responded were equally interested in trying blog and wiki tools.
- Several faculty suggested that it would be helpful to be able to send emails to students directly from the gradebook page.
- When asked to identify Blackboard tools useful in all or most courses, students most frequently identified the online gradebook, ungraded practice problem sets, links to e-reserves, and graded quizzes and tests. Most students rated the use of the discussion board and live chat lower than these tools.
- When faculty and students were presented with a list of potential enhancements to Blackboard and asked to rank these, both groups rated “Customized notification alerts for new content” highly and rated “Linking Blackboard to a Duke e-portfolio system” as least important.

Significant milestones in AY 2005 - 2006

- Integration with Peoplesoft online gradebook through custom Building Block (A Building Block™ is a custom extension to the Blackboard system based on supported software programming interfaces to the system)
- Improved automation to streamline the integration of e-reserves within Blackboard using Building Block technology
- Upgrade to version 6, application pack 2
- Licensing of commercial Building Blocks from Learning Objects, Inc, to add blog (Journal LX) and wiki (Teams LX) functionality
- Improved automation to streamline administrative processes and provide better customer response with Duke Create User Building Block
- Planning for impact of content storage needs under Duke Digital Initiative
- Successful monitoring of large files impact on system performance
- Increased file size limits for some courses under Duke Digital Initiative
- Identification of performance issue in version 6, application pack 3, and resolution with vendor

Completed activities in AY 2006 - 2007, to date

- Increased file size upload to 25MB for all courses
- Ongoing support for some courses involved in the Duke Digital Initiative
- Lextopia plug-in for Blackboard to support DukeCapture service
- Upgrade to version 6, application pack 3

Under review for 2006 - 2007

- Blackboard support web site usability evaluation (in progress)
- Investigation of upgrade to Blackboard 7
- Continued monitoring of Brownstone EDU (assessment tool) from Horizon Wimba for potential pilot integration with Blackboard

- Exploration of Content Storage and Management issues in collaboration with other campus technology initiatives
- Development of Building Block (extension) to enable faculty to enroll students for auditing classes that dropped the class during drop/add. Currently requires escalation to system administrators.
- Exploration of Building Blocks that meet user needs and that fit in with increased use of digital media and distribution technologies (podcasting, rss aggregation, etc)
- Ongoing monitoring of Building Blocks and integration extensions that might meet student and faculty needs
- Engage in continued discussion of Content Retention Policy with other groups managing enterprise academic tools (OIT)
- Monitor status of vendor, Blackboard, Inc. and alternative Learning Management System (LMS) solutions. Blackboard, Inc. recently completed a merger with WebCT. At the time of acquisition WebCT had been Blackboard's most successful competitor with respect to market share in the Learning Management System space. Also, Blackboard, Inc. recently procured a software technology patent and subsequently brought a lawsuit against Desire2Learn, a remaining commercial competitor. Moodle and Sakai both garner interest as leading open source alternative LMS's