Overview
This note is an update on Blackboard status written for the Blackboard Advisory Committee meeting of 3 Sept 2009.

Meeting agenda (revised)
- Information: Bb 9 status review
- Information: Bb disk space upgrade plans
- Information/discussion: Downtime schedule for fall 2009
- Emergency preparedness: H1N1, possible strike, etc.
- Moodle pilot project discussion and planning
- Additional topics per group interest
- Time permitting, updates from the Bb World conference

Summer status report

Regularly scheduled and unscheduled downtime
Blackboard was down as scheduled for upgrade on August 22, from 8am until about 4pm. Tim installed Blackboard LEARN, aka Blackboard 9.

We experienced one significant outage this summer, on 4 Aug from 2:10am - 7:30am. We also experienced a 5 minute downtime on 12 Aug. Unfortunately, this rather spoils our almost perfect downtime record for the year, with a total of 340 min of unscheduled downtime so far this calendar year. We had been close to the seldom-achieved “4 nines” uptime; we are now at 99.90% for the calendar year.

In addition, there have been several occasions when systems on which some blackboard users depend were unavailable. In particular, the WebAssign servers (WebAssign is an external service used primarily in Chemistry and until recently in Mathematics) were down for an extended period this summer, as was the server that supports Amiga and Voiceboards communications tools.

Upgrade notes
Although the Blackboard upgrade went smoothly, we have had a large number of issues and questions in the last 2 weeks. See the handout, “UO BB 9 upgrade information” for some of the issues that are particularly relevant to instructors starting to use the new system. Overall, the trouble ticketing system (blackboard@ithelp.uoregon.edu) logged 70 tickets between Aug 22 and Sept 1, or about 8 per day. That’s more than double our usual rate of trouble tickets. Perhaps the most serious reported problem was that copying courses from previous terms did not work (unless the instructor did it twice). We worked with Blackboard, who provided a fix which we installed on 2 Sep.

We also offered two workshops on the new system, one for Law faculty and one for faculty generally.

Decisions from last term
Several policy questions were discussed at our spring meeting. The committee concluded:

- Should we change the default for courses to "available”? NOT AT THIS TIME
• Student names in Blackboard: should we use nicknames ("preferred name") rather than first names? NO

**Upcoming events of plans**

**File server upgrade**
I’m pleased to report that we have finally resolved the long-standing problem with file storage. After exploring a large number of options we developed a plan that essentially replicates the current replicated NAS file server architecture but with hardware that is much more modern than the 4 and 5 year old servers we are currently using. The new servers increase file capacity from approx. 1.2 TB per server to 4 TB. Although this space increase is not huge, it should be adequate at least for 2 to 3 years, and the cost of the upgrade, about $10,500, was within our limited budget.

Hardware was delivered in early August, and has been mounted in racks in the library Computer Room. It is scheduled to be placed into production on Sept. 12, replacing the existing file servers.

The newer of the existing servers is expected to be repurposed as the experimental Moodle system. The older server will likely be surplused or used to upgrade our Scholars’ Bank institutional repository

**Moodle planning**
We had hoped to be ready to do a pilot project evaluating Moodle as a blackboard add-on this fall. Unfortunately, the large number of issues surrounding the BB 9 and file server upgrades have meant that we will not be ready to run even an experimental Moodle server by the start of fall term. As a result, our current recommendation is that we proceed at a pace that makes it likely that we’ll be able to offer a successful pilot project: we are currently planning to have a Moodle test service in operation in October, and to be ready to do a pilot project with a small number of courses starting Winter term.

In our initial implementation, Moodle would run on a separate server but students would log in to it through Blackboard; Moodle courses would appear in the list of student courses in Blackboard and be displayed in a Bb frame. In a future version we expect much more integration with Blackboard.

**Downtime schedule**
For the current announced downtime schedule through 2009, plus criteria we use to schedule downtime, see [http://libweb.uoregon.edu/scis/blackboard/schedule.html](http://libweb.uoregon.edu/scis/blackboard/schedule.html). Actual plans for downtime this fall include:

- Sept 12 – perform database maintenance, upgrade bbnas (file servers), and install a critical security hotfix from Blackboard. Expected downtime, 7 to 10 hours
- Oct 10 – tentative, emergency upgrade only
- Nov 14 – tentative, emergency upgrade only
- Dec 28-29 – upgrade to Bb 9 SP2

In addition, there is some possibility that campus electrical work during the week of Sept 13 will require emergency (but we hope scheduled) downtime if the electricians need to shut off power in Knight Library for more than a few minutes.

The upgrade plans for Christmas week are still quite fluid. They depend on Blackboard Inc. successfully delivering service pack 2 in timely fashion and on availability of staff. There has been some discussion of closing the university during that week, which might result in a change in plans. A two day outage is unlikely; most likely is an outage all day Dec 28.

As in the past, we are committed to providing long lead time for any scheduled downtime, and do not anticipate adding further downtime this fall.
Risks
In addition to the risks associated with the hardware upgrade on Sept 12 and electrical upgrades the following week, we note several significant possibilities that need to be planned for.

First, we at this time do not know for sure that the university’s negotiations with the SEIU will be successfully concluded. If not, there is a possibility that there will be a strike in late October. This strike would imply at a minimum that Tim Boshart would be unavailable. We have backup plans in place, but would expect some degradation in service and in timely response to trouble tickets.

Second, we are assessing the causes of the downtime on 4 Aug. The proximate cause was the failure of a fairly old network switch. Network Services is evaluating whether a replacement is needed, and what it would cost us. If replacement is required, this would probably occur during Christmas break.

Third, we are planning for a major outbreak of H1N1 (swine flu) this fall. Depending on the pattern of infection, this will certainly imply that faculty will be more dependent on Blackboard as they marginally increase their use of distance education approaches to deal with large numbers of student absences. Meanwhile, we are preparing for a situation where both Boshart and Johnson simultaneously are out with the flu.

Blackboard training and documentation
Given the large user interface changes in Blackboard 9, we are putting substantial effort into training and documentation. Documentation is currently lagging our software, with some information still reflecting the old version. We have updated most web sites, but information that was copied into fall coursesites when they were created last spring is now incorrect.

As noted at our spring meeting, CMET Consulting will offer one on one assistance with the new Blackboard, though with somewhat reduced hours from years past. Also, since only 2 student staff members are continuing from last year it is not yet clear how comfortable the consulting staff will be with the new system prior to the start of the term.

TEP and SCIS are planning several instructor-training events for September, including:

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<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bb Introduction for New Users</td>
<td>Sep 15</td>
<td>10am</td>
<td>Knight 42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bb 9.0: New Version Training</td>
<td>Sep 16</td>
<td>10am</td>
<td>Knight 41</td>
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<td>Bb Grade Center</td>
<td>Sep 18</td>
<td>10am</td>
<td>Knight 41</td>
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<td>Bb Assignments and Assessment</td>
<td>Sep 21</td>
<td>10am</td>
<td>Knight 42</td>
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<td>Bb Blogs and Journaling</td>
<td>Sep 22</td>
<td>10am</td>
<td>Knight 41</td>
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<td>Bb Intro for New Users</td>
<td>Sep 23</td>
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<td>Bb Discussion Board</td>
<td>Sep 24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bb Intro for New Users</td>
<td>Sep 24</td>
<td>1pm</td>
<td>Knight 41</td>
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In addition, JQ will teach additional customized introductions to Blackboard on request by departments, including one currently scheduled for OEMBA students on Sept 10 and one on Oct 7 for library computer help desk staff.

Issues for discussion
We are unlikely to cover most of these topics at our September meeting. However, here are a few general topics that would benefit from wider discussion within the advisory committee. Committee members who have thoughts on topics that we don’t get to in our meeting should email them either to JQ or to the group as a whole.
Blackboard 9
What should the library be doing to smooth the transition to Bb 9?

Moodle
What is the best approach for evaluating and perhaps deploying moodle as a part of our CMS strategy?

H1N1 Planning
The provost’s office convened a small group to look at instructional continuity in response to a major swine flu epidemic at UO. This group was represented mostly by Information Services and Library, and its advice would benefit from more input from instructional faculty. What should UO be doing given limited resources to make effective use of technology as a response to a significant H1N1 outbreak?

Student Facebooks
Our committee has been interested in providing student facebooks through blackboard, but I erroneously claimed that including a student facebook in Blackboard isn't technically feasible. The new Bb 9 in fact does offer support for collecting student images. Students can optionally load an image of themselves into the new "My Places" screen, and it will be used in a variety of places throughout the Bb interface, e.g. as an avatar attached to their blog postings for individual courses. An instructor can now fairly easily create an individual blog in her coursesite, perhaps instructing students to introduce themselves to their classmates, and use it to display student avatars. Should we be encouraging this use of Blackboard? How should we (instructors and administration) handle students who load inappropriate/nonsense images?

Early Warning System?
As noted in email, much interest has recently been generated in Purdue’s use of the CMS as an early warning system. See http://news.uns.purdue.edu/x/2009b/090827ArnoldSignals.html. Is the Advisory Committee interested in looking at this more closely? Since UO currently doesn't impose much structure on the way faculty use blackboard it might be harder for us to implement something like this than it was for Purdue. Their system works best if one can count on having a reasonable number of large intro courses that use blackboard in more or less the same way to communicate course grades.

Blackboard, by the way, has a quite nice "early warning system" built in. It works a bit differently from the Purdue model, without the graphical R/Y/G stoplight. It's a rule-driven communication tool that sends email messages to students when the rule is triggered. Rules are written by instructors and can be based on a test score, a missed due date, or Course access. Are there large introductory courses that would be interested in experimenting with the Early Warning System? If we got successful implementation in one or two large courses we could then expand to more courses.

MobilEdu?
Blackboard recently purchased the company MobilEdu. This is the company that developed the iStanford and iDuke iphone applications – tools for students and community members to access a wide variety of resources about the university with a very convenient handheld interface. MobilEdu has been working in particular at offering an interface to course information, either as an extension of the Blackboard core product or potentially as an alternative. How should the UO be evaluating this type of application? Does it have potential to replace systems like Blackboard LEARN or Moodle with a new paradigm for interaction that makes those two look essentially identical?

Downtime schedule
The Blackboard downtime schedule was largely predicated on the idea that there are periods during the year when classes are not meeting, and that these are the best times for potentially disruptive and user-visible upgrades. That is becoming less and less true. Even Christmas break will have classes meeting online if the university is open at all. Is it time to revise criteria for downtime and major upgrades? What should the downtime schedule be for 2010?