I'm not good at taking minutes, but I wanted to send to the group a few notes from yesterday's Blackboard meeting. I thought it was a really excellent meeting, and one that I got a lot out of, in part because it challenged Tim and me in a number of areas.

Attending were Deb Bauer, Tim Boshart, Helen Chu, John Fenn, Pedro Garcia-Caro, Grace Golden, JQ Johnson, Skip McFarlane, Anne van den Nouweland, Deborah Olson, Ken Prehoda, Sean Sharp, Elizabeth Shepard, Robert Voelker-Morris, and Eric Wiltshire.

- We agreed that I'll attempt to add 2 or 3 more faculty members to the committee starting winter term.
- We agreed that there were no obvious problems with the downtime and upgrade schedule described in the fall status report.
- We reviewed the changes coming in BB 9.1. Consensus seemed to be that the changes were generally an improvement but were not major.
- We discussed timing for workshops, e.g. for BB 9.1 upgrade info. We concluded, I think, that the schedule I've announced for the workshops isn't too bad. However, we agreed that more variety in time of day (and particularly morning sessions) would be desirable, as would more variety in location (particularly workshops held in the sciences, e.g. in Science Library). We also need to accommodate Portland attendees by videoconferencing.

Most of our time was spent discussing the Blackboard survey and appropriate responses. I reported that although mean faculty satisfaction with blackboard was in the "average" to "exceeds expectations" range there were quite a few respondents who had strong negative opinions, e.g. about the quality of the user interface. Ken noted that this opinion was widely shared within our committee. We had a good discussion, largely using the difficulty of making a coursesite available as our test case. As someone noted, "doing simple things is hard." Part of that may be due to the power and complexity of the Blackboard system -- not everything can be in the top menu; part of it may be due to a philosophical approach that Blackboard has to user interface design, emphasizing minimization of the number of clicks required to accomplish a task but perhaps not accounting for the difficulty in figuring out how to accomplish the task, particularly for faculty members who use blackboard only occasionally.

I took away a few concrete proposals for things Tim and I can do with the committee's help, among them:

- conduct a survey of student attitudes this spring
- try to avoid gratuitous change to the user interface, since people can get used to suboptimal interfaces
- improve documentation, with a focus on making it easier to find information within the documentation (via better search tools?)
- advertise existing support services, ranging from the video training materials CMET Consulting has developed to the ability to call 6-1942 with a question
- brainstorm new ways to make it easier for instructors to set their coursesites to available at the beginning of the term. I plan a followup email on this topic soon, after we have explored some possibilities.
- look closely at the responses to the faculty survey, and attempt to identify a few other frequently-expressed pain points that we could address.
- work with Blackboard Inc. to make them more aware of our needs. Helen has already contacted our company representative, and we are planning a meeting for him with the BAC, probably for January.

I think I missed some of the concrete suggestions, so would appreciate additions from anyone who has them.

JQ Johnson
Director, Scholarly Communications & Instructional Support
University of Oregon Libraries
1299 University of Oregon T: 1-541-346-1746; F: -3485
From: JQ Johnson <jqj@uoregon.edu>
Date: December 2, 2010 2:28:39 PM PST
To: Blackboard Advisory Committee
Subject: also, a bit of Bb bragging...

Tim just told me that he checked the blackboard system just now, and we had 15,000 users logged in simultaneously, 8,000 of whom were actively using the system as he checked. That means that more than half of the UO community was using Blackboard! He reports that many students in multiple courses were uploading assignments, so there must have been quite a few due dates today.