



## Using the Content System for Group Collaboration

### Introduction

Some of the most valuable features of the *Blackboard Content System* are those that allow users to share documents in group settings. Traditionally, group members maintain multiple copies of similar documents, and email various versions to others in the group. The *Blackboard Content System* greatly simplifies the group collaboration process by providing powerful tools for sharing, versioning and locking files and folders. Workflow Activities can also enhance the traditional process of sharing documents.

### Prerequisites

This document is intended for users who are using the *Blackboard Content System* to manage content. Before referencing this document, users should be familiar with Content System interface and they should be able to complete basic tasks. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- adding, moving, and removing items
- adding and modifying permissions

The following tools must be enabled in order to make use of all features described in this document:

- the Content System tab must be enabled for the intended institution role
- Bookmarks
- Versions
- Locks
- Workflows

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### Create a group folder

Users collaborating in a group often require access to a shared set of documents. A group may be created informally as a collection of users who wish to collaborate, or may be created formally using the course or organization Groups functionality in the *Blackboard Learning System*. The first step to sharing documents is to create a group folder that can be accessed by each member of the group. Creating a group folder is not required (group members can collaborate on a single file), but establishing a specific folder may be helpful for sharing a collection of files. Follow the steps below to create a group folder:

- Step 1** Open the Content System tab, and browse to the location to create the group folder. A common location is within the username folder, such as: /users/jsmith
- Step 2** Select the **Add Folder** button in the Action Bar

- Step 3** Enter a folder name, such as 'Biology Group Folder', and complete the rest of the page.

### Share a group folder

After the group folder is created, the user must provide the appropriate permission to other group members. If Instructor has created Groups in the course, users can share the folder with all members of a Group in a single step. If the Instructor modifies the Group members in the future, the *Blackboard Content System* will automatically share the folder with the updated Group members.

### Share with a course Group

Follow the steps below to share a folder with a course Group:

- Step 1** Select **Permissions** next to the group folder. If **Permissions** is not visible, select **Modify**, then **Permissions**.
- Step 2** From the drop-down list in the Action Bar, select **Course Group User List** (or **Organization Group User List** if the Group belongs to an organization). Select **Go**.
- Step 3** The page displays all course Groups in which the user is enrolled. Select the check box next the Group name with which to share the folder. Multiple Groups may be selected.
- Step 4** Select the appropriate permission check boxes. To grant the group full permissions, select all of the check boxes.

### Share with a user group

If the user would like to share a folder with a group of users that exists outside of a course or organization Group, the folder must be explicitly shared with each group member. Follow the steps below:

- Step 1** Select **Permissions** next to the folder. If **Permissions** is not visible, select **Modify**, then **Permissions**.
- Step 2** Select **Add Users** in the Action Bar.
- Step 3** Enter the username of each group member, separated by commas, in the **Choose Users** field. Click **Browse** to locate unknown usernames.
- Step 4** Select the appropriate permission check boxes for these users. To grant all members of the group full permissions, select all of the check boxes.

### Locate a Group folder

After a user creates the shared folder in the desired location, other group members need a simple way to locate and access the folder. The easiest way to achieve this is for all other group members to create Bookmarks to the folder.

**Note:** The creator of the group folder should inform each group member of the folder location.

Follow the steps below to create a Bookmark:

- Step 1** Open the Content System tab, and click **Bookmarks** in the **Tools** area.
- Step 2** Select **Add Bookmark** in the Action Bar.
- Step 3** Enter a Bookmark name.
- Step 4** Enter the location of the Bookmark, such as:  
/users/jsmith/Biology Group Folder (note the forward slashes: / )  
Bookmark locations are case-sensitive.

Once the Bookmark is created, the user selects **Bookmarks** in the Content System Menu, and then clicks the Bookmark name to access the shared group folder. The creator of the group folder may

access the folder directly through his or her username folder. If all group members have been granted full permissions, they may add, modify, and remove any file or folder within the group folder.

**Note:** Users may also locate the group folder by selecting **Search** in the Tools area.

## **Collaborate on documents**

The *Blackboard Content System* includes numerous tools that allow users to collaborate on group projects.

### **Versioning**

Versioning keeps track of every saved instance of a file to make it easy to roll back to a previous draft. The versioning feature creates a history of the changes that have been made to a document.

For example, a group collaborates on a final research paper and many modifications are made throughout the semester. One group member accidentally deletes an important graph from the document. Fortunately, the graph exists in a previous version of the document, so the group can easily retrieve the graph from the version history.

For more information on versioning, please see the **Manage Versions** section of the *Blackboard Content System User Manual*.

### **Workflow**

Group members may take advantage of Workflows in the *Blackboard Content System*. Workflows allow users to assign tasks to other users and request a specific action in return.

For example, a group of students is collaborating on a final project. After creating the outline of the project, the group seeks feedback from the Instructor to determine if the outline meets the Instructor's expectations. A group member creates a Review Workflow Activity, indicates the priority and deadline, and sends it to the Instructor. The Instructor receives the Workflow Activity, reviews the outline, and returns the Workflow to the group. All of this activity occurs inside the *Blackboard Content System* (in the **Workflow Activities** section of the **Tools** area), without the need for email and attachments.

For more information on versioning, please see the **Manage Workflow Activities** section of the *Blackboard Content System User Manual*.

### **Locks**

A lock on a folder secures the folder itself (name and settings) from changes. Locking the folder and all its contents protects both the folder itself and the materials it contains. A group member can use locks to ensure that other group members do not access the folder while its files are open for modification. For example, one group member opens up the group folder to edit multiple documents throughout the day. In order to prevent other group members from making changes to documents while work is being done (thus overwriting the modifications), the user creates a lock on the folder and all the files within it. Follow the steps below to lock a folder and all of its contents:

- Step 1** Open the Content System tab and locate the folder to be locked.
- Step 2** Select **Modify** next to the folder name, and then select **Properties**.
- Step 3** In the **Lock Options** section, select **Lock this folder and everything it contains**.

After creating the lock, any user with at least Read permission can continue to read the files in the folder. However, the lock prevents another user from making changes to the items in the folder, even if that user has Write permission on the item. After the changes are complete, the user that created the lock must remove it in order to allow other group members to resume full access. Locks may also be created on individual files, rather than on an entire folder.

### Comments

Group members may use the Comments feature to share information on items. For example, one group member writes the draft of final research paper. Another member edits the draft and adds comments for other group members to review. In essence, the Manage Comments area may be used as a discussion area for files and folders.

For more information on Comments, please see the **Comments** section of the *Blackboard Content System User Manual*.

### Tracking

Group members may enable Tracking to view the history of all interactions with a file. The Tracking log indicates information such as when a group member reads or modifies a file.

For more information on Tracking, please see the **Tracking** section of the *Blackboard Content System User Manual*.

## **Additional Documentation**

The following related documents are also available:

- *Blackboard Content System User Manual*

These and other Blackboard documents can be found on the Behind the Blackboard extranet. Use the following URL to access Behind the Blackboard:

<http://www.blackboard.com/products/services/support.htm>

A login is required to access Behind the Blackboard. Users may create their own login for roles other than Administrator. Administrators must receive their Behind the Blackboard login from their Blackboard Account Manager.

## **Updates and Additions**

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