Delivering Documents to your Students

A popular uses of a Blackboard for hybrid courses, is the dissemination of course materials to students. Students may also use Blackboard to turn in or deliver assignments to faculty or fellow class members. Many questions to Ask Dr. C from students revolve around the inability to download or view some course materials the instructor has posted. Usually the problem is simply that the student does not have the correct software or latest software to view the file. Here are a few tips and best practices to make your posting of course materials a success.

How files in Blackboard work

Blackboard is a web application that in reality can accept and store just about any type of file you upload into it.   Just because you can upload a file, does not mean your students can view it. Web Browsers (i.e. Firefox, Internet Explorer, Safari) are built to interpret and display a small group of files. This includes Web pages (HTML) , and a few images (jpg, png, gif). Everything else must be viewed with a special 3rd party plug-in, or program. If you upload a Microsoft Power Point Document , then your students must have Microsoft PowerPoint or the free PowerPoint viewer installed on their computer to view the presentation. Uploading these types of files into Blackboard is ok, just realize that your students must have software installed to view or edit them. Next to the link for the file, put a note about what type the file is. If free viewers are available, then simply provide a link to the viewer.

Creating Web Friendly Documents – PDF files

Creating Web friendly documents is the best way distribute course materials to your students. The Adobe Portable Document Format, also known as PDF is the standard for document distribution, on the web. Creating a PDF is as simple as printing a document. Most all of the PDF creation utilities install as a printer driver. You can use your favorite software to create the document in it's native form, then using the print option, create a PDF document of it. A few programs have the PDF option built in, or available via download as a free option. You can use the official Adobe Acrobat Professional. There are also many free PDF utilities available including …

Cute PDF

PrimoPDF

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Creating PDF files from PowerPoint.

Creating PDF versions of your PowerPoint lecture files is a great way to distribute them to your students. One of the biggest advantages will be file size, and will result in faster download times. In PowerPoint, there are options to print the presentation

as full page color or black and white slides. You can also create handouts with 1, 2, 3, 6 or more slides per page. A very useful option is the 3 slides per page handout option, that also creates room for students to take notes.   You simply choose print, then choose the option of three slides per page, and make sure to choose the PDF writer in the option of printers.

Some programs including Open Office and Microsoft Office 2007 (PC) and 2008 (MAC) have an option to save as a PDF built in. Office 2007 may require you to download the option from the Office 2007 website.

Conclusion

The large majority of computers will have the Adobe Acrobat Reader, already installed on their computer. PDF files have become the second most used document on the web behind native HTML or web pages. Distributing PDF files will make it possible for your students to have easy access to course materials. PDF files will be a lot smaller than the original file, and will allow your students to have access to your content without having to worry about knowing what program your document was created in.