Blackboard®

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Overview of the Blackboard Learn™ 9.1 Q2 2017 and Q4 2017 releases

The latest releases for Blackboard Learn 9.1 (the Original experience for managed and self-hosted institutions) have delivered many new features and enhancements that significantly improve:

- Overall quality and infrastructure
- User experience including mobility, accessibility, and look & feel
- Efficiency and ease of use
- Assessment and grading

By upgrading from the Q4 2016 release to the Q4 2017 release of Learn, your institution will benefit from an environment that is easier to use, more responsive on mobile devices, higher quality, and more powerful – which means happier, more successful educators and students.

The following release highlights were delivered in the Q4 2017 and Q2 2017 releases.

Quality & Infrastructure

We have doubled down on our commitment to delivering strong product quality and providing a stable, reliable experience for educators and students using Learn. In these releases, we have:
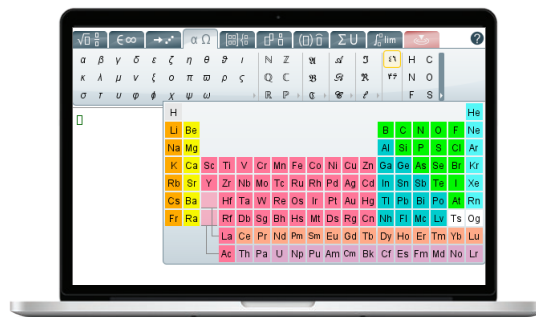
- Addressed the top client-reported issues that were affecting the largest number of users
- Updated the technology that Learn runs on to ensure a stable and secure product, including JAVA, Tomcat, SCORM engine, ActiveMQ, and more
- Made changes to simplify Learn upgrades and make them more reliable, including:
  - Continuing improvements to the new installer
  - Reducing code dependency issues that were found in prior maintenance processes to improve stability
  - Improving the maintenance process so that more requested fixes can be delivered more quickly to currently supported versions
  - Reducing downtime for upgrades and server startups
- Introduced support for Caliper Analytics – a standard from IMS Global for exchanging activity data for analytics purposes – for self-hosted institutions (already available for managed-hosted institutions)
- Introduced additional REST services

User Experience

- **Greater responsiveness for the Learn 2016 theme** (Q2 2017 & Q4 2017) – Instructors and students alike will enjoy an improved mobile experience as each release has introduced responsiveness to additional areas of Learn. For example, in the Q4 2017 release, system and course level navigation as well as blogs and journals were optimized for mobile devices.

- **Blackboard Ally, a solution for better accessibility** (Q2 2017) – Greatly improve content accessibility by integrating this new service into Learn. Ally provides instructors an accessibility score for their content and suggests ways to improve the accessibility of materials. Students can download automatically-generated alternative versions of uploaded files, such as accessible HTML, digital braille, and audio format files. Administrators can view accessibility scores of materials across courses and track changes over time to plan, measure, and improve accessibility. Blackboard Ally license is required.

- **Additional accessibility enhancements** (Q4 2017) – ARIA landmarks have been incorporated in the course menu and the content area to better define the page structure and assist users with screen readers in navigating page elements. Additionally, the first-time user overlay has been removed to improve accessibility for users.

- **Chemistry notation support** (Q4 2017) The math editor found in the Content Editor now includes tools specific to chemistry, like an embedded periodic table of elements.

- **Blackboard app download module** (Q4 2017) – Increase student engagement by driving adoption of the Blackboard app for students. A new module called "Download Blackboard's Student App Today" helps students discover and quickly download the app.
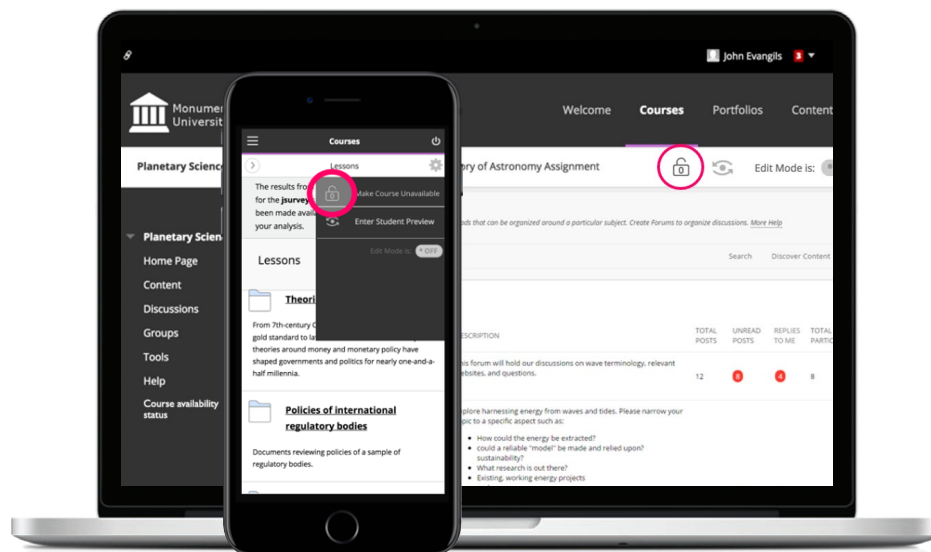

- **Collaborate Ultra sessions for groups** (Q4 2017) – Improve collaboration among students in a group by adding real-time, face-to-face web conferencing functionality. Instructors can choose to add Collaborate Ultra sessions to Group pages. Blackboard Collaborate license is required.
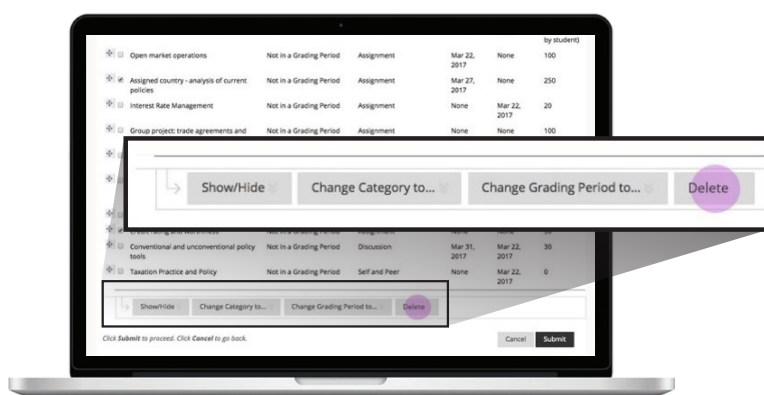
Efficiency

- **Course availability status** (Q4 2017) – From the main course view, instructors and other privileged users can now easily see the availability of the course to students and quickly change the availability, saving both time and effort.

- **Discussion board "replies to me"** (Q4 2017) – Keeping up with large discussion board forums is made easier by giving users a "New Reply" count and filter so unread replies to their posts can be easily identified and read.

- **Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI) deep linking** (Q4 2017) – The Content Item Message specification is now supported, offering users a more seamless experience when linking or integrating with tool providers who also support this standard. Instructors and course designers can create links to specific resources without knowing and specifying resource IDs. Instead, they can launch into the tool provider's user experience, select resources to add to their course, and the individual links are created in the correct place in the course. Students clicking the links will be taken directly to the specific resource rather than to a generic tool page for the tool provider.

- **LTI improved launch experience** (Q4 2017) LTI links now open in a lightbox within the course, rather than directing users to a new window or tab, creating a more seamless workflow for students.

- **Email tool recipient permissions** (Q4 2017) Administrators now have greater control in defining the extent to which students in courses can contact one another using the Email tool. This eliminates the burden on instructors and drives greater efficiency for administrators.

- **Additional drag and drop locations** (Q2 2017) – The ability to drag and drop files has now been added to the Content Collection, content editor, blog, journal, and portfolio features. If the browser allows, users can also drag a folder of files and the files will upload individually.

Course availability status

Assessment & Grading

- **Delete multiple gradebook columns** (Q4 2017) – The #1 requested feature in our Spring voting on the Community Site, instructors can now delete multiple gradebook columns at once making managing the gradebook even easier. When deleted, manual and calculated columns are removed completely; columns associated with gradable items are cleared of attempt and grade data, but remain in the Grade Center.

- **Grade display standardization** (Q4 2017) – To provide greater consistency, all gradebook columns (online and downloads) and My Grades now support up to five decimal points, are not rounded, and are consistent for all display types (score, percentage, letter grade).

- **Submission receipts enhancement** (Q2 2017) – Students can receive a notification email for each assignment attempt with information about the submission including attached files. Students can also access receipts at any time on the My Grades page.

- **Outcomes Assessment: evidence sampling by demographic** (Q2 2017) – When collecting and sampling previously-submitted student assignments for a secondary program evaluation process, assignments can now be sampled by student demographic information. Assessment coordinators can sample by the education level field or institution roles. Sampling by institution roles allows Boolean AND/OR selection for enhanced search.

For more details on the contents of each release, see the Release Notes on **help.blackboard.com**. Visit the **Blackboard Community** Site to join other institutions in the **Upgrade Club**. Plus, provide your product suggestions and vote on ideas for our upcoming releases in the **Blackboard Idea Exchange**.