Blackboard®

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Overview of the Blackboard Learn™ 9.1 Q2 2016 through Q2 2017 releases

The latest releases for Blackboard Learn 9.1 (the Original experience) 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 to the latest release of Blackboard Learn, your institution will benefit from a learning 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 Q2 2017, Q4 2016, and Q2 2016 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, BIRT reporting engine, ActiveMQ, and more

- Made changes to simplify Learn upgrades and make them more reliable, including:
  - Introducing a 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

These efforts have led to a series of high-quality, stable releases. We also introduced support for REST APIs in 2016. Administrators and developers can now create integrations using REST APIs and secured with OAuth.
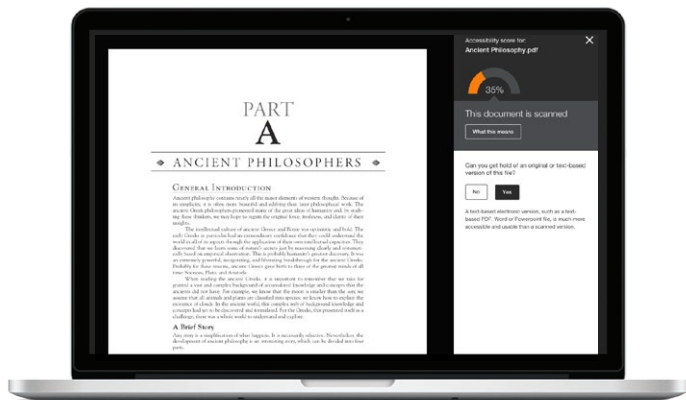
User Experience (Mobility & Accessibility)

- **Learn 2016 theme with greater responsiveness** (introduced in Q2 2016, enhanced in Q4 2016 & Q2 2017) – Enhance the overall look and feel of Learn with this new, optional theme. Updated colors, fonts, and spacing provide greater consistency between Learn, Collaborate, and the Bb Student mobile app. Plus, greater responsiveness of the interface provides a much improved, more enjoyable mobile experience.

- **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.

Efficiency

- **Drag and drop files** (introduced in Q4 2016, enhanced in Q2 2017) – When instructors create content items, assignments, and web links, they can quickly and easily drag files from their desktop to the "hot spot" in the Attach Files area. Students can drag files to upload when they submit assignments. The drag and drop capability has 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.

- **Grades Journey** (enhanced in Q4 2016) – With this enhancement, the exchange of assignment and grade data between your SIS and Learn is made even easier. Improvements have been made to how users manage grade columns and read grade data from merged sections. Plus, institutions using flat file or REST in addition to LIS integration types can now retrieve just the external grade column. New column filtering and column mapping capabilities also make it easier to integrate with various student information systems.

- **Dropbox integration** (Q4 2016) – Using this new cloud service integration, instructors and students can link to their Dropbox content directly from Learn using the mashup menu found in most content creation workflows.

- **Course activity report enhancement** (Q4 2016) – To better support instructors with large enrollment courses, this report can now be filtered to break down the calculations of student activity by course groups.

Assessment & Grading

- **Submission receipts** (introduced in Q4 2016, enhanced in Q2 2017) – Keep track of all student submissions, regardless of whether the attempt or assignment is deleted or the submission history is changed. A submission receipt gives students assurance about their work and can provide evidence for academic disputes. 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.

- **Missing coursework reminders** (Q4 2016) Instructors can send email reminders from Grade Center columns to students and members of groups who have missing coursework. Students receive a system-generated email that lists the course, coursework, and the due date, if included.

- **Needs grading improvements** (Q4 2016) When multiple-attempt assessments are set to calculate using the first or last attempt, a new filter is available both in the Needs Grading workflow as well as within the Grade Center to show or hide other non-counted attempts. Attempts that won't calculate towards the assessment grade are indicated with an icon.

- **MOSAIC & O*NET standards** (Q2 2016) – For institutions who wish to evaluate student work or align their curriculum against either the Multipurpose Occupational Systems Analysis Inventory - Close-Ended (MOSAIC) or Occupational Information Network (O*NET) competencies, these competencies are available for download.

- **VALUE rubrics** (Q2 2016) – As part of the Association of American Colleges & Universities' (AAC&U's) Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative, the VALUE rubrics contribute to the national dialogue on assessment of college student learning. Educational professionals from over 100 higher education institutions collaboratively developed 16 VALUE rubrics to use the most frequently identified characteristics for measuring success in key learning outcomes. Each rubric has been built and formatted appropriately so it can be imported to your courses and used anywhere you can align and evaluate with rubrics today.

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**.