Exploring the Blackboard Course Environment

In order to be successful in an online course, it is important to familiarize yourself with the overall structure and elements of the environment in which you will be learning. For instance, you most likely know how to find your way to the library when in need of resources. The information below will help you identify the major areas of the course environment, along with the various types of content that may be used within a course.

Topic	What's Covered
Universal Navigation	The tabs and buttons in top area of the Blackboard system are referred to as universal navigation since they stay with you no matter where you are in Blackboard
Course Menu	Once you enter your course, there is a list of links located on the left side of the screen. This is your course menu and the main navigation for all Blackboard courses and organizations
Working with the Course Menu	Deals with expanding and collapsing the course menu for better content visibility
Course Module Page	Explains more about the course dashboard where you can find course alerts and announcements
Types of Blackboard Content	Learn more about the different types of content that might be presented in a Blackboard course

Blackboard Universal Navigation

You will notice that even within a course, the top area remains the same. We refer to the tabs and buttons in that area as universal navigation since they stay with you no matter where you are in Blackboard. To the left will always be your **Course Menu** and

to the right will always be where the course content will be displayed. When you click on a menu item on the left, the area to the right changes.

The Course Menu

Once you have entered a Blackboard course, you will see a list of links down the left hand side of the screen. This is known as the **Course Menu**. Use these links to access and view various areas of the course. Each Course Menu may vary slightly depending on your instructor's preferences. As such, your courses may look a bit different from each other and have different sets of tools available.

Instructors customarily will group related items together under a particular navigation link. For example, the syllabus, course policies and schedule might be found in a section called Course Information. Handouts, assignments, and lecture notes might be found under a link titled Lesson One, Chapter Materials, or Course Documents. Within these areas, you will typically find your assigned learning materials in the form of text, graphics, and files.

Important Note:

Course Menu Customization
Instructors can customize the names the content and tools on their course menu. Keep this in mind as you go through your online courses. Some tools, like Blackboard Messages or the Course Module Page, may have a name relevant to the structure of the course and not necessarily the name of the tool itself.

At the top of the Course Menu is a set of icons that can be used to change the Course Menu.

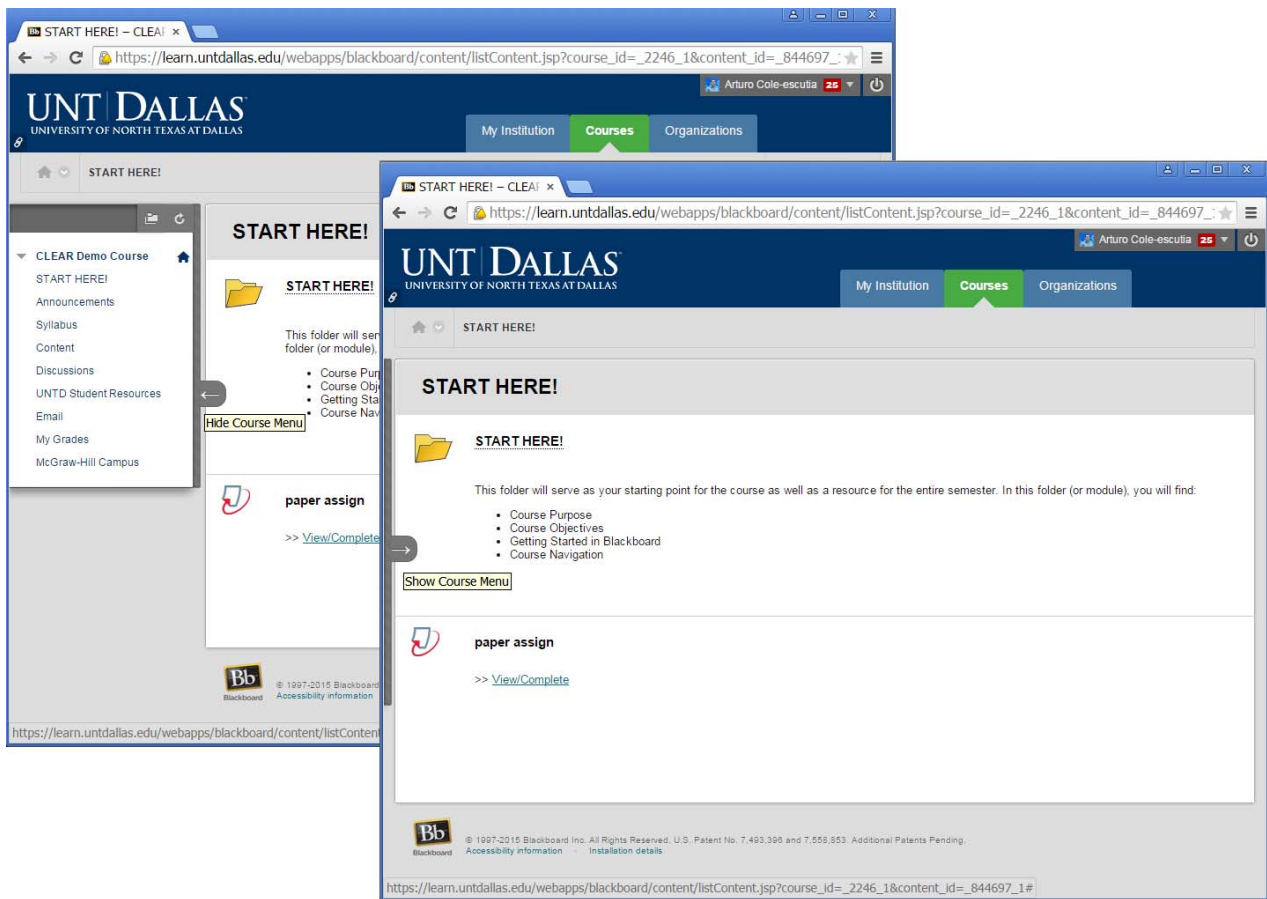| Course Menu Icons	
☰	Presents the Course Menu in List View. The links to various areas in the course are listed as text links or buttons.
📁	Presents the Course Menu in Folder View. The links to the various areas in the course are represented as folders that can be expanded to reveal items and collapsed to save space.
🗗	Opens the Course Menu in a separate window, referred to as the Course Map.
↻	Refreshes the Course Menu to see any new content.

On the first day of the new term, it is a good idea to click each link on your Course Menu and explore each area. You should soon see a pattern emerge which will help you know where to find the particular information you are looking for. If you have questions regarding the course structure or organizations, contact your instructor for clarification.

Below are four different examples of Course Menus design and organization. The differences between these course menus are similar to the differences you might see in the set-up of the classrooms on campus. The layout may vary between your courses, but they will function roughly the same.
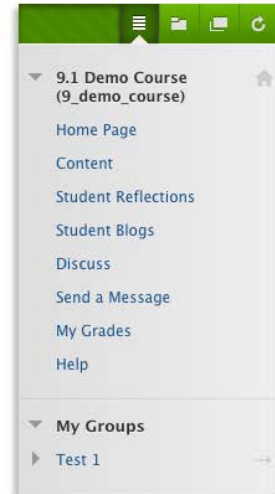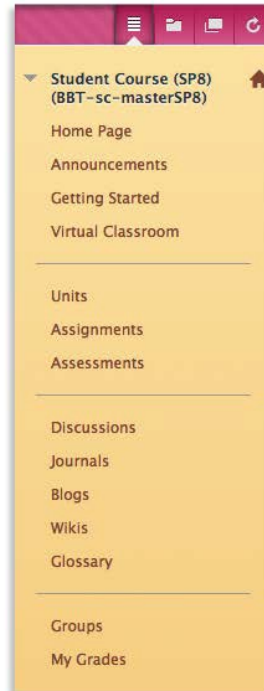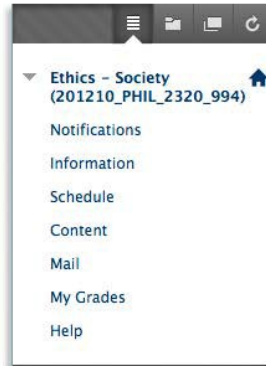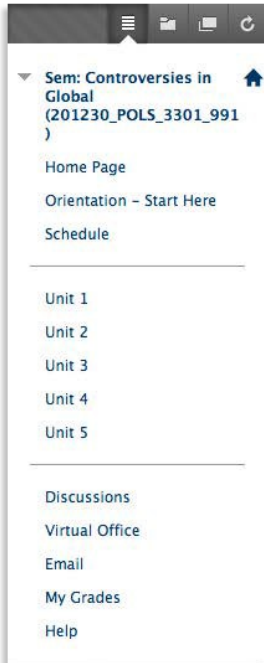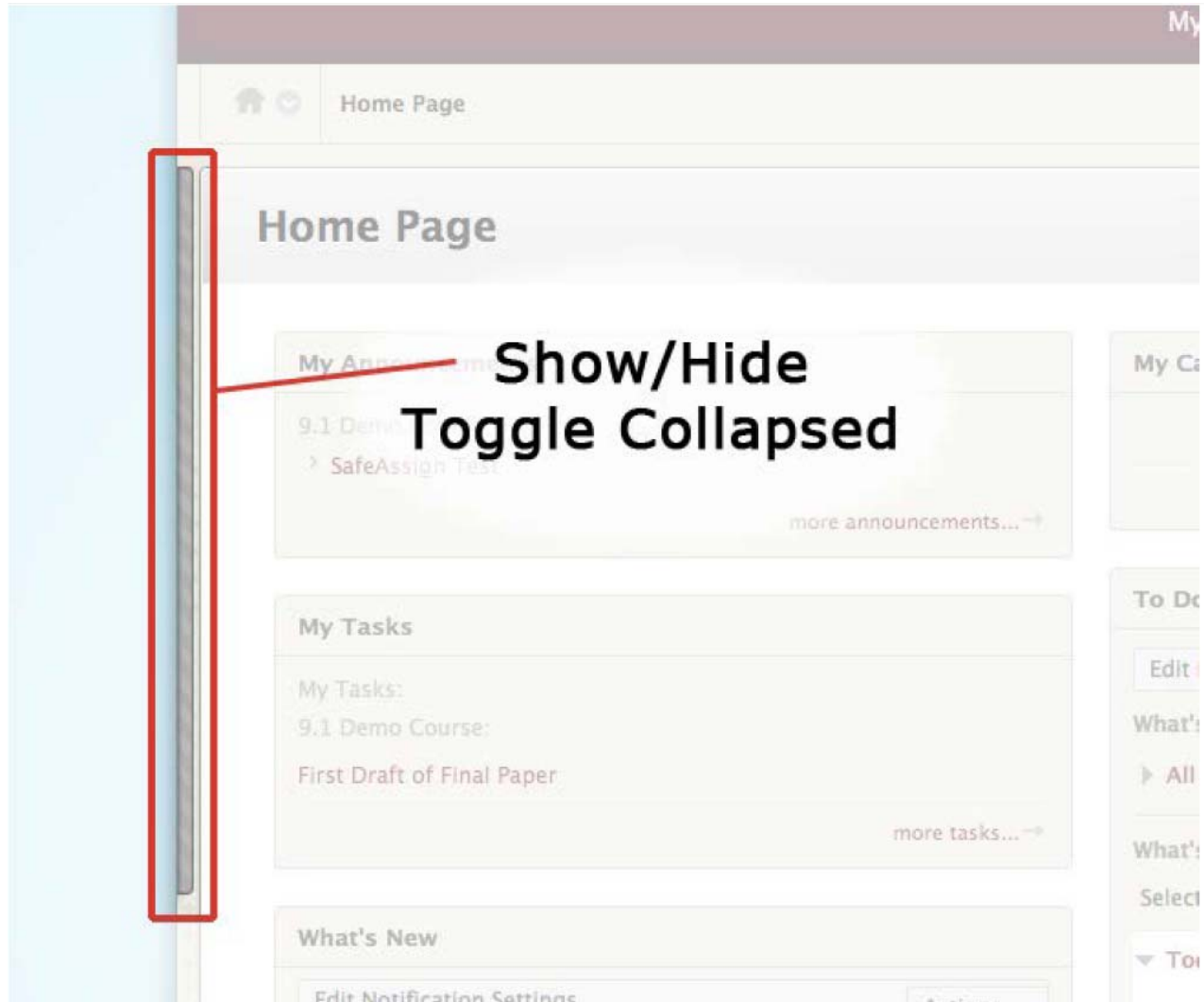
Working with the Course Menu

The **Course Menu** is the primary navigation feature in every Blackboard course. In certain situations, it may be necessary to collapse the course menu to increase the viewing area of the course content. Some learning objects (i.e. content items, learning modules, etc.) will auto-collapse the course menu to make the content easier to read.

When the Course Menu is expanded, the **Show/Hide Course Menu toggle** is located between the course menu and the main content area. If you hover your mouse near this area, you will see a dark grey bar. **Click the Show/Hide Course Menu toggle to collapse the course menu**.

The Show/Hide
Course Menu Toggle
(normal and mouse-over)
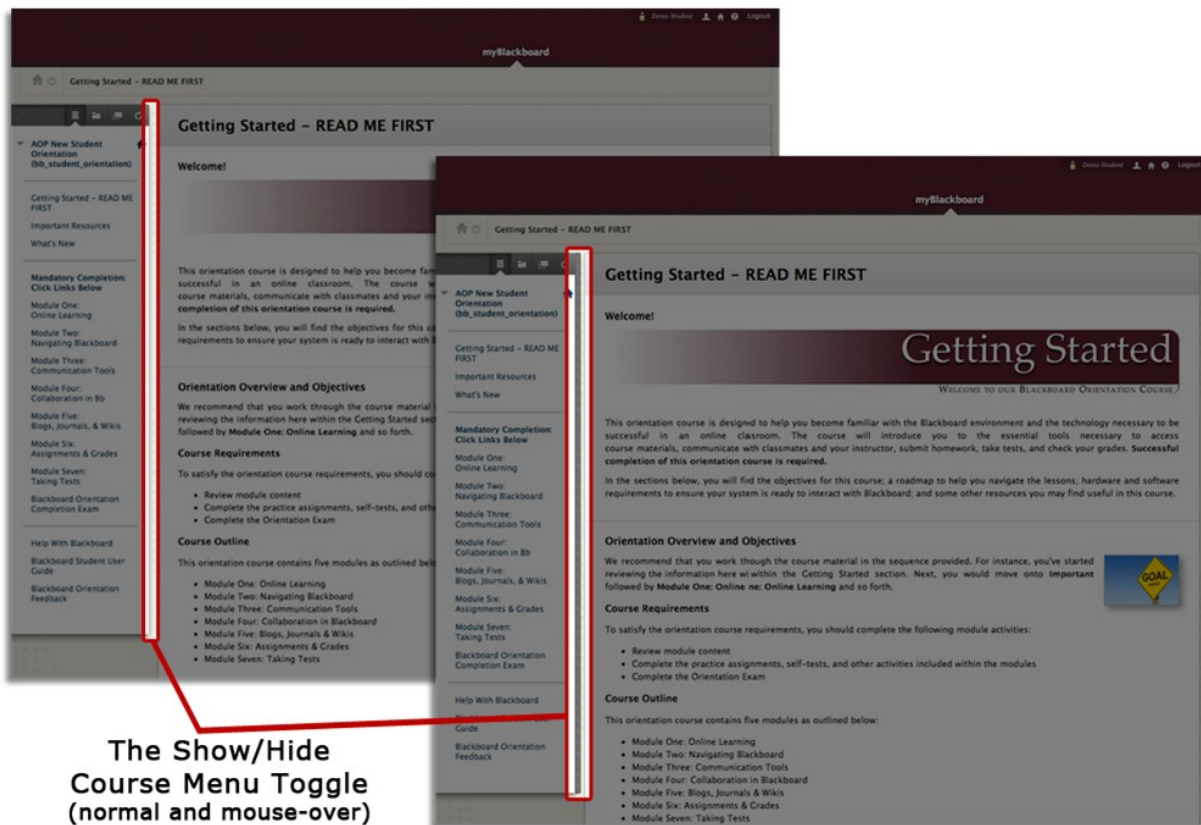
When the course menu is collapsed, the Show/Hide Course Menu toggle will be located along the edge of your browser window. It will appear as a light grey striped bar. **Click the Show/Hide Course Menu toggle to expand the course menu**.

Show/Hide Toggle Collapsed
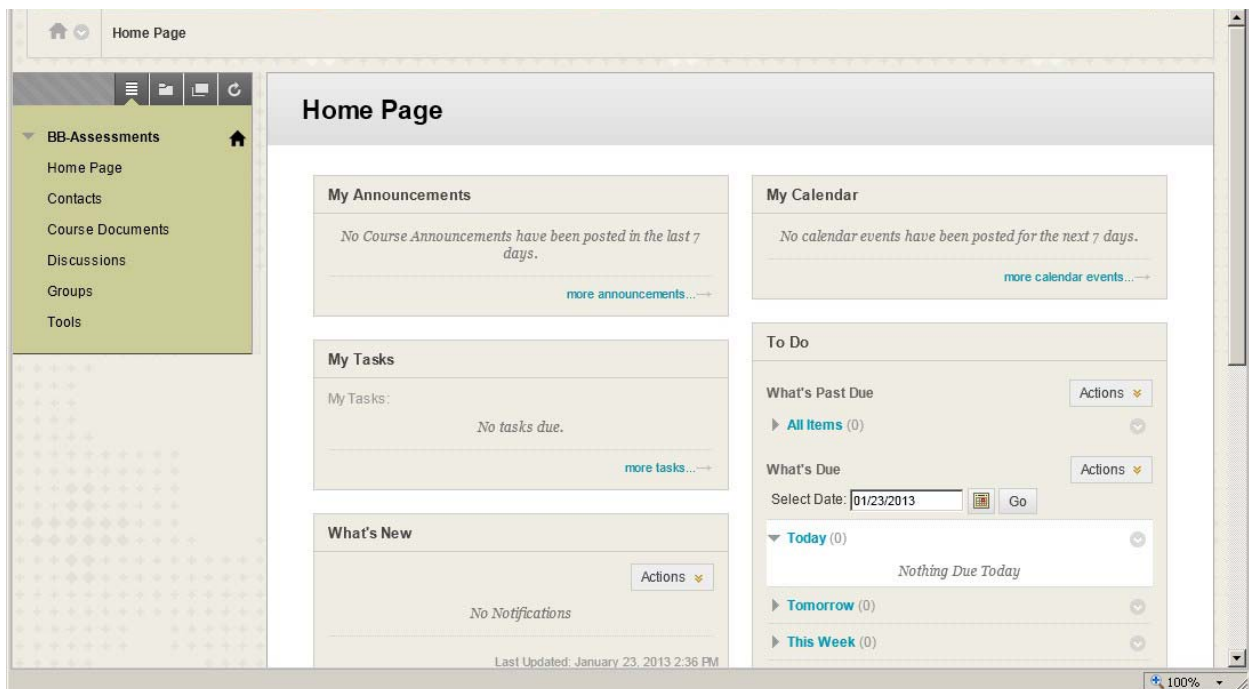
Course Module Page

The **Course Module Page** is a type of content page inside your Blackboard courses that is similar to the Notifications page on the My Blackboard tab. The Course Module Page contain information related to the course like content updates, assignment due dates, and upcoming course events. While module pages can be placed anywhere in the course, the system automatically creates a Course Module Page that serves as the default entry page, or home page, for all new Blackboard courses.


While the Course Module Page is the default home page for new Blackboard courses, instructors have the option of changing this setting. For example, in the Blackboard Student Orientation, the Course Module Page is not the course home page. To access that course's Module Page, you would click the **What's New** link on the course menu.

Types of Blackboard Content

As a student in Blackboard, when you click a Course Menu link a variety of content types will be displayed in the content frame. For example, you might see some text and graphics, links to files, links to Web sites, and even folders that contain more content.
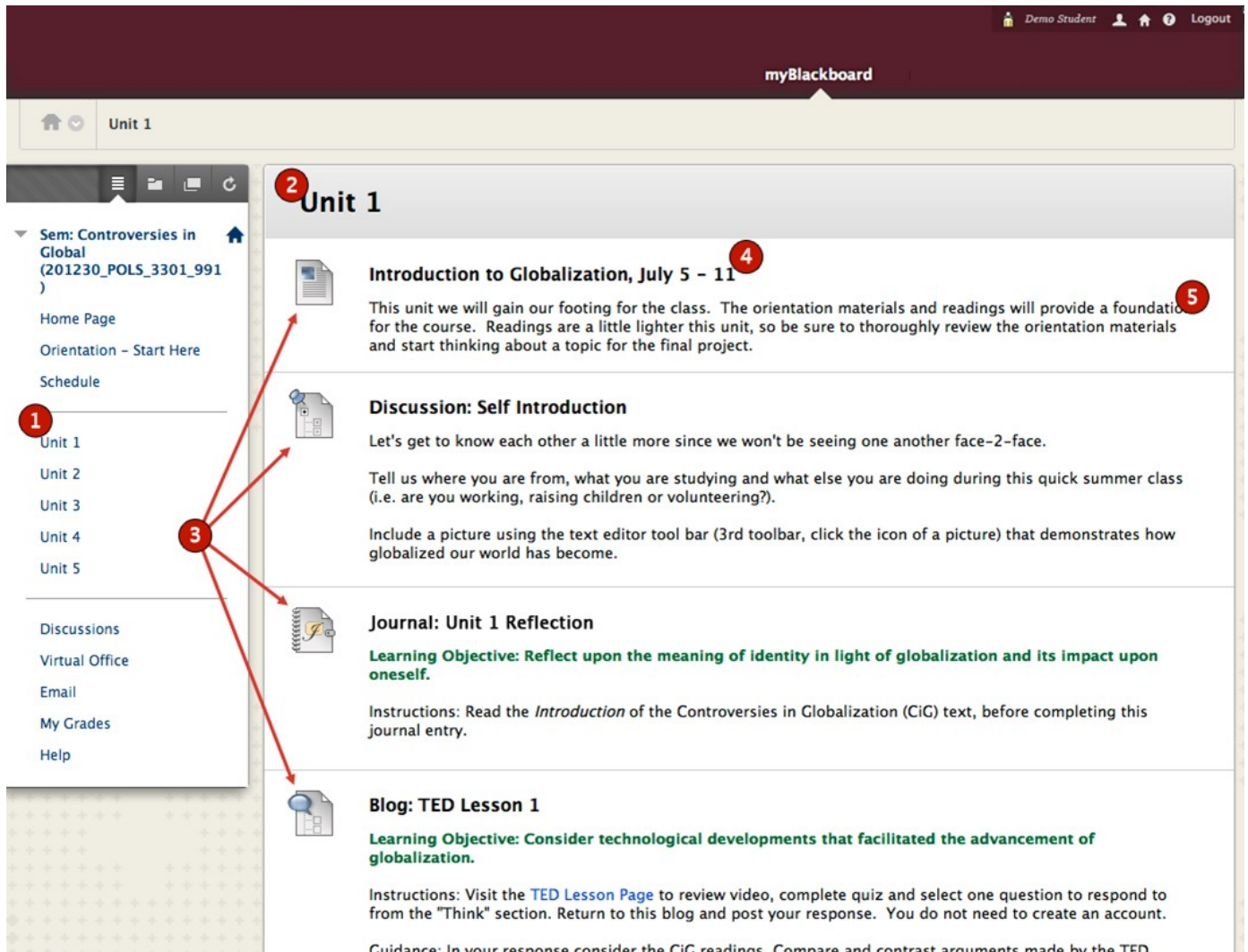
1	**Course Link**	These links will take you to different areas of the course and allow you to access the majority of your course content.
2	**Page Title**	Lets you know which page you are viewing.
3	**Course Icons**	An easy way to distinguish the different types of content items is by looking its icon. As you can see here, content

items have a different icon than discussions or blogs. As you progress through the rest of the materials in this course, you will be presented with the icons for the other types of content.

4   **Content Name**

The name of the content. Some content names also act as course links that link to other areas within the course. You always want to hover over the content name to see if it is a link or not.

5   **Content Details**

This area is used to display additional information related to the content. This can be a description, informative text like what you are reading now, or instructions.

Content Items

A **Content Item** in Blackboard can contain one or a combination of many elements such as text, graphics, audio or video, and links to files. An example is displayed below that includes a variety of elements. Your instructor may use Content Items to share information such as course lessons, instructions, and class policies or procedures.

Getting Started

Introduction

What is English 110 all about?

This course will allow you to read, analyze, research, and discuss electronically a variety of literary genres grouped together by common themes.

Some of your work will be **synchronous**. For example, "meetings" in the chat room at a specified time determined by your group.

Some will be **asynchronous**. For example, assignments that you can submit anytime during the week.

Even though we will not come together in a physical classroom, I hope that by the end of the semester you will feel part of a valuable learning community!

After completing these lessons, you will be able to:

- Enhance your appreciation of literature
- Reflect upon and respond to the ideas of others
- Refine your thinking, reading, and writing skills
- Use the writing process to understand different texts
- Increase your working vocabulary of literary terms
- Improve your research and documentation skills
- Improve your electronic communication skills
- Apply critical perspectives to various genre

A note about assignments:

Your activities and assignments, which will require about nine or ten hours a week, must be completed during the week they are due.

If you experience difficulty in meeting deadlines, please notify me immediately.

Your success in this course will depend upon your ability to communicate in a timely and appropriate manner!

Looking for Help?

Help is available to you from ANYWHERE within this course. You can click on the **Help** link located in the page header. This online help should be your first source for information whenever you need assistance.

The Importance of Journals

Folders

Folders in Blackboard work in much the same way they do in other computer applications and even like paper file folders. Blackboard folders are containers that hold information or more folders. Just like a physical file folder, you must open the folder first to view the items within. You open a folder in Blackboard by clicking on its title. You will see the breadcrumb trail lengthen with the folder name once inside.
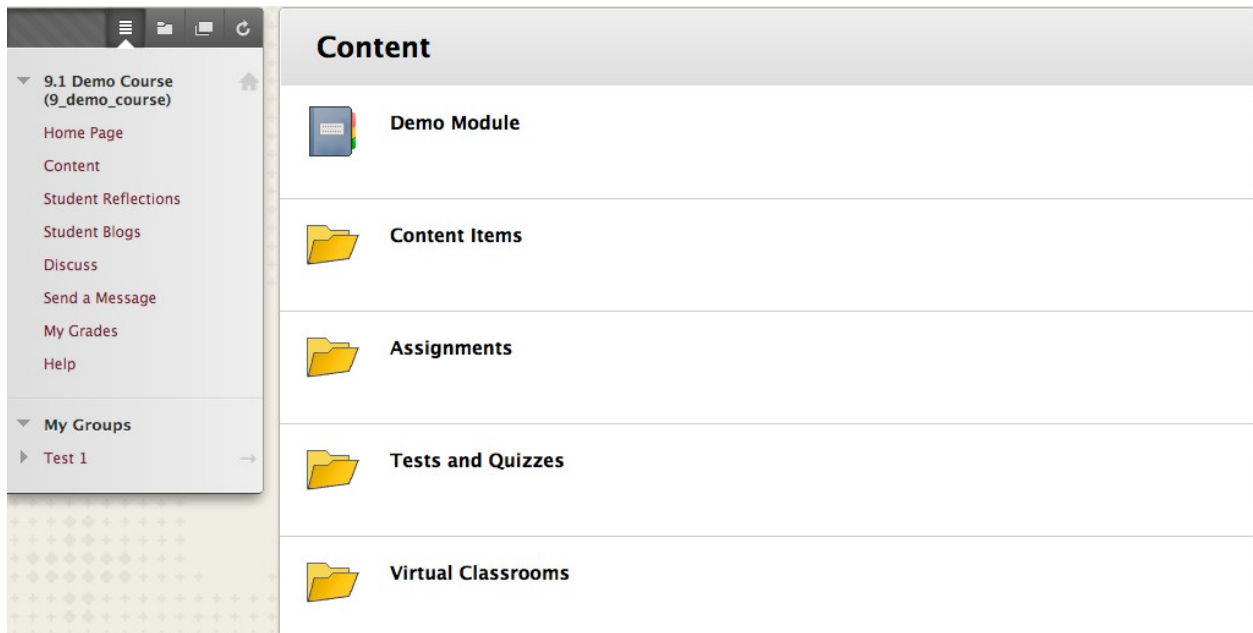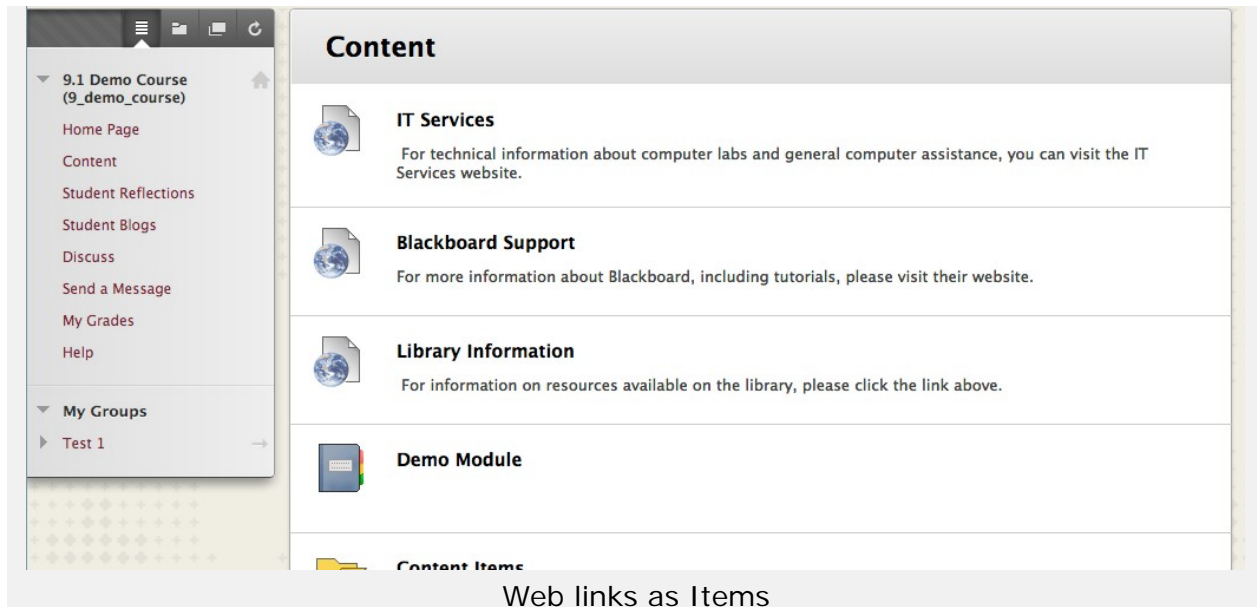
Web Links

Within your course, you may encounter **Web Links** to web sites that are external to Blackboard. There are two ways in which your instructor may set up a link for you to follow:

- As an Item itself where the title becomes an active link
- As text linked within a Content Item

In general, UNT Dallas Blackboard web links are displayed in maroon, underlined text. In your other courses, the web links may be in different colors depending on the course theme. Just be aware that if the text looks different (bold, a different color than the surrounding text, underlined, etc.), it is probably a web link. The simplest way to find out is to hover over or click the text. Also, your mouse pointer will usually change if the text is a link.

Links can open inside the content frame or they can open in a new window. Your instructor will set this function when the link is added to the course.

Web links as Items

Course Links

Course Links are similar to bookmarks in your web browser. They are used as a way for your instructors to create a shortcut to other items within your course. As opposed to the Web links we just reviewed, Course Links are internal links that provide shortcuts to different areas within a course. Instructors typically use course links to help organize the course content. For example, an instructor might link directly to a discussion board within a weekly unit so students can access the forum more easily.

Discussion: Self Introduction

Let's get to know each other a little more since we won't be seeing one another face–2–face.

Tell us where you are from, what you are studying and what else you are doing during this quick summer class (i.e. are you working, raising children or volunteering?).

Include a picture using the text editor tool bar (3rd toolbar, click the icon of a picture) that demonstrates how globalized our world has become.

JOU: Unit 1 Reflection

Learning Objective: Reflect upon the meaning of identity in light of globalization and its impact upon oneself.

Instructions: Read the *Introduction* of the Controversies in Globalization (CiG) text, before completing this journal entry.

Blog: TED Lesson 1
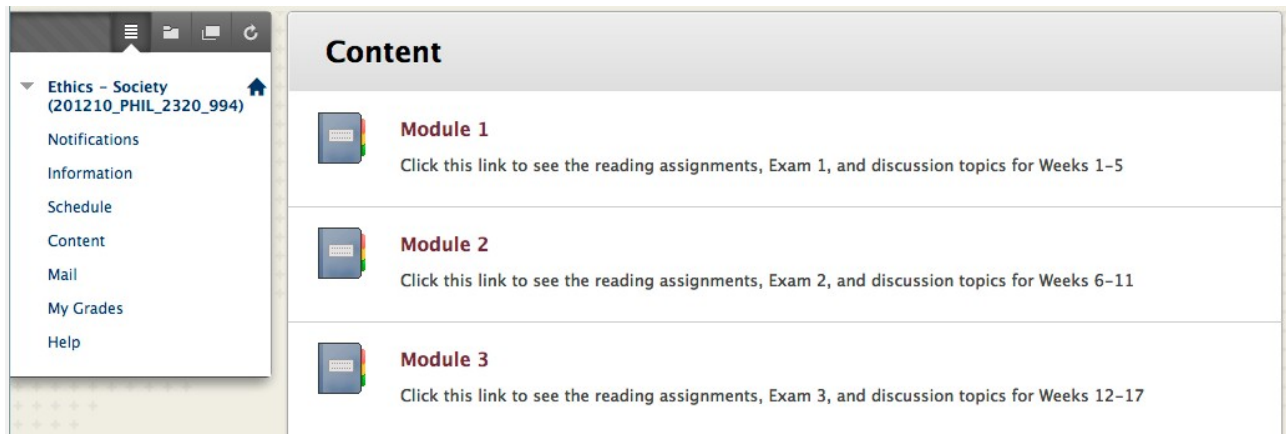
Learning Objective: Consider technological developments that facilitated the advancement of globalization.

Instructions: Visit the TED Lesson Page to review video, complete quiz and select one question to respond to from the "Think" section. Return to this blog and post your response. You do not need to create an account.

This activity is worth 10 points and will be graded according to the quality of grammar, organization of thoughts, references to text, and inclusion of outside examples to support statements.

Learning Modules

There may be times when the topics you are learning require review in a more structured order. For instance, when you are learning a process such as the steps to solving an equation, the scientific method, or the elements of fiction, you may learn them in a specific order. To reinforce this, your instructor may make use of a **Learning Module**, which automatically sets a structured path for progressing through the content. As opposed to scrolling down to see the information, like with a Blackboard Folder, you would proceed through a sequence of screens using the Table of Contents
or the forward and back arrows to move from one page to the next.
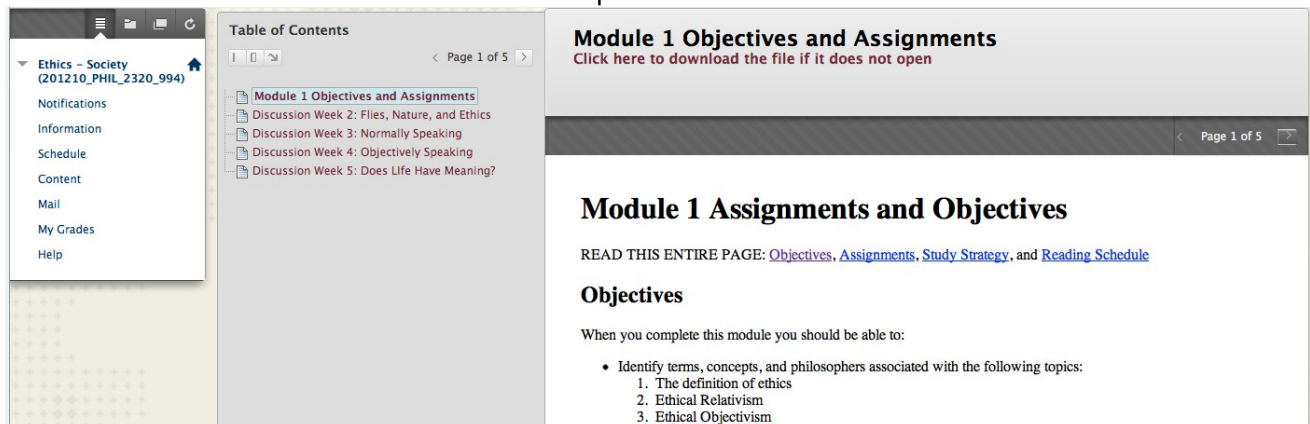
Learning Modules from the Outside

Some Learning Modules are designed to only be viewed in a sequential order. The items in these types of learning modules must be viewed in order, you cannot jump ahead to another section. Other Learning Modules have a suggested path you should follow, but you have the option to skip ahead to another unit within the module if the Table of Contents is present.

Inside a Learning
Module

Naming Your Files for Use on the Web

Because electronic files can be accessed by any computer, you must be careful to name your files in such a way that they can be opened on any machine.

Here are some general guidelines to follow when naming your files:

1. **Length:** Keep your file names as short as possible. Different operating systems impose different restrictions regarding the length of filenames; this can range from 12 - 260 characters.

> Best practice would be to keep your filename as close to 12 characters as possible, while still following any naming conventions your instructor/professor has established.

2. **Acceptable Characters:** To ensure your document can be opened, only use acceptable characters for your filenames. Acceptable characters are the basic alpha-numeric characters (a-z, 0-9), the period (.), and the underscore (_).

Filenames must **NOT** include special characters, such as:

> ` ~ ! @ # $ % ^ & * ( ) + = { } [ ] | \ / < > / ? , ; : ' "

Also, do not use spaces (use the underscore (_) instead), and only use a period to separate the filename from the extension (eg. my_file.doc).

If you are using numbers in your filenames, include a zero with single-digit numbers; (eg. use "01" instead of "1"). This way your files will display in logical order when you sort by filename.

Acceptable Examples:	Unacceptable Examples:
myname_01.doc	my name 01.doc
my_file_chpt01.doc	my_file_chpt#1.doc
chpt01_myname.txt	chpt#1.myname.txt

3. **Upper or Lower Case?** It is recommended that you use all lower case letters.

4. **Extensions:** The file extension is an indicator of the file type. PC machines will add the file extension for you, Mac machines will not. When working on a Mac, you must manually add the file extension to the filename or the file can not be easily viewed on a PC machine.

<p style="text-align:center">my_name_chpt01.doc</p>

<p style="text-align:center">filename   extension</p>

You do, of course, need to use the correct filename extension. Here is a brief list of common files and their corresponding extensions:

Word 2007 document:	.docx Excel
2007 spreadsheet:	.xlsx Text
file:	.txt Rich Text
file:	.rtf JPEG
image	.jpg GIF
image:	.gif PDF file:
	.pdf
PowerPoint 2007:	.pptx
Photoshop document:	.psd

If you are unsure of the proper file extension, ask your instructor/professor.

Testing Best Practices for Students in Blackboard Learn

Before Taking an On-line Test:

1. **Use only supported browser versions** when taking on-line tests.

2. Before starting an on-line test, **close all other software programs on your computer**, including the browser that you plan to use to take the test. Re-start your browser and log in first to Blackboard without logging into any other sites. This will help identify your test session in the system logs if you encounter technical issues.

3. **Disable all pop-up blockers**. The steps for this will vary among browsers. If you have questions, call the IT Helpdesk check your computer and browser settings for pop-up blockers.

4. **Whenever possible, use a hardwired connection** rather than your wireless connection to the Internet to take an online test. Make sure that when you connect your network cable to your computer you also disable the wireless receiver so that it does not override or interfere with the wired connection.

5. If your computer is connected to the Internet through an **ISP cable modem that is shared among a number of users** (such as at an apartment complex), you will likely experience problems with on-line tests. Questions may be slow to display and your connection may be lost briefly, which will cut off your test session. You should try to find a computer for your on-line tests that is on a more stable connection.

6. Make sure you **do not have more than one browser window opened to Blackboard**; this can cause problems submitting your exam.

7. Make sure your **computer is up-to-date on Windows patches and that it is virus and spyware free**. If you are not sure of the reliability of your PC or are having problems, use a campus lab computer.

8. **Clear the cache on your computer** before starting a test to mitigate potential problems. See below.

Clearing your Browser Cache

*Internet Explorer

1. Click the **Tools** menu.

2. Then select **Internet Options**.

3. On the **General** tab in the **Browsing History** area, click **Delete**.

4. Select all of the checkboxes.

5. Then click **Delete**.

6. Click the **Content** tab.

7. In the **Certificates** area, click **Clear SSL State**.

8. Then click **OK**.

*Mozilla Firefox

1. Click the **Tools** menu.

2. Select **Clear Recent History**.

   Note: On a MAC computer, the option will be **Clear Private Data**.

3. Then select all of the checkboxes in the **Details** area.

4. Then click **Clear Now**.

*Safari

1. Click the **Safari** menu.

2. Then select **Reset Safari**.

3. Select the **Empty Cache** checkbox.

4. Then click **Reset**.

*Google Chrome

1. Click the **wrench icon** on the browser toolbar.
2. Select **Tools.**
3. Select **Clear browsing data**.
4. In the dialog that appears, select the checkboxes for the types of information that you want to remove.
5. Use the menu at the top to select the amount of data that you want to delete. Select **beginning of time** to delete everything.
6. Click **Clear browsing data**.

*These steps may vary depending of the version of the browser.

While You Are Taking an On-line Test:

1. Make sure **you don't use your browser's back, forward and refresh buttons** during a test. This can interrupt your test and knock you out of the test. To move from question to question, users should only use the arrows within the testing window or the **Question Completion Status** list of questions.

2. **Do not double-click the start button on a test** while waiting for it to load. This can cause multiple instances of the exam to open, leading to some confusion.

3. **Make sure you are aware of your time while taking an on-line test**. If your instructor sets a time limit, Blackboard will try to display a warning 1 minute before the time limit expires, but browser settings may prevent this warning from appearing. If your instructor sets a time limit in Blackboard, when you click open a test the clock will start and will not stop regardless of whether you save it and reopen later. It certainly may be prudent to have a back-up timer of your own. If you should get knocked out of an on-line test you should log back into Blackboard as quickly as possible to resume the test.

4. **Instructors may set a limit as to when an on-line test is available**, often referred to as the "test window." The link to open or re-open your test is only visible during this window. If your test also has a timer, you will not be ejected from the test at the end of the test window, but if that window has closed you will not be able to re-enter the test if you are knocked out of the test after that time, even if your timer has not expired. Start early enough during the test window so that you can complete the test before the window expires.

5. **If you are disconnected from your test session** for any reason, you should close your browser, re-start the browser, and go back to the test in Blackboard. If your instructor permits, you will be returned to the test question you were just viewing. If your instructor selects the **Force Completion** option, however, you cannot re-enter a test. In such a case you must contact your instructor first regarding this.

6. If the exam has been selected to show all questions at once, **you should periodically save your answers**. You can click the **Save** button next to each question as you select answers or scroll to the end of the page and click the global **Save** button. This will save your work thus far but will allow you to continue to other questions and even change earlier answers up until the time you click **Submit**.

7. If test questions are presented one at a time, **only click the "next question" arrow once**, even if the response is slow moving to the next question. Each question is saved automatically by Blackboard as you move from one question to another so there isn't any reason to hit **Save** before moving to the next question. That would just add an extra delay between questions.

8. If you are typing an answer in a text box, be aware that **neither Blackboard nor your browser saves text as you type it**. One option is to click the **Save** button next to the question frequently so the text you have typed so far will not be lost. Another option that perhaps is more secure is to type answers to essay questions first in Notepad, save it there, and then copy and paste the answer into the test's text box.

9.   If your instructor presents test questions one at a time, **he can also choose whether to allow students to "backtrack"**—that is, to go back to previously answered questions. If backtracking is permitted, you can go forward and backward to adjacent questions at any time using the test navigation arrows or to any question at any time using the **Question Completion Status** window. However, if backtracking is prohibited you can only move forward one question at a time, and you can only get to the end of the test to the **Submit** button by advancing through all questions one at a time. If your test has a time limit, you will need to keep this in mind in case you need to skip several questions to reach the end and click **Submit** before time expires.

Save vs. Submit

Blackboard has a Save Answer button for each question in an Assessment and a Save All Answers button before and after the questions for Assessments that show all of the questions at one time. As you answer questions, you can click the Save Answer button next to a question to save the answer for that particular question.

The Save All Answers button at the beginning and end of the Assessment will save answers to all of the questions answered so far. This is recommended after answering about 5 or 6 questions. This will refresh your window.

If you change an answer just click the Save Answer button next to the question or one of the Save All Answers buttons to record the change. But remember, you must still click Save and Submit at the end of the Assessment to finish.

Assessments that show questions one at a time also have a Save Answer button. Clicking the arrow to advance to the next question automatically saves the answer to the current question. It is extremely important that you DO NOT click on a link in the Course Menu or Reload during an Assessment.

After Taking an On-line Test:

After you submit your test, the information you will see next depends on the settings your instructor has selected. You may only see a confirmation that the test was submitted with no additional information. You may see a grade for the test if the instructor turns that on, if no test questions have to be graded individually, and if no time limit has been exceeded. If any questions require the instructor to assign a grade individually, you will see an exclamation mark (**needs grading**) instead of a grade. If you exceed a specified time limit, and you have not submitted the test, you will see a pencil and paper icon indicating that your attempt is Still in Progress. If you have exceeded the time limit, but submitted your test, you will see a green exclamation mark for the grade. If you have questions about this, you should contact your instructor.

What if...?

I got bumped out of my test and can't get back in. What do I do?

You must contact your instructor, who will need to "clear your attempt" so you can start the test again. When the instructor "clears your attempt", any and all of your previous answers will be erased.

I keep getting locked out of tests right when I start them.

If you have problems accessing a test or quiz, "double-clicking" may be the problem. When you click the link to begin a test, be sure to use a SINGLE mouse click. You should not double-click anywhere in Blackboard--especially when accessing a test!

I clicked on the link to a test but nothing happened.

Most likely, a pop-up blocker is preventing the test from opening. Try disabling your pop-up blocker, then click the test link again. (And remember to single-click the test link.)

Tips for avoiding problems with online tests:

To begin taking a test:
SINGLE-CLICK the link to the test. (NEVER double-click the link.)

While taking a test:

- Do not resize your window after entering a test. (Some browsers will refresh the screen when you resize the window, and this can bump you out of your test so that you can't get back in.)
- Do not refresh the screen or click your browser's BACK button while taking a test.
- Be careful when using the <Backspace> key to correct errors in text boxes. (In some cases, pressing the <Backspace> key is the same as clicking your browser's back button.) Be sure that your cursor is inside the text entry box before pressing <Backspace>.
- Depending on the settings your instructor chooses, students who attempt to view material on another web site or in another area of the Blackboard course may find themselves "locked out" and unable to return to complete the test.

- SAVE OFTEN! If all test questions are displayed on a single screen, use the SAVE button at the bottom of the test screen (to the left of the SUBMIT button). DO NOT use the SAVE button beside each question. Scroll down and click SAVE at the bottom every 15 minutes or so as you are working on your test. But do not click SUBMIT until you are completely finished!
- Remember: Some instructors set their tests to display each question on a separate screen, and students use navigational buttons to move from one question screen to the next. In this case, your answer is saved automatically when you move to the next question (and there is no save button).
- Be sure to click SUBMIT, but only when you are completely finished with the test.

Technical Questions

- **What are the minimum technical requirements?** Online courses may be conducted using a range of software applications including Blackboard Learn (a Learning Management System).
  Recommended web browsers: Google Chrome, Internet Explorer 9.0 or Firefox. Software required for viewing multimedia resources: Flash and Java
  Speakers required to head multi-media content
  PDF reader required for viewing articles
  The Requirements for Blackboard Learn can be found on the Web site:
  https://help.blackboard.com/en-us/Learn/9.1_SP_12_and_SP_13/Student/030_Browser_Support/040_Browser_Support_for_SP_13
- **How do I access the online course?** Access to UNT Dallas hybrid/online courses will be made available once your registration has been processed. Each participant must have Internet access.

Who to Contact

Course Related Problems

You should contact your course instructor for any problems, which are course related - i.e., problems finding course material and resources in the Blackboard course web site. Instructors organize their Blackboard sites differently and choose different settings. It's a good idea to ask your instructors because often the answer is specific to the way they are doing things. It's also important for your instructors to know if you're having a technical problem that may affect your ability to do your assignments.

Platform Related Problems

If you are experiencing any trouble with Blackboard please contact the Blackboard Helpdesk at 972-338-5580 or by sending an email to UNTDDistance@unt.edu. Please be sure to give or enter the following information in your issue ticket: Complete name, Email address, Student id, Operating System of your computer, Web Browser you are using (Name and version), Course id, Course Name and Area of problem. Be sure to give a full and detail description of your issue and include the steps to repeat it at our end. It's important to be as specific as possible so we can determine the problem.

Blackboard Student Helpdesk (972-338-5580)

Students	
Email:	UNTDDistance@unt.edu
Direct Phone:	972-338-5580