Blackboard Ultra Course View

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Blackboard Ultra Course View (UCV or "ultra courses") is an entirely re-designed approach to Blackboard courses, both for instructors to create content and student to participate in courses. It is distinct from Original Course View (OCV or "original courses") which is Blackboard's name for courses as they currently exist. It is also distinct from Ultra Base Navigation (UBN), which refers to the new menu structure that was enabled at Syracuse during the summer of 2021.

ITS and Online Learning Services (OLS) have been working to test and configure ultra courses, create support documentation, design training materials, and develop a rollout plan in conversation with campus partners. We are committed to a diligent rollout that ensures support is in place if and when an instructor converts from original to ultra courses.

- Features
  - User Interface Benefits
  - Easier Content Creation and Editing
  - Communication Tools
  - Student Evaluation
- Access
- Timeline

Features

Ultra courses provide a number of usability enhancements for both instructors and students. However, there are some features that exist in original courses that are either not yet available in ultra courses or will not be enabled in ultra course. This document is focused on some key benefits of ultra courses, but is not exhaustive. Instructors should refer to our feature comparison for help in deciding whether their course is a good candidate for conversion from original to ultra.

> ⓘ **Feature Comparison**
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> Please see the feature comparison for more specifics about the differences between individual tools in Ultra Course View and Original Course View.

User Interface Benefits

The following are look-and-feel benefits for ultra courses:

- Modern Look and Function — Ultra courses better reflect contemporary web design practices. They are also more accessible and function better on mobile devices.
- Streamlined Content Presentation — Ultra courses deliver content in fewer pages with folders and modules that collapse and expand. Blackboard has done extensive user testing and research to come to a design that helps students more easily find the content they need.
- Pages with Hybrid Content — A new content type called "Document" allows instructors to create pages that more seamlessly mix text, images, videos, and files. Some file types, like Word documents and PDFs, can be presented in-line rather than requiring a student to download the file to view it.

Easier Content Creation and Editing

Ultra courses include workflow improvements for instructors such as:

- Add Content Anywhere — Instructors can now add materials directly where they want in the page, including in between existing items. Instructors can also create more modular content that they can drag and drop to reorder.
- Drag and Drop Files — The ability to drag and drop files from your computer to the Blackboard page are greatly expanded.
- New Content Editor — The new Content Editor is streamlined to focus on the most common tools for adding text, links, media, and formulas. It also has features to help create mobile-compatible and accessible content.

Communication Tools

Ultra courses enable new ways to communicate with your students or them to communicate with one another:

- Conversations — You can enable "conversations" on individual content items or assignments. This lets students ask questions and receive replies about the content in the place where they're viewed. Instructors no longer need to created dedicated discussion boards to address questions about assignments or content items.
- Announcement Pop-Ups — Course announcements now appear as a pop-up when students enter a course making it less likely that they'll miss key information.
- Messages — Blackboard has always included course messages as a communication tool but it was buried and difficult to use. The new design puts course messages in a better location for in-course communication which could replace some email use

Student Evaluation

The gradebook in ultra courses has been redesigned to include more options for its display and re-organized workflows:

- Item View — In addition to the traditional column layout, there is an new mode to view items for grading with summary information about their due date and gradings status
- Students in the gradebook — Instructors can now search the gradebook for individual students and see all assignments and their status on a per-student basis
- Posting Grades — Grades in ultra courses aren't sent to students until you post them. This increases the amount of control instructors have about when students have access to their grades and feedback.
- Automatic Zeros — For past-due assignments students can receive an automatic zero. This grade can be overridden by the instructor when the student makes a submission, but helps notify student when they've missed a due date.
- Accommodations — You can now set accommodations on a per-student basis. Once set, the accommodation is automatically applied to all of that student's assessments in the course. Instructors no longer have to go through and add student accommodations for each student on each assessment.

Access

Access to ultra course sandboxes is now being provided on request. Please email help@syr.edu to request a test course if you are interested in exploring the new features. Keep an eye on this page for more information about ultra course documentation and trainings offered by OLS.

Timeline

The timeline below describes some of the work already completed on the path to enabling ultra courses at Syracuse University and articulates current goals for enabling ultra courses more broadly. It is subject to change based on the findings in each phase.

There is no current plan or timeline to require that instructors use of Ultra Course View. Blackboard has not announced an end-of-life for original course view, meaning that the vendor continues to develop and support original course view. Further, the decision to use ultra or original course view can be made on a course-by-course basis. When ultra courses are available, an instructor may elect to have some courses in ultra view with others remaining in original view.

Term	Development	Impact
Summer 2018	Transition from hosting Blackboard on-campus to a cloud-based version.	The transition from self-hosting to a version hosted in the cloud allows for more frequent bug-fixes and updates with less downtime along with the ability to enable Blackboard's newest features as they are released.
Summer 2021	Ultra Base Navigation is enabled.	This changed the look-and-feel of Blackboard immediately upon login, along with the way that users navigated their courses. This is a required step toward enabling Ultra Course View and introduced new ways of interacting with Blackboard at the top-level. It greatly improved Blackboard's accessibility and the way that it functions on mobile devices. There are additional benefits in this navigation level that are only realized once instructors begin using Ultra Course View.
Spring 2022	Ultra Course View sandboxes are made available by request.	Instructors interested in exploring the features of ultra course view can request a sandbox site to experiment in by emailing help@syr.edu. Exploration is welcome but unsupported at present.
Summer 2022	Ultra Course View training is delivered to selected users.	Online Learning Services is partnering with select instructors, primary SITETL alumni, to get feedback on ultra course view settings and training materials. Selected instructors will complete a three-week training program and share their experiences with the new view in preparation for a broader rollout.
Fall 2022 & Spring 2023	Ultra Course View is used by selected instructors in credit-bearing courses.	A vanguard group of instructors that have completed ultra course training will have their courses converted from original to ultra for their credit bearing courses. They will work closely with Online Learning Services for support. Their experiences will inform decisions about system configuration, priority for support documentation, and additional training needs.
Fall 2023	Ultra Course View is made available for credit-bearing course to a wider range of instructors	In consultation with the Academic Technology Advisory Committee, ITS will establish requirements and a process for instructors to opt-in to the use of Ultra Course View for credit-bearing courses.