INSTRUCTIONAL COMPUTING *&* **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

Engage the Students. Infuse the Curriculum.
Empower the Faculty. Enhance the Administrative Process.

Configuring the Course Blog in Blackboard

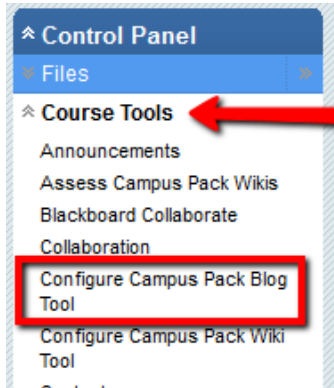## What is in this document?

This document contains instructions for configuring a **Course Blog**. The **Course Blog** can be found in the **Tools** area of a Blackboard course and is often used to share news and post announcements. Blog entries can contain images and embedded media as well as links to web sites and files. Some instructors use this tool to encourage sharing of resources and course-relevant information among students. While announcements can only be posted by instructors, the **Course Blog** can be configured to allow posting by all students in the course. It can also be designated as the entry point of a course, so that it is the first thing that members of the class see when they go into the course site. There is only one **Course Blog** in a Blackboard course and it is configured in the **Control Panel**. Blog entries of a **Course Blog** can be exported as web pages but the blog itself cannot be copied to another Blackboard course.

In contrast to a **Course Blog**, content area blogs are generally used for journaling and writing assignments and can be associated with columns in the **Grade Center** for entering of grades. Instructors can create as many content area blogs as they wish in a Blackboard course. They can even create separate blogs for different groups of students collaborating on a project or researching a topic. Another difference between the **Course Blog** and content area blogs is that content area blogs can be copied to the same or a different Blackboard course site. Please see our document *Configuring Content Area Blogs* for instructions on how to create content area blogs.

The two kinds of blog tools that are available in Blackboard and their locations can easily confuse instructors and students. We recommend that instructors give students precise instructions about where to find the blog and share instructions on how to read and write blog entries contained in our document *Reading and Posting to Blogs*.

Configuring the course blog

1. Go to the **Control Panel** of the Blackboard course in which you wish to add a course blog.

2. Click on **Configure Blog Tool** under **Course Tools**.

3. Select **Course Blog Tool Options.**

- **Do you want to allow students to create blog entries?**
  If you would like students to write blog entries, then choose **Yes**. Selecting **No** means that only instructors can write blog entries.

- **Do you want to allow users to view posts by other users?**
  Selecting **Yes** allows students to see blog posts written by others in the class. Selecting **No** means that students can only see their own posts. The **No** option would be useful if you wanted to use this tool as a private journal read only by you and the individual students.

- **Do you want to enable a public (unauthenticated) RSS feed?**

  Enabling a public RSS feed allows people with access to the blog to make its contents visible to people everywhere. An RSS feed is a document containing either a summary of content from an associated web site or the full text. RSS is a convenient way for Internet users to gather information updates from different sites using a "reader" or "aggregator." Users need to subscribe to the RSS feeds provided by the sites. More information about RSS can be found in the short handout *7 Things You Should Know About RSS* (http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ELI7024.pdf) and the video RSS in Plain English (http://www.commoncraft.com/rss_plain_english). We recommend that you choose **No** if there is any possibility of revealing private or sensitive information.

- **Do you want to allow students to permanently delete blog entries?**

  Selecting **Yes** would allow students to delete posts that they have authored. We generally recommend that you do not allow students to permanently delete posts because they may be accidentally deleting comments posted by other people. Students who wish to change what they have written can edit their blog posts.

- **Do you want to allow students to export the blog?**

  Selecting **Yes** would allow students to save the blog entries as web pages which are compressed into a .zip file. The web pages can later be uncompressed and viewed with a web browser.

- **Do you want to allow students to view comments on blog entries?**

  Selecting **Yes** would display a **Comment** link at the bottom of each blog entry and allow students to see comments associated with it. You might want to allow viewing of comments to encourage feedback and exchange among students. If you decide to do this, we recommend that you point out the **Comment** link to your students and encourage the authors to check on their posts periodically to see if there are new comments. Comments can be easily overlooked because the **Comment** link appears at the bottom of a blog entry and because more recent blog posts "push down" older blog posts. If you were using the **Course Blog** as a tool for private communication where users are not allowed to see each other's posts, then the setting of **Yes** would allow students only to see comments posted by you. If you chose the setting of **No**, then you could use the commenting function as a way to keep notes for yourself.

- **Do you want to allow students to add comments to blog entries?**
  This option is only available if you chose to allow viewing of the comments in the previous setting. Selecting **Yes** would allow students to write comments associated with blog entries. This setting applies only to students; instructors are always allowed to add comments. Select **Yes** if you intend to use the tool for interaction; select **No** if you want one-way communication.

- **Choose the dates and times for which students will be allowed to edit the blog tool.**
  If you decide to specify the beginning and end times that students are allowed to write blog entries and comments, check the boxes before **Allow Edits After** and **Allow Edits Until**. Select the dates and times from the drop-down menus. You may want to restrict the time when students are able to post blog entries to encourage them to write their entries in a timely manner or not allow posts once the class has moved to a different activity not requiring the use of the **Course Blog**. This setting only applies to writing of new entries and modifying of existing ones. All blogs posts are still readable.

- **Choose the dates and times for which the blog tool can be viewed by students.**
  If you decide to specify the beginning and end times that students are allowed to view blog entries and comments, check the boxes before **Display After** and **Display Until**. Select the dates and times from the drop-down menus.

- **How shall public references to students be displayed?**
  Students' entries will be referenced with the name value you select for this field. We recommend that you leave this option set to the default (**Person Name**), i.e., the student's first and last name. One's **User Name** is a string of 20 digits which is not descriptive and usually not even recognizable by its owner.

- **Choose Primary Text Direction**
  We recommend that you leave this option set to the default (**left to right**) unless the blog will be written in a language that reads right to left.

4. Click on **OK** to save the settings for the **Course Blog**.

You and your students can now access the **Course Blog** with the settings that you have chosen in the **Tools** area of your Blackboard course.
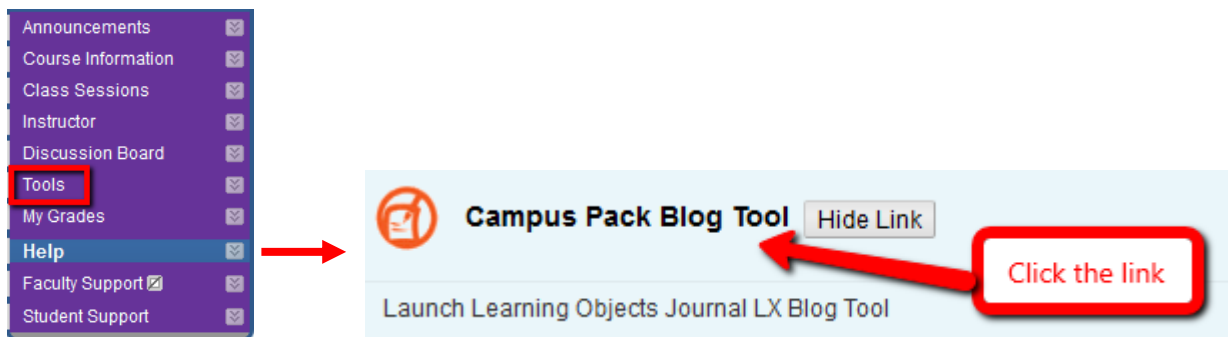

Click on **Blog Tool** and then on **new entry** to start composing a blog post.
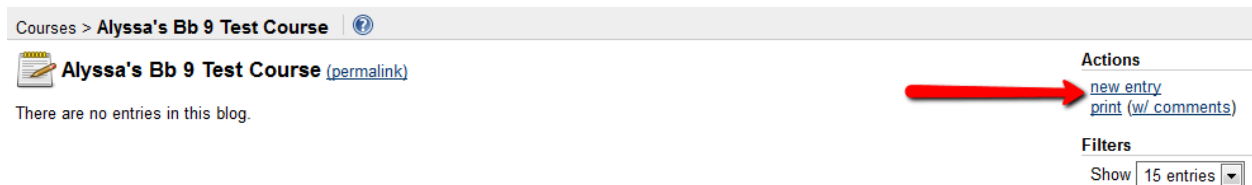
Because the **Course Blog** is not immediately visible to a person entering the course, some professors have chosen to add a link to it from the course navigation menu. See the section below for instructions to add a link to the **Course Blog** to the course navigation menu.

Adding a link to the Course Blog to the course navigation menu

1. Go to the **Navigation Menu** and click on [+] button and under that click **Create Tool Link**.
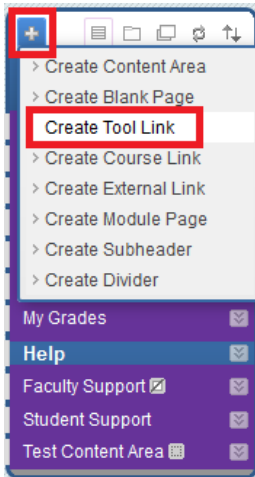
2. Select **Blog Tool** from the **Type** drop-down menu.

3. Enter a descriptive name for the navigation item in the **Name** field. For example, you could name the link "Student Announcements" or "Course Blog."
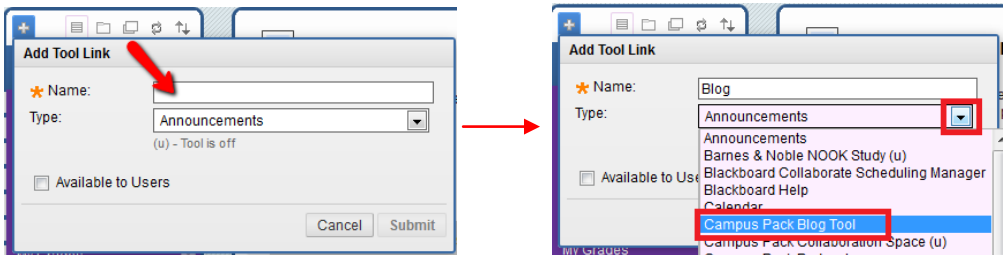
4. Click on **Submit**. A new navigation item linked to the **Blog Tool** will appear at the end of the list. You may want to change its position to a more appropriate location on the list.

If you have further questions or need assistance, please email bb@hunter.cuny.edu or contact the Technology Resource Center (Thomas Hunter Hall 402) at 212-772-4357. For assistance designing learning activities that incorporate blogs and to discuss advantages and drawbacks of the different tools, please contact one of ICIT's Educational Technologists at edtech@hunter.cuny.edu.