

**Customizing Your Blackboard Menu
Creating a Discipline-Specific Blackboard Template**

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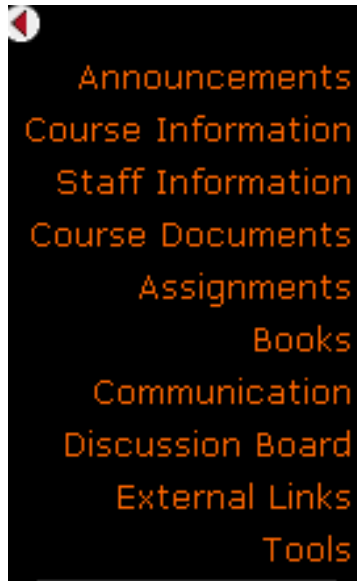
Customizing Your Blackboard Menu

With the latest version of Blackboard, it is possible to tailor your site's menu to the specific needs of your course or organization. You can create links in your menu to specific content areas, to specific items within content areas, to specific tools that you make frequent use of, and to external sites. As the links are text-based, you can choose what to name them, and even use special characters and diacritical markings. Using some simple HTML tag gives you greater options for colors and font effects.

Creating a Discipline-Specific Blackboard Template

Academic departments now have the opportunity to design a discipline-specific course site template that can be used when Academic Services creates their courses. This template can include not only a customized course menu, but content, information, and layouts that may be appropriate to or useful for all courses in the discipline.

Instead of this default Blackboard menu currently used to build all the course sites,



you can customize your menu to suite your discipline, pedagogy, and taste. For example:



You can even design a menu template that will be used to create all the course sites in your discipline. Of course, each instructor can further modify the template for individual courses.

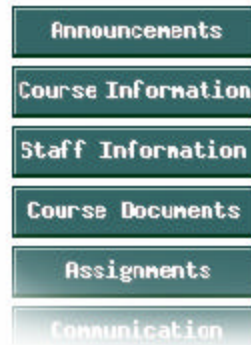
Text or Buttons?

[COURSES](#) > [ARA101 ELEMENTARY ARABIC I](#) > [CONTROL PANEL](#) > [SETTINGS](#) >

Course Design

1 Select Navigation Style

Buttons



Text



You can choose between using buttons or text for your course menu.

1. Go to **Control Panel > Settings > Course Design > Course Design**
2. Select either **Buttons** or **Text** under "Select Navigation Style"
3. If you choose buttons, pick a type, shape, and style under Select Style Properties. If you choose text, select your background and highlight colors under Select Style Properties. The highlight color is the color the text will appear.
4. Click **Submit**.

Does it matter, other than aesthetically? YES.

Selecting buttons further limits the choices you have as far as font effects, the number of characters you can use in naming the items, and the number of items that can be display on the screen.

Creating / Modifying the Menu

In designing a course menu, there are two main considerations:

- Content
- Style

Sound pedagogical should be the primary consideration in making your design choices.

CONTENT

Blackboard allows for four types of links in the course menu. You can link to:

- Content areas
- Specific files in the site
- Tool areas or specific tools
- External Websites

To create / modify your menu items:

Click on the **Manage Course Menu** link in the Course Options section of the control panel.

Click the **Modify** button next to existing items to edit an existing link name

or

Click on one of the **Add** icons in the gray bar at the top of the page to add a new link.

Add Content Area - creates places where documents and other course material are stored:

1. Click on the **Content Area** icon.
2. Choose a name from the pull-down list, or type one of your own into the **Area Name** field.
3. Scroll down to the bottom of the page and click the **Submit** button.

Add Course Link - creates a button that links directly to a document or tool placed somewhere else in the course:

1. Click on the **Course Link** icon.
2. Type a name into the **Area Name** field.

3. Click on the **Browse** button.
4. Scroll down to the bottom of the page and click the **Submit** button.

Add Tool Area- creates direct links to function areas, Discussion boards, Email, Tasks, Dropbox, etc.
Organize the information on the web page clearly and in a logical flow.

1. Click on the **Tool Area** icon.
2. Choose a tool type from the pull-down list.
3. Scroll down to the bottom of the page and click the **Submit** button.

Add External Link - creates a button that links directly to an outside website:

1. Click on the **External Link** icon.
2. Type a name into the **Area Name** field.
3. Type or paste the URL in the **Target** field.
4. Select **Launch in a new window** if you do not want the site to be displayed in the Blackboard frame.
5. Scroll down to the bottom of the page and click the **Submit** button.

When you have finished adding menu items, use the dropdown boxes to the left of each item in the **Manage Course Menu** page to order the menu items. Organize the items in a clear and a logical order.

STYLE

Besides making decisions about menu content, style needs to be considered. Style considerations should not just be about aesthetics, but should contribute to making the menu clear, uncluttered, and easy to read.

The first step is choosing between Text and Buttons, and selecting either the background and text colors for Text or the button style. See **Text or Buttons?** above for more on this.

If you selected Text, you can make modifications to its appearance. The main purposes of this should be to give emphasis and to clarify separation of links (especially when a link to a single item may use two links because the name is lengthy). How do you modify the appearance of the text? By using **HTML tags** when entering the names of the links.

HTML Tags for Customizing Your Blackboard Site Menu

BOLD

`Course Information` = **Course Information**

ITALICS

`<i> Course Information</i>` = *Course Information*

UNDERLINE

`<u> Course Information</u>` = Course Information

SPACING

To put a space between one menu item and the next, follow the item name with `<p>`

DIACRITICALS

For accents and special characters, refer to this guide from Harvard University. It contains the codes for Macintosh and Windows:

<http://lrcnt.fas.harvard.edu/Resources/Documentation/accents.htm>

FONT SIZES

`Course Information` = Course Information

`Course Information` = Course Information (*default size*)

`Course Information` = Course Information

`Course Information` = Course Information

`Course Information` = **Course Information**

You can go up to size 7, but it would be ridiculously large for a menu tem.

FONT COLORS

` Course Information` = **Course Information**

`Course Information` = **Course Information**

` Course Information` = **Course Information**

For the code for other colors, see <http://www.webmoments.com/colors.htm>

Blackboard Templates

Academic departments now have the opportunity to design a discipline-specific course site template that can be used when Academic Services creates their courses. This template can include not only a customized course menu, but content, information, and layouts that may be appropriate to or useful for all courses in the discipline.

The Writing Program was the first to pilot this template project. All their fall seminar sites were built with the same course menu, as well as folders containing assignment submission dropboxes.

If you are interested in designing a template for your school, department, discipline, or program, please contact:

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For spring 2004 sites, the templates would need to be created by early November 2003.