

IBUGUnC

Independent Blackboard User's Group
for Universities and Colleges

IBUG Report of Activities Bb Users Conference - Phoenix, Az.

During the recently held Blackboard Users Conference in Phoenix, members of Seton Hall University facilitated sessions to promote the development of an independent user's group (aka IBUG). An organizational meeting was held on March 19th, followed by three breakout sessions on March 20th. The following provides a summary of these sessions and a recap of our dialogue with Blackboard representatives.

Tuesday, March 19, 2002 – Organizational Meeting

Approximately 120 conference attendees* were present to express their interest in the growth and further development of IBUG, and review it's mission, objectives and goals for 2002-03.

*The make-up of the group from informal polling was 80% college and university administrators, 15% K12 and 5% other (i.e., learning services other than HE or K12)

[\[Powerpoint show presented during this session\]](#) [Membership forms](#); [Mission, Goals, and Objectives](#); [e-mail and website information for IBUG](#), and instructions for subscribing to the Blackboard ListServ (BLKBRD-L) hosted by Arizona State University were distributed. The floor was then opened for comments and questions.

Questions raised, and recorded as discussion topics for further review and clarification:

- Should business partners or entities outside of the K12 and HE level be included in the user group?
- Should the name change and address K12 issues also?
- How many Bb clients have already expressed their interest in membership to IBUG? ~300
- Should students be included in the user group?

Comments and suggestions for next steps:

- Solicit assistance from volunteers to form a charter
- Update IBUG website to reflect our progress in its formative stages, and welcoming volunteers, new members, and suggestions.
- Coordinate with existing users groups such as the card access group that already exists.

- Setup a Bb community to foster discussion. (Should Bb host this or should this remain separate and independent?)
- Organize a repository of successful practices.
- Consider other successful users groups as models for IBUG, such as SASU, SETA, Oracle group.

Conclusion:

- Session attendees voiced a positive interest in organizing a formal, recognized user's group, capable of providing Bb clients a forum to collaborate and communicate. The need to develop a constructive communication channel with Blackboard is evident.
- Participants were informed of three concurrent workshop sessions to be held the following day. Each session focused on a different facet to further develop the structure and purpose of IBUG: (1) IBUG's mission to Support each other; (2) Structure of IBUG; (3) IBUG's communication and relationship with Bb.

Wednesday, 3/20/02 - Concurrent workshop sessions

1) SUPPORT – within the IBUG Community

Co-Facilitated by Don Carter, Director TLTC, Seton Hall University; Drew Tatusko, Instructional Designer, Seton Hall University

19 participants were present at this session. Discussion centered around three foci: what this particular group as a part of IBUG ought to be and do, the kind of information and resources that this group could contribute to the whole, and the general structure of organization and information architecture online.

What this group ought to be and do

- The first question raised was “Should this group go “beyond Blackboard” to focus on issues more pertinent to teaching and learning as well. In addition to Teaching and Learning it was also mentioned that community-building and portal issues maybe ought to be incorporated into the discussion.
- One concern raised was the need for some sort of mission statement for the group.
- In addition to the mission statement the need for specific goals was also seen as important.
- The relationship to BLKBRD-L listserv was raised.
 - Should we use a “bottom-up” approach? This approach would use this group's collaborative process to come up with concrete solutions, workarounds and ideas to contribute to the listserv.
 - Or should it be a “top-down” approach? This approach would glean any findings or issues raised on the listserv that this group would then be able to consider more in-depth.
 - Or should it be a combination of the two approaches? This would result in a sort of circular relationship where information sharing would work in a back and forth motion.

- In general it was clear that a need exists to consolidate and organize the postings in the listserv somehow, and then to offer concrete and documented solutions and/or workarounds for issues both raised and not raised within the listserv.
- The need to include K-12 was reiterated from the general session on the prior day. Included in this discussion is the need to drop “UnC” (Universities and Colleges) from IBUG (which was also strongly voiced by a participant from University of North Carolina for other obvious reasons).

Information that this group can contribute to the whole

Keeping the notion of concrete solutions in mind, there was a general consensus that there needs to be a better organized documentation of solutions and workarounds, ideas and strategies, and a showcase of practices that would be a resource to other institutions. Some of the specific topics follow:

- Version 6 – a stand alone discussion to share all and perhaps more of the topics that follow, but specifically in relation to Bb 6 and migrating to Bb 6 from current platforms.
- How courses relate to the portal system – Community Building
- Workarounds and solutions
- Plagiarism and Intellectual Property
- Showcase of “Best Practices” – (Although it was duly noted by several that a “best practice” is greatly relative to the institution in which it was devised. Hence “best” is perhaps not the best term to use)
- Multi-media integration with Blackboard and pedagogical uses of different multi-media applications for the classroom
- Training, “How-To” and instructional materials, Training Curricula

Organizational Structure

For at least the beginning, it was decided to host a Bb site that would let users of this group begin collaboration following the conference. This site would include the ability to share documents and engage in a discussion of some or more of the above items. This would be a self-enroll enabled course that would be linked on the IBUG site for anyone who would care to participate. Forums would then be created indicative of a “two-tier” structure that would include the whole group but divided into smaller groups by topic who would be able to come up with an organized documentation of solutions related to the given issue or topic. These working groups could then collaborate through discussion forums. The forums that were decided are as follows:

- Mission Statement
- Administrative Issues
- Training Issues and Tips
- Multi-Media Integration and Pedagogical Use
- Suggestion Box of Other Topics and Ideas
- How Campuses are Using Portal Functionality

The Bb site will be hosted at the University of Miami and administered by Bill Vilberg. Don Carter from Seton Hall University and John Fowler from Hudson Valley Community College have agreed to assist where needed. There were also specific volunteers to moderate each forum which the facilitator (Drew Tatusko) did not get in writing.

**2) Making IBUG Count – Summary of Charter Committee session
Facilitated by Nancy J. Mustachio, Director of Application Development & Project Management, Seton Hall University**

During the conference, approximately 50 individuals representing the diverse population of Bb's clientele expressed interest in developing the structure of the Bb's independent user's group.

25 individuals were present at this session. The purpose of this session was to discuss the next steps in forming the group's Charter. Because of the size of the group and the working order at hand, 6 individuals were selected as the Charter Committee to continue developing the proposed structure and purpose of the user's group.

The immediate next step for the Charter Committee is to finalize a draft. The draft will then be sent to all those who have expressed interested in contributing to the "development" of the user's group. Edit recommendations will be reviewed by the Charter Committee, who will then schedule a time and venue to present to Blackboard.

It is our intention for Blackboard to recognize the group as a unified forum; its main purpose to support the exchange of resources and dialogue in relation to Bb's products.

**3) Working with Blackboard – Effective Communications
Co-Facilitated by Stephen Landry, CIO, Seton Hall University; Georgianna Maroulakos, Project Manager for Division of IT, Seton Hall University**

The purpose of this session was to discuss how IBUG can effectively communicate Users' input to Blackboard; and how Blackboard can work with IBUG to establish a common ground for understanding client needs.

Blackboard Representatives included Todd Gibby, General Manager; David Yaskin, VP Product Management, and Michelle Thompson, Senior Manager, Product Marketing and Liaison to Product Advisory Board (PAB).

28 participants were present at this session, including Bb representatives, and users who are members of the PAB. The discussions centered around three general areas:

Customer/Technical Support issues, Product Enhancements, and Efficient Communication Processes.

Customer/Technical Support issues:

In response to the concerns voiced by Users about Bb's Customer/Technical Support process, we heard from Jim White, the newly appointed Tech Support Director.

- Jim explained about their new web-based ticket tracking system, re-staffing and increased training for the area. Now that their response times have improved they will begin a renewed emphasis on the quality of responses.
- Users present acknowledged an improvement in response times since the initial IBUG meeting held at EDUCAUSE in October, 2001. Members commented that often the suggestions they get from other Users on the BLKBRD-L listserv are often more helpful than the responses from Bb Tech Support. IBUG could potentially work with Bb to establish an enhanced Knowledge Base, where users can submit articles on their solutions and best practices, so that Tech Support could then access and share these with future users with similar issues.

Product Enhancements:

Members expressed a need for a clear and efficient process to escalate common issues and enhancements. This process would require feedback from Bb on the priority and timing for the proposed solution.

- David Yaskin reviewed Bb's current process for allocating limited development resources between the maintenance and evolution of the products. They will be publishing a new knowledge base that will now include known issues and problems. Bb will continue to use their Tech Support Tracking System, small focus groups, campus visits and the PAB to help them analyze and prioritize what should be included in future enhancements.
- It was then suggested by a user that IBUG could serve as an additional resource in this process by providing a structure where users could submit suggestions, review other members' issues, and vote on their priorities for enhancements. This could be accomplished through the IBUG website where members could access a restricted database and cast their votes. Bb responded that they would be interested in reviewing this proposal further once IBUG had developed a clear and efficient process that would work with Bb's development timeline for future releases.

Efficient Communication Process:

Todd Gibby and a representative from Bb's Marketing Division discussed their new communications strategies. They have now been publishing a news bulletin that is e-mailed to all their Clients. As mentioned by D. Yaskin, they will be producing a Knowledge Base for their Tech Support with the details on the status of current and future releases, including known issues and fixes.

- In addition, Bb will be conducting an annual Client Satisfaction Survey for users to rate such things as their product features, support/service areas, usage of specific attributes and components of the products. Results of these surveys will be reported back to the client base.
- IBUG members applauded these new communication strategies. They again encouraged Bb to also incorporate in their Knowledge Base the Best Practices, Tips & Tricks, and Strategies for Implementation that could be submitted by members to the IBUG website. It was also recommended that Bb support and promote IBUG through their new client news bulletin.

Conclusions:

At the conclusion of these sessions Todd Gibby reiterated Blackboard's willingness to work with IBUG to develop a clear and efficient process for communicating.

- Blackboard looks forward to reviewing the proposed charter for the structure of this user's organization, and will give prompt response to how Blackboard's liaison will work with IBUG's steering committee based on what will be proposed.
- In addition, it was suggested by Todd that we reconsider the name of this evolving users organization; in an effort to better represent all Bb clients (K-12, Higher Ed, Corp Training, Transaction System Users); and to reflect the growing collaboration and cooperation between us. This suggestion will be presented to the current membership for their consideration, perhaps in an on-line suggestion poll on the IBUG website.