CHAPTER 5: COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS

Terminal Objective

By the end of this module, the learner will be able to use the communication tools within Blackboard Vista to communicate with their students.

Enabling Objectives

1. Generates an announcement in Vista using the Announcement Tool
2. Constructs chatrooms that can be used to promote discussions between students
3. Creates email to dissemiate information and stay in contact with students
4. Produces calendar event in Vista using the Calendar Tool
5. Builds a discussion board and facilitates conversation between students
CHAPTER 5: THE COMMUNICATION TOOLS

ANNOUNCEMENTS TOOL

Instructors can use the Announcement tool to create and send announcements to students enrolled in their course.

Announcements appear in students’ My Courses or on the Announcements screen. Announcements can also appear as pop-up messages, which appear when students first log in to the course.

Topic 1: Creating an Announcement

1. From the Build or Teach tab, select the Announcement icon in the upper left-hand navigation bar, Course Tools.

2. From the Announcements screen, click Create Announcement.

3. The Create Announcement screen appears. Enter a title. The title identifies and summarizes the announcement to course members.
4. In the **Message** box, enter the announcement text:
   1. To enter the text in Plain Text format enter the announcement text.
   2. To enter the announcement in HTML format you can use the **HTML Creator** or code in HTML:
      - To use the **HTML Creator**, click **Enable HTML Creator**.
      - To code in HTML:
        a. Select **Use HTML**.
        b. In the **Message** text box, enter your HTML code.

5. Under **Recipients**, determine which members receive the announcement. Selecting a role means that every member enrolled in that role will receive that announcement.
   1. Next to each role that you want to receive the announcement, select the check box.
   2. To quickly select/clear all roles, next to **Select All Roles**, select/clear the check box.
6. Under **Delivery Dates**, click the **Date Selection** and **Time Selection** icons to select dates and times. You can also enter dates in numerals separated by forward slashes. For example, depending on locale settings specified by an administrator, enter dates in this format: **10/29/2008** or **29/10/2008**.

![Delivery Dates](image)

To have the announcement appear as a pop-up message (when students log in), select the box next to **Also deliver as a pop-up message**.

7. Click **Send** and your announcement is delivered.

![Send](image)

**CHAT TOOL**

1. Start in the Build tab and click on **Chat**.

![Chat Tool](image)
2. Click the **Create Chat or Whiteboard Room** button.

3. Complete the required fields (those marked with an asterisk). Be sure to expand **More Options** for permissions associated with the **Chat and Whiteboard Room**. Click Save.
CALENDAR TOOL

Topic 1: Viewing Different Types of Entries

The Calendar tool within Vista 8 is a powerful function that can be used to inform students of future events and/or can serve as reminders. The Calendar Tool has a large amount of functions which will be covered in this tutorial.

The Calendar Tool has the capability to create different types of calendar entries according to the needs of the user. For example, if the user is a professor and wants to create a calendar entry of meetings for the week, the Calendar Tool can be used to create a personal meeting that only displays for the professor. However, if the professor wishes to create a calendar entry for a Vista course, any individual enrolled in that class will see the event. For example, if the professor creates a course Calendar entry that states a test will take place on November 30th, any individual enrolled in the professor’s course will see the entry.

1. To see a personal entry on the Calendar Tool, click on the View drop down box on the right side of the screen and select Personal. Once the Personal option is selected, click on the Green Arrow (¤).

2. The Calendar will display only personal entries like the meeting scheduled on November 18th.
3. However, if the user wishes to view assignments that are scheduled in the class, click on the View drop down box again and select This Course Only and then select the Green Arrow.

4. Once the course view is chosen, any Calendar entries related to the course will be displayed. In this example, there is a course related assignment, Assignment 3, that is due on November 24.

5. It is also possible in Vista 8 to display different types of calendar entries simultaneously. To select multiple types of events to be displayed simultaneously, click on the View drop down box and select This Course and Personal and then click the Green Arrow.
6. The Calendar that displays will contain both personal and course related entries as denoted by the two red arrows below.

- **Calendar**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sun</th>
<th>Mon</th>
<th>Tue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>View Week</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View Week</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View Week</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View Week</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17 Today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View Week</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24 Assignment 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View Week</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Entries in italic are private entries.*

Keep in mind that only the user will see both types of calendar events when this particular view is chosen. Students will not be able to see the personal calendar items of the instructor or faculty member.
Topic 2: Adding an entry to the Calendar:

1. In the **Build Tab**, click on the **Assignment Tool** under **Course Tools**

2. Next, click on the **Add Entry** button.
3. Please fill in each of the following fields.

**Add Entry**

- **Title:**
- **Description:**

**Optional:** Enter a description to help define the Calendar Entry

**Dates**

- **Start Date:** 11/14/2008
- **Start Time:** HH:mm AM/PM
- **End Date:** M/d/yyyy
- **End Time:** HH:mm AM/PM

**Entry Type**

- **Personal (Only you can see this entry.)**
- **Course (Allows you to link to content in this course.)**

**Access:**

- **Public (All course members can see this entry.)**
- **Private (Only you can see this entry.)**

**Optional:** Classify the entry as a Personal entry or a Course entry. If it is a Course entry, select the Public option or the Private option

**Recurrence**

- **This entry repeats:**
  - Every day
  - Every week on these days:
    - Sun
    - Mon
    - Tue
    - Wed
    - Thu
    - Fri
    - Sat

**Until:** 11/14/2008

**Optional:** Click on the More Options link to set up a recurrence for the Calendar Entry. Click the This entry repeats checkbox and then select the day that the entry will repeat on. In the Until field, select the date the entry end date

**Links**

- **Add File**
- **Add Content Link**

**Optional:** Click on the Add File or Add Content Link to add a file to the entry.

**Save**

**Cancel**

- **Required field**

Click on the Save button to save the Calendar Entry
Topic 3: Deleting an entry

1. In the **Build Tab**, click on the **Assignment Tool** under **Course Tools**

![Sample](image1)

2. The Calendar will appear on the screen. Select the month that the event will appear in and then click on the **Green Arrow**.

![Sample](image2)

*Entries in italic are private entries.*
3. To delete an entry, the Calendar must display the exact day of the event. Click on the exact day of the event that will be deleted. For this example, the event scheduled on the 23\textsuperscript{rd} of November will be deleted so click on it.

4. After clicking on the event scheduled on November 23\textsuperscript{rd}, the day will appear on the computer screen looking like this.
5. Click on the **Action Button ( )** and select the **Delete** option.

6. Vista 8 will ask the user to confirm deleting the Calendar entry, select the **OK** option.

7. The event is now deleted and does not show up on November 23\textsuperscript{rd}. 

![Calendar](image)
MAIL TOOL

The Mail Tool appears as an icon on the course tools in the upper left navigation Bar. Mail provides the ability to communicate with other Vista users in the course. Mail in Vista cannot be used to exchange messages with external mail accounts over the Internet. The Mail tool includes features common to most standard email programs, including:

- Compose messages with carbon copy or blind carbon copy
- Add a priority indicator to messages
- Add attachments to messages
- Search, compile, and organize messages into folders

Topic 1: Accessing Mail

1. Start in Build and click Mail from the left navigation bar.

Topic 2: Using Mail

The Mail tool now provides a single page from which to view and manage folders and messages.

Topic 3: Managing Folders

Folders are listed in the left frame of the Mail view. The number in parentheses is the total number of messages in that folder. Folders may be collapsed into a drop-down list.

- The frame is removed and a drop-down list appears above the mail messages.
- Create, rename, and delete custom folders.

Topic 4: Viewing Message List

Messages are viewed by clicking on the message title in the Subject column. Unread messages appear in bold and are also indicated with a closed envelope icon to the left of the message title. Read
messages appear in a lighter typeface and are indicated with an open envelope icon to the left of the message title (figure).
- Sort the message list by clicking on the column heading. Choose ascending or descending order by clicking on the up-down arrow next to the sorted column heading.
- Choose to **Show All** or **Unread Only** messages or **Mark Read** or **Unread** from the View messages drop-down list
- Refresh your message list manually or automatically every couple of minutes
- Search message text and display results
- Forward mail to an external email account. Note: this is a forwarding service only. To reply to a message, log into Vista and access the **Mail tool**.
- Change the page viewing options
- Delete messages individually or by selecting multiple messages.

**Topic 5: Compiling Messages**

From the message list, click the check box next to each message to compile, or click the check box at the top of the column to select all messages. Click the **Compile** button. All the messages will be compiled and open in a separate window. Click the **Print** button to print to your local machine, or click the **Save as file** button to save as either an HTML or TXT file to your local computer.

**Topic 6: Reading Messages**

The folder that contains the messages to be read must be open.

1. From the messages screen, click the subject line of the message to be read. To read the next or previous message from the same folder, click **next** or **previous**.

2. To save attached files:
   a. Click **View Attachments**.
   b. Select each attachment. To save all attachments, select the check box next to **File name**. To save multiple attachments in separate folders, save each attachment separately.
   c. Click **Save to Folder**. The **Content Browser** pop-up window appears.
   d. Store the attachments.

3. When finished reading the message, click **Close this window**.

**Topic 7: Composing Messages**

1. From the messages screen, click **Create Message**.
2. Specify recipients for the message by doing one of the following:
   a. Click **Browse for Recipients**.
   b. Select the recipients and click **Save**.

3. To send a copy of the message to other recipients, click **Browse for Recipients**. Select the recipients and click **Save**.

4. To send one or more recipients a copy of the message but hide those recipients from other recipients, **Browse for Recipients**. Select the recipients and click **Save**.

5. Enter a subject.

6. If the message is urgent, select **High priority**.

7. Enter the content of the message:
   o To create the message in Plain Text format, enter it in the **Message** text box. The message will appear exactly as typed.
   o To create the message in HTML format, use the **HTML Creator** or hand code the HTML:
     - To use the **HTML Creator**, click **Enable HTML Creator**.
     - To code in HTML:
       a. Select **Use HTML**.
       b. In the **Message** text box, enter the HTML code.

8. To attach files to the message:
   a. Click **Add Attachments**. The **Content Browser** pop-up window appears.
   b. Locate and select the files.

9. To preview the message, click **Preview**.

10. Click **Send**.
DISCUSSIONS TOOL

The Discussion Board is one of the most valuable components in an online course. Online discussions ensure that all students are engaged and actively participating. They give students time to craft their best response rather than the first that comes to mind. The textbook, notes, or other resources can also be drawn upon to provide a better-reasoned and well-supported contribution.

Online discussions will be initiated by a topic, comment or question posted by the instructor. Typically, students are required to respond with posted comments to the instructor's post and to those of other students.

Topic 1: Creating and Editing Categories

Use categories to organize topics. An example would be to create a category to periodically post a reading focus question topic for your students each week. Any topics that are not assigned to that category will appear under Uncategorized Topics.

1. From the Teach tab, click on the Discussions under Course Tools.

2. From the Discussions screen, click Create Category.

3. Enter a title.
4. Enter a description.

5. Click Save.

**Topic 2: Creating and Managing Discussion Topics**

Discussion topics allow users to post messages to exchange ideas, record thoughts, and ask questions on a particular subject. Topics may be added to a category, or they can be left uncategorized.

1. To create a new topic from the Discussions screen, click **Create Topic**.

2. Enter a title.

3. Enter a description.

4. Next to **Item Visibility**, select whether to show or hide the item for Students.

5. Under **Category**, to add the topic to a category, do one of the following from the **Select Category** drop-down list:
   - To add the topic to an existing category, select the category.
   - To create a category:
     - Select Create New Category.
     - Enter a name and description.

Under Grading, select whether Students will receive a grade:

- If the topic is not gradable, select **Topic is not gradable**.
- If the topic is gradable, under **Allow the topic to be graded** choose the scoring type.
  - To assign a numeric grade, select **Numeric grade** and, in the **Out of** text box enter the maximum grade that can be attained.
  - To assign a letter grade, select **Alphanumeric grade**.
To grade the topic using a grading form (see Grading Form, Chapter 6 Assignment Tool):

- To remove a grading form that is currently selected, click the Remove icon next to its title.
- Select Grade by grading form and then click Select Grading Form.
- Select the grading form to be used.
- Click Select.
- If the Grade Book column for this topic needs to have a name other than the topic title, enter the name in the Grade Book column title text box.
- For students to see their grades for this topic, select Release grade to Students.

6. Next to Topic Behavior Options, click Expand/Collapse to set Student Posting Rules for the topic:

   - To allow Students to contribute to a topic:
     - Select one of the following:
       - Students can post messages and reply to messages.
       - Students can post messages but cannot reply to messages.
       - Students can reply to messages but cannot post messages.
     - To allow Students to edit their messages, select Students can edit their messages after posting them.
     - To allow Students to read messages but prevent them from contributing to a topic, select Lock this topic for Students. Section Instructors and Teaching Assistants can post messages to a locked topic.

7. Under Author Identification, specify whether Students' names should display with their messages:
   - For user names to display, select Authors are identified by user names.
   - For postings to remain anonymous, select Authors are anonymous to Students.

8. Click Save.