



Managing Multiple Sections of Course Web Sites in Blackboard

A Blackboard Tip Sheet

Introduction

Creating a single course Web site in Blackboard for a single instructor to use with a single group of students is an easy task, and that course can be customized, managed and updated relatively easily. What if the instructor plans on administering a course Web site to more than one section of the same course? This tip sheet will give instructors some options for how to manage multiple sections of a course.

Scenario

Think about the following scenario:

Mrs. Byers plans to create a course Web site in Blackboard for her Spanish classes. She will be teaching three sections of Introductory Spanish this semester which are based on the same material, but will have different students enrolled in each, (in a K-12 environment the classes might be labeled class periods instead of sections). There are three basic options available to Mrs. Byers in order to administer the three sections.

1. She can have three separate course Web sites created, and upload all of her course materials to each one.
2. She can have one course Web site created, upload all of her course materials to that course, and have the two more sections copied from that course Web site.
3. She can have *four* course Web sites created. In one of the course Web sites, she can upload all of the course materials common to all three sections. This is the **main course Web site**. The other three course Web sites would be **section-specific course Web sites**. Section-specific materials would be stored in those course Web sites as well as providing a space for section-specific user interactivity. The students would be enrolled in both the main course *and* the appropriate section-specific course Web site.

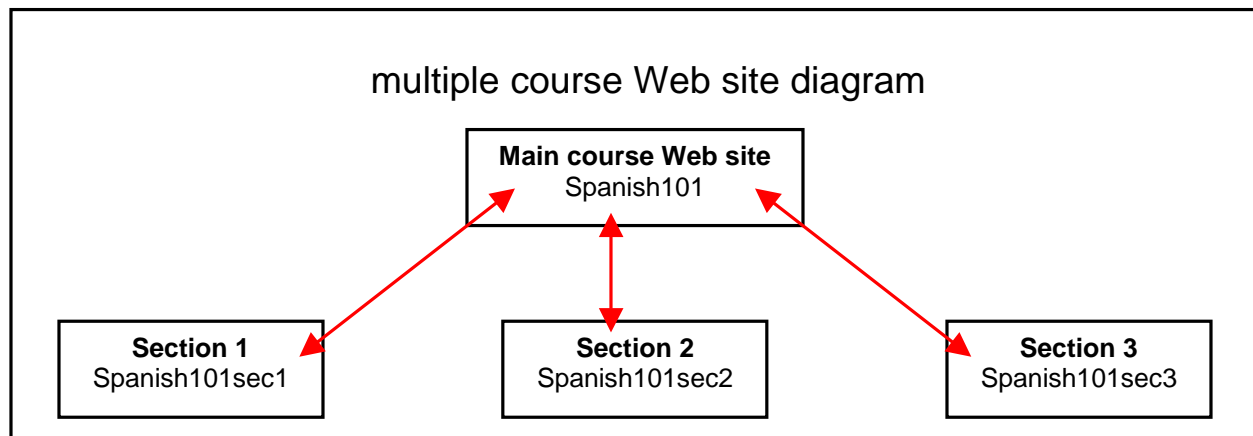
These are all practical options, but the third option has benefits for the instructor and the student that the other two options don't have. Here are the reasons that the third option might be the best way to administer and manage multiple sections of the same course.

Reasons for use of multiple course Web sites

In the first option, Mrs. Byers had three separate course Web sites created. When managing these courses, if she decides to create, modify, or remove information in her sections, she must do it three times, once in each course. This can make the instructor course creation process seem tedious and repetitive.

In the second option, Mrs. Byers is forced to have much of her course material uploaded and organized in the original course early, in order to have it available in the other course Web sites that are copied from the original. Then she will have to create, modify, or remove information in her sections separately as in the first option.

In the third option, Mrs. Byers can have the main course Web site created, and she can then upload all of her course materials to this course Web site. The other three course Web sites that are created will act as the separate sections with the appropriate students enrolled in each. Each of these sections can then refer to the main course Web site by having its address (URL) linked into each section. The links can be created in the External Links area of the course and/or in any page editor, such as the Announcements area. The diagram below shows how this process would work.



Each section is still a separate course Web site, but users can get the course material from a single location. The multiple course Web site option provides the following benefits to the instructor and the student.

- The instructor needs only to create, modify, and remove course materials once.
- The student can feel more confident that the information provided is consistent across all sections of the course.
- Course materials provided for each section are now easier to manage because they reside in the main course Web site.
- If separate materials are needed for each section, they can still be created in each separate course Web site.
- Students from each section will be enrolled in their specific course Web site, as well as the main course Web site. Students from the individual sections can now

participate in chats and discussion forums across sections (through the main course) as well as in their own section. This can improve online collaboration.

Creating the links between the course Web sites

The process for creating links between course Web sites is slightly different in Blackboard CourseInfo 4 and Blackboard 5.

Creating links between course Web sites in Blackboard CourseInfo 4

In Blackboard CourseInfo 4, the format for the URL of a course will be:

`http://server.yourinstitution.edu/courses/courseid`

where "server.yourinstitution.edu" is replaced with the address of your institution's Blackboard CourseInfo 4 server and "courseid" is replaced with the Blackboard CourseID of the course being linked to.

Any instructor can use the External Links page editor to create links to their other course Web sites. If the instructor chooses to go this route, it is necessary to select "Yes" for the option that allows you to launch the site in an external window. Otherwise, opening a course within a course will result in a very cramped display, and the navigation frame may disappear from the linked course Web site.

If the instructor uses some basic HTML, he or she can create the link in any of the page editors, using the **Smart text** option. For example, a link to the three sections of the Spanish course used in our earlier example might look like this:

Click ` HERE ` to go to section 1 of Spanish 101.

Click ` HERE ` to go to section 2 of Spanish 101.

Click ` HERE ` to go to section 3 of Spanish 101.

The word "HERE" will now become the link to each of the other courses.

Creating links between course Web sites in Blackboard 5

In Blackboard 5, the format for the URL is slightly different:

`http://server.yourinstitution.edu/courses/1/courseid`

where "server.yourinstitution.edu" is replaced with the address of your institution's Blackboard 5 server and "courseid" is replaced with the Blackboard CourseID of the course being linked to.

In Blackboard 5, the instructor would follow the same guidelines as Blackboard CourseInfo 4 if they choose to use the External Links section.

If the Instructor chooses to write HTML to create the links, it will need to be modified slightly to account for the frame at the top of the screen that includes the Blackboard 5 navigation tabs. By adding a *TARGET="_top"* modifier to your link tag, you will be able to make sure the linked course opens in the entire window, instead of opening within the bottom frame. By adding a *TARGET="_blank"* modifier to your link tag, the linked course will open in a new browser window. The sample HTML might look like this:

```
Click <A HREF="http://courses.yourinstitution.com/courses/1/Spanish101sec1" TARGET="_top">
HERE </A> to go to section 1 of Spanish 101.
```

```
Click <A HREF="http://courses.yourinstitution.com/courses/1/Spanish101sec2" TARGET="_top">
HERE </A> to go to section 2 of Spanish 101.
```

```
Click <A HREF="http://courses.yourinstitution.com/courses/1/Spanish101sec3" TARGET="_top">
HERE </A> to go to section 3 of Spanish 101.
```

The word "HERE" will now become the link to each of the other courses.

Summary

Multiple course Web sites is just one of many ways that multiple sections can be administered in Blackboard. By using this option, both the instructor and the student can have added benefits. Management time for the instructor can be drastically decreased and online collaboration between students can add to the learning process.

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