Blackboard: Enhancement and Third-Party Integration Request; Review Process for New and Existing Integrations

Background & Rationale

While Blackboard provides a rich feature set to help faculty and staff in delivering a student centered educational experience, there are times when enhancements to the Blackboard environment or integration with third parties can improve that experience. OIT and CETL’s eLearning team, as the groups responsible for maintaining and supporting Blackboard at CMU, can facilitate these enhancements and integrations in a way that ensures the best possible experience for everyone involved. Since an integration may affect Blackboard system-wide throughout the University, a thorough review and testing process prior to initiating and/or modifying an existing integration is necessary. The process is based on many factors, including system security and performance, student data integrity, overall student/faculty benefit, implementation deadlines, and University compliance.

As a note, integrations or enhancements that require any sort of purchase of services from an external vendor must also follow the Technology Acquisition Process (https://www.cmich.edu/office_provost/OIT/About/purchasing/Pages/default.aspx).

Request & Testing Process Outline

1. CMU Faculty/Staff Submits Service Request
2. Initial Review
3. Testing & Final Approval
4. Schedule Production Change
5. Go Live & Ongoing Support
6. Scheduling Considerations

CMU Faculty/Staff Submits Service Request

To provide a consistent and timely response, all Blackboard integration or modification requests must be initiated by the CMU faculty or CMU staff person requesting the integration. Requests may not be initiated by the Publisher or Vendor Representatives. Requests may be completed using the online Service Catalog (https://cmich.teamdynamix.com/TDClient/Requests/ServiceDet?ID=22299) or by contacting the Help Desk (http://helpdesk.cmich.edu/) by phone at 989-774-3662.

The following information should be included:

1. Description of the integration/modification and the anticipated student/faculty/institutional benefits.
2. Contact information for the vendor.
3. Estimate of how many instructors/students will be using the integration and whether it involves one-time/single semester use or will be an ongoing implementation.
Initial Review

- **Department approval** - The faculty's department head or staff member's supervisor approves or denies the request for further processing.

- **eLearning Review** - CETL's eLearning team will review the request to ensure that the requested enhancement, integration or modification doesn't already exist, and that it does not unnecessarily duplicate an existing Blackboard feature, supported enhancement or integration. If a request is denied at this point, eLearning will work with the requestor to meet the goals of the request with existing tools.

- **OIT Review** - OIT's Application Support team will review the request for any clear technical incompatibilities that would prevent the use of the requested enhancement, integration or modification at CMU. Examples of denials at this stage would include requirements for a newer or older version of Blackboard Learn than CMU is currently running, or other underlying system requirements that CMU's environment does not and cannot reasonably meet.

Testing & Final Approval

If all initial reviewers approve the request, OIT will work with the vendor to install and configure the requested enhancement, integration or modification in the Test and/or Staging Blackboard Learn environments.

OIT and eLearning will work together with the requestor and/or any other university department that may be affected or needed to verify that the requested enhancement, integration, or modification functions as intended, meets the actual goal(s) of the requestor and does not have an adverse effect on the system. Once the requested integration has been analyzed for its compatibility and impact on the system, a communication regarding the decision to approve or decline the implementation will be sent. Depending on the type of enhancement or modification being requested, the responsiveness of the vendor, and the timing of the initial request, the implementation schedule will vary based on existing Blackboard maintenance/update schedules and may take up to six weeks to complete. During this process eLearning will also develop appropriate support documentation regarding the enhancement or integration.

Schedule Production Change

Once OIT and eLearning have completed testing, OIT will schedule a time to install and configure the enhancement, integration or modification in the Production Blackboard environment, generally in a way that it is initially not exposed to most users. It can take up to two weeks from the end of testing before a Production change is made. At this point, OIT and eLearning will again work with the requestor to verify that the production install is working as expected.

Go Live & Ongoing Support

Once functionality is verified in Production, the enhancement, integration or modification can be made available to the intended audience at the requestor's discretion. At this point users should follow standard support procedures by contacting the CMU Help Desk (http://helpdesk.cmich.edu/) for assistance. Please note that CMU's Help Desk and eLearning Support staff generally DOES NOT have access to the 3rd party servers or support databases and thus will not be able to fully investigate any technical issues and/or questions that arise.

As a result, ongoing technical support for the enhancement, integration or modification will be limited to the following areas:

- Ensuring that the integration/building block/LTI/other third-party content is correctly installed and configured within Blackboard.
- Ensuring the tool is active and available to instructors within Blackboard courses.
- Providing faculty/students with contact information for the vendor's end-user technical support staff.
- Updates to the integration, when necessary, will be completed according to standard Blackboard maintenance schedules.
Scheduling Considerations

In order to complete the necessary evaluation and testing periods, it is always best to involve eLearning and OIT as soon as possible and to initiate integration requests well in advance of when they are needed. A good rule of thumb is to submit requests that need to be in place by a certain semester no later than the mid-way point of the prior semester, and the earlier the better. For example: If a Fall 2017 implementation date is desired, requests must be made by the middle of the Summer 2017 semester. Consideration should also be given to general Blackboard updates, which also go through extensive testing by OIT and eLearning. Major Blackboard updates generally occur around the Independence Holiday or the Winter Holiday closure.

Was this helpful?  Yes  No  Yes  No

Comment

Kenneth Barnt
Committed Revision 11.
Mon 1/29/18 9:37 AM

Kenneth Barnt
Committed Revision 10.
Fri 8/11/17 11:27 AM

Kenneth Barnt
Updated Service Catalog link to go directly to the correct form, rather than the root of the Service Catalog.
Fri 8/11/17 11:28 AM

Kimmy Noall
Committed Revision 9.
Mon 8/7/17 9:18 AM

Kimmy Noall
Committed Revision 8.
Mon 8/7/17 9:16 AM

Kimmy Noall
Committed Revision 7.
Mon 8/7/17 9:11 AM
Kimmy Noall
Changed Subject from "Blackboard Enhancement and Third-Party Integration Request & Review Process for New and Existing Integrations" to "Blackboard: Enhancement and Third-Party Integration Request; Review Process for New and Existing Integrations".
Committed Revision 6.
Mon 8/7/17 9:10 AM

Kimmy Noall
Changed Next Review Date from "Nothing" to "5/17/2018".
Mon 8/7/17 9:02 AM

Susan Parker
Changed Subject from "Using Publisher and Third Party Content Building Blocks in Blackboard" to "Blackboard Enhancement and Third-Party Integration Request & Review Process for New and Existing Integrations".
Committed Revision 5.
Thu 6/8/17 11:34 AM

Susan Parker
Changed Owner from "Derek Leib" to "Susan Parker".
Changed Category from "eLearning Internal" to "Blackboard".
Thu 6/8/17 11:32 AM

Susan Parker
Committed Revision 4.
Thu 6/8/17 11:29 AM

Kimmy Noall
Committed Revision 3.
Wed 5/3/17 1:36 PM

Kimmy Noall
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