Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackboard

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Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackboard *

Jan STEWART

In my opinion, dustless chalk is about as dustless as a floppy disk is floppy. Actually, those of us who remember the 5¼" floppy disk can appreciate the etymology of the word "floppy." "Dustless," on the other hand, is probably a clever marketing misnomer, designed to play on every classroom teacher's dream of exiting the class with clean hands.

Alas! the whiteboard revolution has brought a Pyrrhic victory. With certain types of markers, writing that is not promptly erased means using a lot of elbow grease to erase the board when you are finally ready. Using the wrong type of marker could mean resorting to using acetone to clean the board. There is also the constant problem of empty markers which leave writing that students cannot read from the back of the room, where many prefer to sit.

Enter the Blackboard Learning Management System (Bb LMS). Gone is the dust of the chalkboard era. Gone are the toxic fumes of whiteboard markers. Here to stay are all the wonders of the electronic age. Well, almost all the wonders. Even the most useful computerized system has its drawbacks as well as its strong points.

This paper will examine the Blackboard Learning Management System in terms of thirteen of its most salient features. I will begin with the Manual, which was magnanimously provided by the support staff, but which in itself exhibits shortcomings that tend to defeat the usefulness of the system generally. Where these shortcomings are most detrimental, I will expound upon them and offer clarification for the benefit of the reader.

#1　Online Manual (マニュアル)

The Bb Manual is available online. All you have to do is visit the Chikushi Jogakuen web site at http://www2.chikushi-u.ac.jp/

* With just as many apologies to Wallace Stevens.

Category：学内LAN

　　　Blackboardのマニュアルについて (the last entry)

　　　◆ 学生

　　　◆ インストラクター

After you have perused the Manual (all 200 pages of it), you are ready to enter the Bb LMS system. On the left of your screen, you will see a menu, under which are two items in a different color. Click on "Control Panel":

(The page numbers of the Japanese Manual are listed first. The Japanese and English Manuals begin to diverge at about page 47.)

#2　Course Information　(コースコンテンツ)　(28 ページ; Page 28)

Here you can provide information about your course. Due to the long list of courses with the same title (one for each year), it is helpful to include some information about the year, meeting times, et cetera.

Add Item　Add Folder　Add Learning Unit　Add Other

1　▶　Meeting Times －

　　　This class meets every Thursday, 2nd Period

2　▶　Syllabus －

　　　2007b TOEFL 演習.pdf (62453 Bytes)

#3 Staff Information (スタッフ情報) (23 ページ; Page 23)

You can provide basic information about yourself, including a photograph, if desired. The latter is done by uploading an image from your computer.

| **Add Profile** | Add Folder |

① Title, First Name, Last Name, E-mail, Work Phone,
   Office Location, Office Hours, Notes

② Options: Make visible?   **Yes** No
   Current image: None
   Profile image: | JS 2001.jpg←Browse | (参照)
   Personal link: | http:// (your_url_here) |

                    ⟨ Cancel ⟩   ⟨ **Submit** ⟩
                                ⟨ **OK** ⟩

Repeat the process if you want to add a folder for Teacher's Assistants, Guest Lecturers, Other — Add Text Below. (You also get a nice "Pick Color" option here.)

#4 Course Documents (コース文書) (33 ページ; Page 33)

Under "Content Areas," select "Course Documents". This offers a very convenient avenue for making materials of all sorts available to students.

① Item Information: | **Add Item** | | Add Folder | | Add Learning Unit | | Add Other |
   Name: (Here a drop-down menu appears, allowing the user to choose from)
   Course Documents, Student Resources, Field Trips, Instructor's Resources, Chapters, Units, Teacher Tips, Resources, Lecture Materials, Handouts, Lecture Supplements, Lecture Notes, Course Packet, Modules, Presentations, Animation Library, Image Library, Practice Tests, Exercises, Additional Materials, Other — Add Text Below.
   Choose Color of Name: (Here a grid appears, allowing you to choose one.)
   Text: (Type or paste your text here.)

② Item Attachments. This allows you to Browse (参照) on your computer or elsewhere, in order to find a file (any type) to attach to your document.

③ Options. Here you can either make the document visible or not, or you can choose to add offline content, open in a new window, track the number of views, or add metadata. The most important thing here is to remember to set the

availability dates (Display After month/day/year//hour/minute/; Display Until month/day/year//hour/minute/).
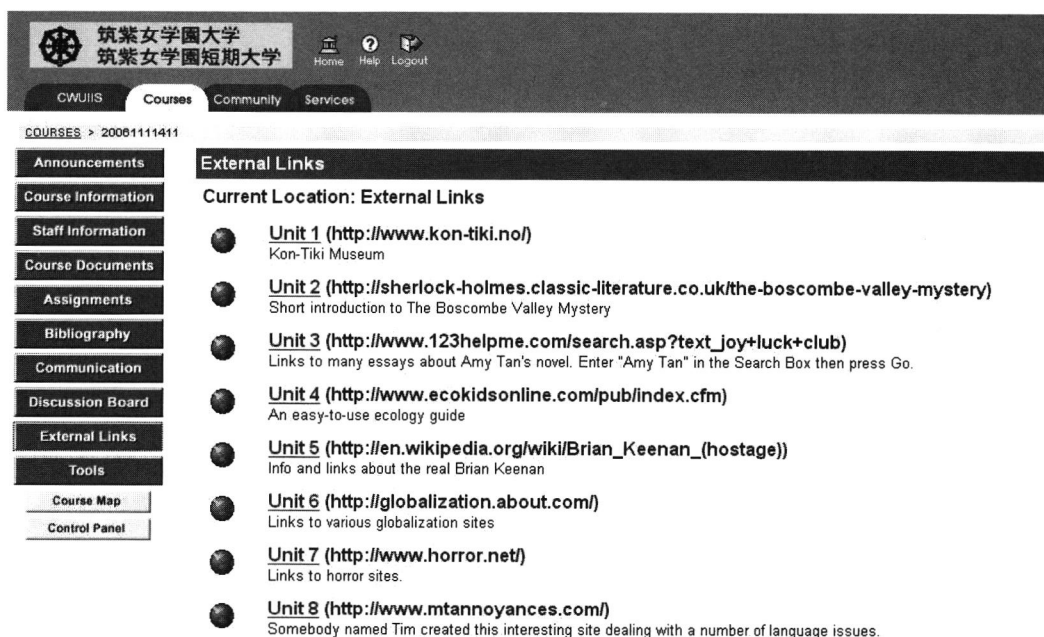
④ Submit

Cancel   **Submit**

OK

#5 External Links （コースコンテンツのリンク） (35 ページ; Page 35)

This "Content Areas" option allows you to make an Internet link available to your students. Below is a list that I developed for a third-year conversation course, to supplement each learning unit.

筑紫女学園大学
筑紫女学園短期大学
Home   Help   Logout

CWUIIS   Courses   Community   Services

COURSES > 20061111411

Announcements
Course Information
Staff Information
Course Documents
Assignments
Bibliography
Communication
Discussion Board
External Links
Tools
Course Map
Control Panel

External Links

Current Location: External Links

Unit 1 (http://www.kon-tiki.no/)
Kon-Tiki Museum

Unit 2 (http://sherlock-holmes.classic-literature.co.uk/the-boscombe-valley-mystery)
Short introduction to The Boscombe Valley Mystery

Unit 3 (http://www.123helpme.com/search.asp?text_joy+luck+club)
Links to many essays about Amy Tan's novel. Enter "Amy Tan" in the Search Box then press Go.

Unit 4 (http://www.ecokidsonline.com/pub/index.cfm)
An easy-to-use ecology guide

Unit 5 (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brian_Keenan_(hostage))
Info and links about the real Brian Keenan

Unit 6 (http://globalization.about.com/)
Links to various globalization sites

Unit 7 (http://www.horror.net/)
Links to horror sites.

Unit 8 (http://www.mtannoyances.com/)
Somebody named Tim created this interesting site dealing with a number of language issues.

#6 Course Calendar （コースカレンダー） (46 ページ; Page 48)

Under "Course Tools" （コースツール）, click on "Course Calendar." This allows you to enter events into the calendar, which may then be viewed on a weekly, monthly or yearly basis.

Add Event   Quick Jump

① Title: Class Picnic

Description: Potluck party, held outdoors on the lawn.

② Time

    Date: month/day

    Start: hour/minute

    End: hour/minute   ◁ Cancel ▷   ◁ **Submit** ▷

#7 Digital Drop Box （デジタルドロップボックス）(93 ページ; Page 96)

This Course Tool allows the teacher to send files to students and vice-versa. It performs essentially the same function as adding an attachment to an e-mail. When you click on this tool, you see a list of class members. You may click on one of them, or all. Unfortunately, Bb LMS does not permit you to choose groups.

#8 *Course Images* （コースイメージ）(119 ページ; Page 124)

This Course Option allows the instructor to choose from many button and banner styles. The types, shapes, styles and colors are described below:

▶ Button Style

    Button Type: Pattern, Solid (default), Striped

    Button Shape: Rectangular, Rounded Corners, Rounded Ends

    Button Style: Blue 2 (default)

        Black 1-3, Blue 1-8, Brown 1-9, Green 1-8, Orange 1-6, Red 1-8, Silver 1-2, Teal 1-6, Violet 1-10, White 1-2, Yellow 1-8

    Gallery (in Solid, Striped, or Pattern):

        Alligator, Aquarium, Brick, Fire, Fur, Furry Dog, Gone Fishing, Lace, Prairie Wind, Rain, Shower, Solstice, Stone, Stucco, Swirl, Texture, etc.

▶ Course Banner

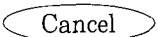   Add or remove a banner appearing on the first page.

#9 **Assessment Manager** （アセスメントマネージャ）(157 ページ; Page 163)

This Assessment option allows you to set up quizzes, in several different formats, such as fill in the blank, matching, multiple answer, multiple choice, ordering, short answer / essay, true / false.
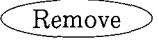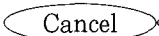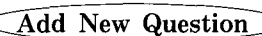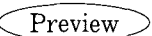
Add Quiz / Exam   Add Survey

    Assessment Properties

① Name:
   Description: ① Enter Instructions
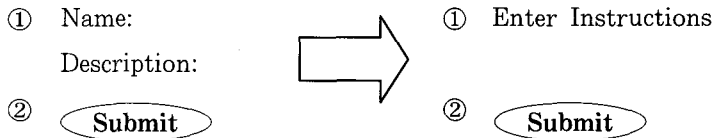
② ⟨ **Submit** ⟩   ⟹   ② ⟨ **Submit** ⟩

Add Question(s) to Assessment

① Select Question Type (from a drop-down menu):

Fill in Blank, Matching, Multiple Answer, **Multiple Choice**, Ordering, Short Answer / Essay, True / False; _ _ _ _ _ From Question Pool or Assessment.

② Submit   ⟨ Cancel ⟩   ⟨ **Submit** ⟩

Add / Modify Question(s);

① Multiple Choice Question

   Text: | What is a noun? |

② Answers: Number of Answers (Choose a number from 4 to 20)

   Correct

   Answer   Answer Values (sic)

   ○ | An action. |

   ○ | A direction. | ⟨ Remove ⟩

   ⊛ | A person, place or thing. |

   ○ | It modifies a pronoun. |

③ Options: Correct Response   Incorrect Response

④ Submit   ⟨ Cancel ⟩⟨ **Add New Question** ⟩⟨ Preview ⟩

                                              ↘
                              (Finishes the quiz)

When you have added as many questions as you need, it is time to finish the quiz. To do this, click on "Preview."

⟨ Cancel ⟩⟨ Add New Question ⟩⟨ **Preview** ⟩

Now you must determine how many points you wish to assign each question. Bb LMS gives you the option to "Modify" or "Remove" a question at this time.

When you are satisfied with your quiz, you have three more choices:

$$\boxed{\text{Cancel} \quad \text{Save} \quad \underline{\text{Save \& Make Available}}}$$

If you wish to do further work now, click on "Cancel." If you wish to continue later, click on "Save." If you click on "Save and Make Available," you must make some final, irreversible decisions concerning the quiz.

Finally, click on: ⬭ **OK**

#10 Announcements (アナウンス) (20 ページ; Page 20)

Of course, you can add announcements manually. The nice thing about Bb LMS is that once you have properly created a quiz, saved it and made it available, the LMS automatically announces the new quiz to your students. All they have to do is click here to take the quiz.

#11 Pool Manager (プールマネージャ) (185 ページ; Page 192)

Classroom instructors who have had the experience of creating a quiz by means of the Assessment Manager will appreciate the value of the Pool Manager. Creating a quiz on the Bb LMS is labor-intensive.

Perhaps you would like to use a quiz for more than one class. In my case, teaching two sections of the same subject, I went about the tedious task of creating the same quiz twice, until I discovered that quizzes can be exported from one course and imported to another. It is not as easy as the Manual makes it out to be, however. In fact, users who are not able to second-guess the intentions of the Bb LMS designers will probably not succeed in transporting files from one course to another. It takes about twenty clicks to actually carry out the instructions that appear as two easy steps in the Bb LMS Manual. Instead of crying great tears, follow these precise instructions, and have a nice day:

1. Create Assessment (see #9 above)
2. Click on Pool Manager

    Add Pool | Search Pool | Import Pool | Export Pool

    — Add Pool: (Type Name, Description) ⬭ Cancel   ⬭ **Submit**
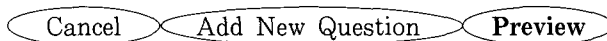
    — Question Type:

    ① Select Question Type (from a drop-down menu):

Fill in Blank, Matching, Multiple Answer, Multiple Choice, Ordering, Short Answer / Essay, True / False; _ _ _ _ _ _ **From Question Pool or Assessment.**

② Cancel Submit

For example:
- Pools:

    Assessments:☑ TOEFL Listening Exam Two

    Cancel Submit

- Search for Questions

    Categories [all] Type ☐ All ☐ MCQ

    Keywords [   ]

    Cancel Submit

- Add   Type   Q Text   Container Name   Type

    ☐MCQ   One   (Quiz Name)   Quiz   Preview

    ☐MCQ   Two   (Quiz Name)   Quiz   Preview

    ☐MCQ   Three   (Quiz Name)   Quiz   Preview

    etc.   Cancel   Submit

- Modify Pool

    [Add Item] [Search Pool] Name: Modify

    Description:

    Preview   Modify   Remove

    OK

3. Pool Manager

    [Add Pool] [Search Pool] [Import Pool] **[Export Pool]**

    - Pool to Export

    ① Select

        Pool to export: [(Drop-down menu)   ] ▼

TOEFL Listening Exam Two

② Submit

Cancel   **Submit**

— Export Pool

Receipt

Click here to download the exported pool.

開 (O)   保存 (S)   キャンセル

マイ ドキュメント
🗀 ABCs
🗀 Better Mousetrap
🗀 Classroom Stuff
    🗀 TOEFL
        🗁 Listening

Name TOEFL Listening Exam Two   保存 (S)
Type   zip   キャンセル

Open (O)   Folder (F)

閉じる
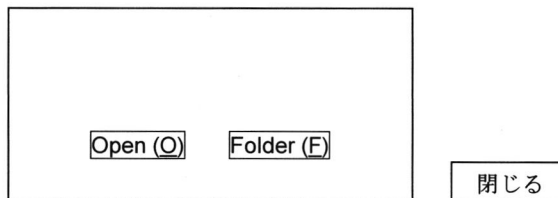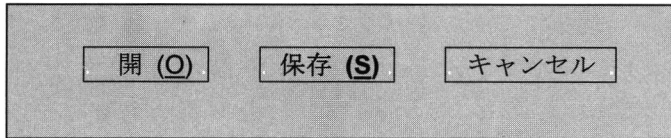
OK

Now you have a handy "zip" folder in your data bank.

4. Pool Manager

Add Pool Search Pool **Import Pool** Export Pool

① Import Question Pool

Pool to Import: | TOEFL Listening Exam Two Browse | (参照)

マイ ドキュメント
📁 ABCs
📁 Better Mousetrap
📁 Classroom Stuff
  📁 TOEFL
    📁 Listening
      📂 **TOEFL Listening Exam Two**

Name | TOEFL Listening Exam Two | 開 (**O**)
Type | すべてのファイル (＊ . ＊) | キャンセル

②   Cancel   **Submit**

- -
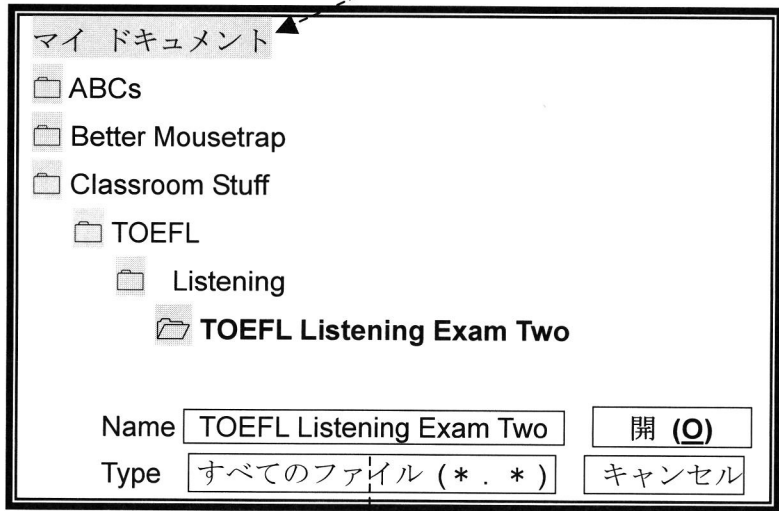
Import Pool
  Receipt   **OK**

- -

Pool Manager

Last Modified   Name   # of Questions
Feb. 6, 2007   TOEFL Listening Exam Two   10

                    Modify   Remove

                         OK

#12 Online Gradebook (オンライン成績表) (193 ページ; Page 200)

This Assessment Option allows the instructor to view results of assessments in three ways: by user, by item, and as a spreadsheet. In addition, it allows the instructor to export gradebook items in a comma-delimited file. I have found the Spreadsheet View

most useful, especially in courses where several quizzes are given during the semester.

Probably the most essential component of the Spreadsheet View page appears offscreen, to the right (due to the "landscape" page layout, one does not view the entire page). Click on the bar at the bottom, and you will see the "Sort Name By: Sort Users by:" option above the spreadsheet. Curiously, Bb LMS orders users randomly by default, so it is necessary to "click" to achieve a useful, orderly gradebook.

Conclusion

Ironically, the thirteenth way of looking at this "blackboard" is in hindsight. By the time readers have had time to enjoy this article, the Blackboard Learning Management System will have become defunct, insofar as Chikushi Jogakuen University is concerned.

Well, all good things must come to an end. I started writing this article long before I learned the news, which really threw me into a tailspin. Perhaps my next article will be entitled "Muddling Through Moodle."

<div align="right">（ジャン・スチュワート：英語メディア学科　教授）</div>