

**Job Aid: “Best Practices Roadmap – Ten Principles of Effective Teaching and Practical Examples of Using Blackboard in an Online Classroom”, for the Human and Behavioral Sciences department, at Westchester Community College**

## **Introduction**

The Human and Behavioral Sciences department, at Westchester Community College, offers courses in both a traditional classroom and distance-learning format. The primary tool for online collaboration is Blackboard. The distance-learning program enables students to take courses at their convenience and eliminates the need to travel. This is a major factor in the success of the distance-learning program. However, some students and professors have expressed that they miss the face time and inter-subjective dialogue that takes place in a traditional classroom setting. Some students have also expressed that there were occasions when the professor seemed unresponsive. The main goal is to improve the quality of online classes using the tools provided, in an effort to encourage students to take more online classes, increase student achievement and mastery of course material.

### ***Performance Analysis Results***

During the gap analysis, optimal performances were identified, one of which was for professors to utilize (using tools available in Blackboard, specifically the discussion board) best practices 100% of the time while conducting online classes. The actual performance is that 100% of the professors are unclear what the best practices are. Best practices were not identified and communicated to the professors by the organization. According to the Job Aid Handbook, performance support is indicated “When performance can be improved through employee self-assessment and correction with standards in mind... Clarity about what constitutes excellence and clear communication surrounding it helps people help themselves” (pp. 23).

### ***Focus of Job Aid***

The purpose of this job aid is to identify and communicate a best practices approach to the professors thereby closing the gap between actual and optimal performance. There is a definite need to support professors as they transition from teaching in the traditional classroom to the online classroom. A job aid is recommended so that the approach to teaching online is informed by a clear theoretical framework. A job aid could be helpful to 1) inform professors of “Best Practices” strategies and applications that can be used to engage online learners and 2) build confidence in the application of these best practices. The content of the job aid is guided by the philosophy that the use of Blackboard should be “informed by a clear theoretical framework... specifically on constructivist learning theory because its principles align well with the design of online learning environments... learner-focused, promote active learning, guided discovery, and the construction of new knowledge, and provide a variety of options that encourage reflection, interaction, and collaboration among students and faculty.” (Connecticut Community College. (2006). *Effective Teaching Practices for Web-Enhanced, Hybrid and Online Classes.*)

### ***Instructional Objective of the Job Aid***

The instructional objective is derived from the goal analysis and optimal performance. Instructional Objective: "Given a job aid of best practices, professors will apply (using tools available in Blackboard) the best practices 100% of the time." Since ADDIE is an iterative process, let it be noted that some adjustments were made to accommodate new findings affecting the instructional objective of the job aid. In the performance analysis, the optimal performance initially specified that “professors utilize *discussion board* best practices 100% of the time”, but has since been adjusted to state that “professors utilize best practices 100% of the time (*using tools available in Blackboard*)”. The performance analysis began with a narrow scope of study (discussion board use) in an attempt to limit scope creep. However, in the process of creating the job aid, a formative evaluation took place and it was determined that these best practices can be expanded to include examples and approaches that are applicable to all tools available in

Blackboard. Therefore the instructional objective now includes “using tools available in Blackboard” as part of the apply condition.

### ***Audience Analysis***

The audience is a sample group of professors. One may assume that this group has a positive attitude towards learning. All of the professors have attended training on Blackboard, are using the system, and also have experience in a traditional classroom setting. None of the professors have been informed of best practices.

### ***Approach***

During the task analysis the content/performance matrix was used to identify the objective’s knowledge type. In this case it is to apply principles. The apply principle objective calls for applying a general rule to a specific situation (Ed Tech Module 9, pp. 11). Therefore each teaching principle is listed followed by a definition and specific examples of how to apply them in various situations using Blackboard.

## **Job Aid Development**

### ***Job Aid Design***

The job aid design was informed by the principles stated in the Job Aids Handbook (pp. 17).

- Converged. Job Aids... are one with the work. They converge with the task.
- Go where the work is... They are available when and where they are needed.
- Simplicity. No frills, no fuss, just focus.
- Personalized... tailors information and guidance to your circumstances.

The job aid was designed with these benefits in mind. It converges with the task (online classroom) by being accessible online and is available when and where the work is. It is simple and focused as a numbered list of ten principles. It is personalized by being tailored to the audience of teachers. It is relevant. The content of the job aid was adapted from “Ten Principles of Effective Teaching and Practical Examples for the Classroom and Blackboard”, on the Bradley University faculty website.

[http://blackboard.bradley.edu/faculty/Recommended\\_Ef\\_Use\\_BB/RecommendedEffUseOfBb.pdf](http://blackboard.bradley.edu/faculty/Recommended_Ef_Use_BB/RecommendedEffUseOfBb.pdf)

This document was chosen to inform the content of the job aid because the research was written by a similar audience (online faculty) and designed to meet similar performance goals (which can be applied to most online campuses). The coaching type of job aid was chosen, and structured as a best practices checklist. According to the Job Aids Handbook (pp. 36), coaching job aids have the following characteristics:

- They answer the question: “What should I keep in mind?”
- They answer the question “Why?”
- They articulate quality standards; and
- They encourage dialog with the user, especially... reasons... and approaches.

This job aid presents a list of ten principles of effective teaching on the first screen, that serve as navigation links to additional information regarding that principle and its definition and practical examples. The job aid can be referred to both during the performance or studied prior to (and after) performance thereby serving as both a sidekick and a planner. This job aid meets the requirement of being performance support, which is “a repository for information, processes and perspectives that informs and guides thought and action.” (Rossett & Schaer, 2007, pp. 16).

### ***Job Aid Media***

The job aid prototype was delivered to an audience who are to apply its principles to an online tool (Blackboard) in practice. This academic audience is also inclined to use print. Therefore media that was both online and printable was selected. A flash .swf file (Flash version 7), with a print button, was created to take advantage of its small and portable file size (80KB) and easy to use navigation. It was safe to assume that all testers have at least Flash Player 7 on their computers at this point in time. HTML was considered, but not chosen since the author does not

have access to the organization's web resources to post the content. The flash file is easily sent as a downloadable file via email and maintains its formatting. The professors can both print the content and keep it near their computer or open a screen on their computer for reference. This meets the requirements of the principle presented in the Job Aids Handbook that "job aids provide that information at the time of performance."

## **Initial Results of the Pilot Test**

The job aid was distributed to the same faculty who participated in the performance analysis. Three responded and tested it over a period of one week. The job aid was piloted at a bad time for the testers. It was distributed one week before the end of the semester. This is a busy time for the faculty as they are preparing to wrap up the semester. Fewer faculty participated in the pilot (compared to the performance analysis) and responses were very brief. Overall, the respondents found the job aid enlightening and helpful. It appears from the responses that the job aid did meet the stated objective to a degree. The respondents say they will use the job aid, but decline to specify if they will use it 100% of the time. Regardless, the job aid helps the performers meet the objective. The following are the exact statements from the participants:

"The job aid is fantastic! It overcomes two things which usually stand in the way of making improvements: 1) all too often there is no quick way to access a list, say of best practices, regarding a topic when needed; and 2) very often a list of best practices is a bit too general and it is unclear how to apply the insights of the list. Naturally, one can always go and find more data. But very often there is little incentive to do time consuming research. But this job aid pulls together a list of best practices for a specific topic and this list can be easily accessed. It can be referred to in the midst of a problem or as teaching is underway. Moreover, it allows the user to access a set of VERY helpful practical suggestions for implementing the practices. These suggestions arose out of a survey of distance learning teachers and can clearly be used to make discussion boards more inclusive, efficient, interesting, and even fun. So the generality of the topics is made more specific by simply clicking a link and accessing the suggestions. I know I will use this aid and I think there should many more such aids on a wide variety of topics. Having these aids would certainly enrich the online teaching experience for both teachers and students!"

"Thanks for the job aid document. The specific and concrete suggestions/examples for each of the 10 principles I found helpful. There were some ideas that I had not thought of."

"I thought the findings were very interesting and helpful. The analysis highlighted a trend in the use of discussion boards that I was unaware of. In doing online courses, I feel isolated with my teaching, and it is useful to have a survey analysis that shows that the professors surveyed have similar concerns to mine. I found the "best practices" question particularly enlightening."

## **Job Aid Revision**

Ideally, the pilot should have run for a longer duration (over the course of the semester) and delivered via the faculty website. Given more time, it would be best to interview or survey the students for their responses on how the job aid impacts their experience of the online classes. The content can then be distilled down to the points that make the most impact and are most relevant to this particular faculty and distance-learning program. Taking this step can help to converge, simplify and personalize the job aid even further.

## **Conclusion - The Big Picture**

The job aid addresses and resolves a basic skills and knowledge issue for the faculty, namely, "What are the best practices for effective teaching in Blackboard?" Further analysis must be conducted to determine if the best practices from the job aid are applied in the long run. The overall big picture is for the faculty to continue to apply these best practices as a roadmap to creating their own schema for conducting online classes in a way that is satisfying to both students and faculty.