



Blackboard Tips & Tricks

Grade Center

Whether you are starting from scratch with a blank Grade Center or want to make changes to an existing one, there are a number of settings you **must** review and/or configure **before** you use the Grade Center. It is recommended that you approach them in the following order:

1. Create Categories
2. Review and/or Create New Grading Schema
3. Add Grade Columns to Add Manually Graded Assessments
4. Add Calculated Columns
5. Review and/or Configure Total & Weighted Total Column Settings
6. Organize Your Grade Center
7. Organize Smart Views

For more details, see: http://www.siu.edu/its/bb/fac_staff/bb_step4g.shtml

- ✓ Grade Center items are added in one of three ways:
 - A Grade Center column is automatically created for tests, surveys, Blackboard assignments, and Turnitin assignments created and deployed within Blackboard.
 - A Grade Center item for discussion board participation as well as journal, blog, and wiki postings is created when the discussion board, journal, blog, and/or or wiki is set up to be graded.
 - Assessments not created or submitted through Blackboard are manually added by using the **Create Column** button in the Grade Center
- ✓ In order to remove an item from the Grade Center, you *must* know how it was added. Columns manually added to the Grade Center using the Create Column button can be removed by selecting the **Delete Column** option from the drop down list in the column header. Columns automatically created by Blackboard (as noted above) must *first* be removed from the content area in which they were deployed before they can be removed from the Grade Center.
- ✓ In the Grade Center, you can choose both a Primary Display method and a Secondary Display method for each column. Note that **grades must be entered into the Grade Center using the method selected as the Primary Display** (i.e. if the Primary Display is percentage, grades must be entered as percentages). Only the instructor sees the Secondary Display.
- ✓ If you choose Letter as either your primary or secondary display method, you **must** review the Blackboard default **Grading Schema** (via Manage > Grading Schemas) to be sure that it mirrors your grading schema. If it does not, you will

need to create a new Grading Schema.

- ✓ Only the Full Grade Center shows *all* columns (with the exception of those instructors have “hidden” from themselves). The links nested beneath the Full Grade Center link under Control Panel > Grade Center > Full Grade Center, (e.g. Assignments and Tests) are “Favorite Smart Views” of the Grade Center. Those Smart Views show only selected columns specified in the Smart Views when they are created.
- ✓ In a course shell where multiple sections of a course have been merged into a single course shell, you can create a “Smart View” within the Grade Center for each section of the course via Manage > Smart Views > Create Smart View. Each section-number-specific Smart View should be created using the following Smart View selection criteria:
 - Type of View: **Custom**
 - Select Criteria:
 - User Criteria: **Child Course ID**
 - Condition: **Equal to**
 - Value: ***a single section number (e.g. 001)***
 - Filter Results: **All Columns**
- ✓ Smart Views should be used whenever more than one person plans to work in the Grade Center at the same time. Each grader should enter grades through their own Smart View for a selected group of students rather than in the Full Grade Center.
- ✓ An Extra Credit item can be added to the Grade Center. When creating an Extra Credit item, set the **Points Possible:** to **0** and **Display as:** to **Score.**
- ✓ In order to use the “Drop x highest/lowest grades” option in a manually created, Calculated Average column, you *MUST*:
 - First, review Manage > Column Organization to assure that all items to be included in the calculated average are assigned to the same **Category**.
 - Set the Primary Display for the Calculated Average column to **Percentage**.
 - Use the “**Selected Columns and Categories**” option rather than the “All Grade Columns option” when creating the Calculated Average column.
 - Use the “**Categories to Select**” option to select the category from which scores will be dropped when creating the Calculated Average column.
 - It is best if *each* of the items within the category is worth the same number of points (e.g. If you will drop the lowest two quiz scores from a total of 10 quizzes, each of the 10 quizzes should be worth the same number of points). If the points possible for each item is *not* the same, then you must decide whether to calculate the percentage for each item “Equally” (sum of percentages earned/number of items) or “Proportionally” (total points earned/total points possible). By default,



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Blackboard will weight them "Equally."

- ✓ If you *are not weighting grades*, it is recommended that you *not display the Weighted Total* to the students. If you *are weighting grades*, it is recommended that you *not display the Total* to the students. Either column can be removed from student viewing via My Grades by expanding the drop down options in the column header and selecting **Show/Hide to Users**. When a column is not visible to students, it will show a universal do not symbol in the column header. *NOTE: A Total or Weighted Total column which is designated as the "External Grade" (displaying a green check in the column header) remains visible to students, regardless of the show/hide to users setting.* Make certain that the total column you actually want students to see is the one that carries the "External Grade" green check icon. To designate the appropriate total to be the "External Grade," expand the drop down options in that column header and select "Set as External Grade."
- ✓ If you *are weighting grades*, you must edit the Weighted Total column to define your weighting. You can weight by column, by category, or by a combination of those methods. It is best if the point possible for each item within a category is the same. If the points possible for each item within a category is *not* the same, then you must decide whether to calculate the percentage for each category "Equally" (sum of percentages earned/number of items) or "Proportionally" (total points earned/total points possible). By default, Blackboard will weight them "Equally." Your choice should mirror the method you would use if hand calculating the grade.
- ✓ Instructors who choose **Hide Column** from the drop down list of options for a column only hide that column from their own instructor view, not from the students view. It is better to delete a column you are not using than to hide it. To prevent students from viewing a column via the My Grades course navigational link, expand the drop down options in the column header and select **Show/Hide to Users**.
- ✓ It is highly recommended that you download a copy of your Grade Center periodically throughout the semester.
 - Definitely download a copy of your Grade Center whenever you have a student withdrawing from a course. Once a student has officially withdrawn, their grades will also be gone from Blackboard.
 - Also download a copy of your Grade Center at the end of finals week for archival purposes. Having a copy of your Grade Center can be useful in addressing student questions and complaints.

- ✓ Instructors who prefer to use Excel to enter grades are strongly advised to create any new columns in Blackboard **before** downloading the Grade Center as a **tab delimited** file. New columns created in Excel, rather than Blackboard, will *always* need to be edited in Blackboard after they are uploaded since they will be with a Primary Display set to "Text" and points possible equal to zero. When uploading the Excel file, be sure to select the "Auto" button for Delimiter Type.
- ✓ Faculty who wish to display for their students a column which shows their final letter grades are advised to manually create a column for that purpose. Note that the **Primary Display must be set to "Text"** in order for you to be able to enter a letter grade of "A", "B", "C", "D", or "F". Do not choose "Letter" as your Primary Display unless you have reviewed and accepted the default "Letter" Grading Schema or created a new one that reflects your own, personalized letter Grading Schema.
- ✓ Faculty who wish to display for their students a column which shows their final percentage grade are advised to set the Primary Display for their Total or Weighted Total column to "Percentage." Some faculty who manually created a Calculated Average column in an attempt to address this concern have reported concerns that the calculation made by Blackboard does *not* match their hand calculations. Blackboard calculates the Calculated Average by taking the sum of the percentage values for all of the selected columns, divided by the number of columns selected for inclusion in the calculation [e.g. (Column 1%) + (Column 2%) + (Column 3%) + (Column 4%) = % earned divided by 4 columns = Average percentage score]. Each item is weighted "Equally." The Percentage calculated by Blackboard for the Total column is calculated by taking the sum of the points earned, divided by the total points possible. Each item is weighted "Proportionally." The Percentage calculated by Blackboard for the Weighted Total column is determined by the settings established at the time that column is created. Items may be weighted "Equally" or "Proportionally."

Tutorial: http://www.siue.edu/its/bb/fac_staff/bb_step4g.shtml