



Cool Tools

Course Messages versus Email

Blackboard offers its users a wide range of tools by which instructors can communicate with their students and vice versa. Two of the most common ways instructors and students communicate with each other is by using Course Messages and Email. Both of these cool tools might seem similar, but they are in fact quite different from each other.

Email is perhaps the most common way in which instructors and students communicate in the distance learning environment at Angelina College. Everyone who is an instructor or enrolled student at Angelina College has an email address provided for them. Email is familiar, relatively easy, and is largely mobile (you can get email on your smartphone and other mobile devices).

Email, despite seeming perfect, does have some problems associated with it. The most obvious of these is that the student or the instructor has *to check* his or her email or they will have no idea what is waiting for them in their email inbox. The other drawback is that the college's email system *is not* a part of Blackboard, and students and instructors alike must log in to their email accounts separately from Blackboard. Because our email system is not a part of Blackboard, instructors *must* inform their students of this as some of our students assume their email account is built into Blackboard while it is in fact not.

The alternative to email is Blackboard's Course Messages. Course Messages are a part of Blackboard, so all communication can be accessed from within Blackboard once logged in. Each class section or master class will have its own unique Course Message Tool, so all course messages *can only* be accessed from within that class. Course Messages can be accessed via most mobile devices, but I would strongly recommend that you use the Blackboard App to retrieve Course Messages (This will set you back \$1.99/year, which is a bargain in my estimation).

Course Messages also have their drawbacks. Since they can only be accessed in Blackboard, an instructor or student would need to log in to check his or her messages. Students and instructors also need to be aware that they can use this medium of communication, understand how it works, and how to access it. The final drawback is that an instructor or student has to check each class for messages as Blackboard does not offer a central Course Message Tool in which all messages are compiled.

Course Messages and Email both have their advantages and drawbacks. Most importantly, the instructor needs to make the decision over which he or she wishes to use and educate his or her students on how to use it. This not only facilitates greater interactivity between the students and their instructor, but it also eliminates confusion and stress. To help further limit these conditions, an instructor should also make whichever communications tools he or she is *not* using unavailable to his or her students to keep them from using the improper tool.

If you have any questions on these or any other of Blackboard's cool tools, please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Tom McKinney at extension 4522.