Commitment to Accessibility

Blackboard® is committed to ensuring that our e-Education platform is usable and accessible. With valuable input from our clients and a strong set of development tools, we will continue to invest in developing accessible products and capabilities that meet the wide range of our client's needs. To fulfill this promise we are continually auditing our code and user interface design techniques to ensure that our applications are usable by everyone, to the greatest extent possible, regardless of age, ability, or situation. Blackboard measures and evaluates accessibility levels using two sets of standards: Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act issued from the United States federal government and the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) issued by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C).

Audits of our most current release, as well as major future versions will be conducted by a third party to ensure the accessibility of the products and we intend to share this with our client base in the near term.

As we work with all of our clients, if a critical compliance issue is discovered in any of our releases, our Support and Product Development teams endeavor to address the issue in a timely manner to maintain system accessibility.

How to Get Help

Whether you are a student, faculty member, instructional designer, or administrator using Blackboard learn, we are here to help you.

For further information or support:

* **Students**: If you are having difficulties accessing or using a Blackboard product, you should contact your institution's help desk for further assistance.
* **Faculty & Instructional Designers:** If you would like guidance in building courses that are accessible or learning more about technology & accessibility, we encourage you to enroll in our self-paced course, Universal Design & Accessibility, at http://coursesites.blackboard.com
* **System Administrators:** Should you have difficulties in enabling Blackboard Learn™ to support all of your users on your campus, we encourage you to visit Behind the Blackboard for more resources on usability & accessibility or contact our Technical Support Helpdesk.

Blackboard Works with Clients on Accessibility

A community of users have created an active user group that meets regularly called the Blackboard Accessibility Interest Group. This group of over 100 clients work in sub-committees on various topics that interest them and have a real impact on the Blackboard community at large. Fortunately the group has allowed Blackboard team members to be a part of their activities; representatives from Blackboard Client Support, Technical Communications, Product Design and User Interface Design have all participated and continue to work closely with this strategic group of clients.

During the Fall of 2008, Blackboard was able to partner representatives from this group to create a self-paced course called Universal Design & Accessibility (available from Behind the Blackboard or http://coursesites.blackboard.com) that teaches instructors and course designers how to build course materials using Blackboard in a way that is accessible for students. Blackboard is currently partnering with a client to create additional documentation on best practices for using Blackboard with Freedom Scientific's JAWS screen reader.

Product Development has worked closely with representatives from this Interest Group on the redesign on the user interface as well as new functionality. Additionally, Product Development now hosts a regular Accessibility Evaluation Program, consisting of clients across all Blackboard Learn products with expertise and enthusiasm about accessibility. These clients provide feedback on design solutions while the product is still in development, and offer their valuable time to provide feedback on early versions of the release. This ensures that Product Development has user information early in the process so that the best result reaches the rest of the community upon General Availability of a release.

"I see the activities and momentum in our collaboration group and the fact that Product Development is proactively engaging the group in working on the product design as a very strong signal that the Blackboard is taking accessibility very seriously." -*Hadi Rangin, Web Design and Accessibility Specialist, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

Renewed Focus on Accessibility & Usability

We are keeping accessibility and usability at the forefront of our development approach. We have undertaken hundreds of hours of research and testing, often in partnership with our clients as mentioned above, to ensure the platform is both accessible and usable by all users. This translates not just into selected features or functions that make the application richer, but also into an architecture that supports assistive technologies and other accommodations or preferences set by a user. Coupled with a streamlined interface and a focus on student engagement and assessment, Blackboard technology is a showcase for our commitment to the user experience.

Many of our clients share our enthusiasm for the work that has been done around accessibility. Here are a few of their statements:

"I am totally convinced that Accessibility across the product line is a priority at Blackboard. They are already spending quality time and extensive resources working with a number of schools to make significant improvements. I have no doubts about Blackboard's commitment to Accessibility."
- *Ed Garay, Assistant Director for Academic Computing, University of Illinois at Chicago*

"It is clear to me that Blackboard is putting forth significant resources into accessibility. It is a process that is being built into the development of the products." - *Mark Burris, Director of Scholarly Technology and Resources (STaR), University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Testing Subgroup Leader, Bb Accessibility Interest Group*