RMIT Learning Hub: The CS&IT Missing Manual

(apologies to David Pogue 😊)

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I won’t be going on about generic how-to information. The basics are easy enough to learn through experience.

There are also a set of manuals provided by ITS:

http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=u7anf0f4f6fr1

Today’s seminar will focus on real-world information and useful tips and tricks on:

• Learning Hub admin
• Blackboard
• Weblearn
• Lectopia
• Migrating Data
• New Semester Cleanup
CS&IT Sandbox

There is a program-level Learning Hub presence that can be used as a sandbox for trying features out.

You can try out new things without fear of breaking anything important to your own course presence(s).

The program code is “PACE2222”

Access to this program is opt-in at the moment:

• email me if you want access right away
Learning Hub Administration

User accounts and authentication is centralised within the Learning Hub, not the individual tools.

Important details:

- types of access (single class, course offering, course)
- access levels (student, instructor, administrator)
- how to manage access permissions
- course vs. program level presence
- organising your access: “My Categories”
- historical access issues
There are three types of course access in the Hub.

- **Class**: single offering (e.g. COSC1076 in S1 ’10)
  
  → *Good for sessional teachers (labbers, tutors)*

- **Course Offering**: all offerings (past, present and future) of a specific course code (e.g. all COSC1076)
  
  → *Good for lecturers and head tutors*

- **Course**: all offerings associated with a certain AMS course ID (e.g. all Programming 2-related courses, across all campuses)
  
  → *Good for Course Managers*
There are three access levels for Learning Hub courses.

• **Student:** participation + read-only access to content
• **Instructor:** above, plus modify content, add students
• **Administrator:** above, plus add instructors

Students automatically get access based on AMS data.

*Instructor/Administrator access can only be given to “E-number” (Staff NDS) accounts.*
Learning Hub Admin: Managing Permissions

There is an Administration link in the Learning Hub home screen.

From here (assuming you have the permission) you can add or deactivate student/staff registrations.

The add screen is smart – you can specify multiple users for a single operation; e.g. give all your tutors and labbers access in one step, rather than individually.

You can also manage permissions by user, rather than by class/offering/course.
Learning Hub Admin: Course/Program Level

In addition to presences for each course ("Course Level"), they can also be set up for programs ("Program Level").

Program-level presences don’t come and go as semesters start and end; they are perpetual.

Just as multiple course codes can link to a single Learning Hub presence, multiple program codes can also link to a single presence.
Learning Hub Admin: “My Categories”

If you have a lot of course permissions, the Hub will force you to search for specific courses and programs.

You can use “My Categories” to organise a set of custom categories that provide easy access to the courses you use frequently.

This is handy for Course Managers, and others that need access to a wide range of courses.
Learning Hub Admin: Historical Access Issues

When the new Learning Hub was introduced in 2008, all long-term permissions were translated at the Course level, as Administrators.

If you were a Course Manager or AU Head back then, you probably have dozens of registrations because of this!

If this annoys you, it is something that has to be resolved at the College or ITS level – as the permission level is so high, nobody within the School can deactivate them.

SEH has a DLS Administrator:

→ Rodney Inns (rodney.inns@rmit.edu.au)
Blackboard

Blackboard is the tool in the Learning Hub for distributing content and hosting communications.

Important details:

- configuring your shell navigation/look and feel
- managing announcements
- configuring content items
- the discussion board
- statistics and tracking
- wikis and blogs
Blackboard: Navigation/Look and Feel

The look and feel of Blackboard can be customised:

- left side menu buttons, tool shortcuts, menu type
- course ‘entry point’: what people first see
- what tools are enabled, and how they are accessed

Some configuration options in the Blackboard control panel are disabled by the administrators.

This is usually because similar functionality is performed centrally by the Learning Hub, or is incompatible with the system architecture of the Learning Hub.
The Blackboard announcement screen only shows the last 7 days by default.

**Workaround 1:** set announcements as “Permanent”.

**Workaround 2:** make use of the date-range feature of the announcement system!

You can specify that announcements can come and go on a date range; if you are keen you could load up the entire semester’s announcements on day 1 and let Blackboard take care of the rest.

*Note: this doesn’t play nice with announcement emails.*
Blackboard: Managing Content Items

Content items can be placed in any content area – these areas are linked from the menu buttons.

You can also create new menu buttons for more content areas, direct links to tools, etc.

It’s also possible to create internal links within your Blackboard shell; e.g. a link in the Assignments area can go to something in your Course Documents.

In the “Edit View” of a content area, check the drop-down box in the top right: there are more content types available than the five on the toolbar!
Content items can also have date ranges, like announcements. This is handy to automate the delayed release of items like tutorial/lab hint sheets and solution sets.

It’s also possible to hide content items, in case something is a work-in-progress and you don’t want students to see it just yet (other instructors and administrators can still see and work on them, from the Edit View).

Attachments to a content item can be files, or entire websites bundled in a .zip file. Blackboard calls these Packages, and can open these when the link is clicked.
The discussion board is lacking a number of features you would expect from a modern forum package.

Moderation features are poor – you can delete, lock/unlock, and hide threads. Can’t move threads 😞

It does have some basic configuration of what is allowable inside each of your forums.

The “Collect” feature can create a digest of selected threads that can then be printed or saved.

The search function works quite well, and creates a printable digest of matching posts.
Blackboard can gather usage statistics on content items. This is available from the *Manage* button in the Edit View.

The usage information gives:

- total hits, and hits per day
- per-user count of total hits, and hits per day
- hits per hour of day
- hits per day of the week

The tool generates graphs alongside a table of data.
Blackboard: Wikis

Wikis are available in Blackboard, as separate tools you can create inside menu buttons or content areas.

RSS is not supported 😞

It is possible to create multiple wikis in your Blackboard shell.

It does keep an edit history, and users can comment on wiki articles.

In general, the feature-set is basic, and tailored towards student access controls, and using them for assessment (e.g. checking levels of participation).
Blogs are also available as a Blackboard tool.

No RSS here, either (more annoying than with wikis).

It too can keep a history of edits, in case you want to use blog posts as a semi-wiki.

You can open up the blog tool to students completely, giving them full control of a blog instance.

Some staff have used the Blog tool as a replacement for Blackboard announcements. However, with this:

- you lose email, and time-release functionality
- integration with myRMIT is broken
Weblearn is used for online assessment and assignment submission. CS&IT staff typically find this tool superior to Blackboard for these tasks.

Important details:

- the assignment repository system
- result storage and auditing
- using Weblearn with Webmark
- quizzes and tests
- generating final results
The assignment submission system is largely straightforward, except for the date window. You need to specify four (!) dates:

- **Start:** when the submission box opens
- **Stop:** when on-time submissions end
- **Late:** when late submissions end
- **Close:** when the submission box closes

The time between *Late* and *Close* might sound useless, but it’s handy when extensions are granted – every student follows the same submission process.
Weblearn: Assignment Workflows

A typical workflow for handling assignment marking, using the online facilities available to the School:

1. Set up a Weblearn submission box
2. Once due, archive submissions and extract
3. Prepare marking batches for tutors
4. Tutors mark using Webmark
5. Student feedback sent via Webmark
6. Results fed back into Weblearn for storage
7. Assignment can be audited to ensure marking is complete
8. Weblearn generates a finalised result sheet at end of semester
Weblearn: Result Storage and Auditing

Weblearn can store results for the assignments a student has submitted.

You can also create ‘hidden’ assignment boxes that act as a placeholder for other results, such as in-class demonstrations and midterm/final examinations.

There are two advantages to using Weblearn as a result repository:

• it can cross-reference results with submissions, and alert you if anything hasn’t been marked

• it can easily collate all results for a course (demo, assignment, test, exam), and generate a spreadsheet
There is no seamless conduit for information to pass between Weblearn and Webmark.

To port assignment results into Weblearn, create a Data Summary in Webmark:

*Create Data Summary ➔ Create Module CSV List File*

Use a spreadsheet to extract the student ID and final result (with any proportional scaling if necessary), and include the Weblearn “assignment ID” as a middle column.

This result file can then be bulk-imported into Weblearn.
If you have deleted assignment boxes in Weblearn, the assignment ID number may not be the same as the assignment! Check the Assignment section of Weblearn to get the ID number given to that submission box.

Webmark handles decimal results poorly; one workaround is to mark out of 10 times the actual worth (so a detailed scheme doesn’t need decimal values), and then divide by 10 before loading into Weblearn.

e.g. assignment is worth 15% – mark it out of 150

Then when preparing the bulk upload for Weblearn, divide all the Webmark results by 10.
Weblearn has a very good quizzing (unassessed) and testing (assessed) facility, and can generate not only results but also statistics regarding your question banks.

Fine-grained control can be given to how tests behave, in terms of the number of allowed attempts, pass marks, adaptive release, test date ranges, etc.

This feature is worth an hours’ discussion in itself.

There is a question bank editor tool available from ITS which makes generating Weblearn questions much easier than hacking the raw somewhat-XML formatting.
Weblearn: Generating Final Results

If you use Weblearn as your result repository, it can audit your assignment marking, collate all your results, and generate a spreadsheet that makes it easy to add hurdle calculations later in a spreadsheet.

The file format is customisable and predictable, so if you create a skeleton sheet with hurdle formulas etc., it makes finalising results each semester very quick and easy.

The buttons to access these tools are:

Auditor: Assign Admin → Marking Status

Results Generator: Prepare Results
Lectopia

Lectopia is available in selected RMIT lecture halls for making recordings of your lectures.

Important details:

• where it does/doesn’t work
• linking Lectopia recordings in Blackboard
• Lectopia administration tool
Lectopia: Enabled Venues

RMIT’s main page for Lectopia information is at:

http://www.rmit.edu.au/lectopia

Lectopia has been around a while, but it’s still not everywhere! A list of Lectopia-enabled venues is at:

http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=did7ykcq138e

A notable exception is Melbourne Central Conference Centre.

Information about setting up recordings (and the booking form to do so) is on the main Lectopia page.
Lectopia: Linking in Blackboard

Lectopia is a content type in Blackboard.

You may need to enable it from the Control Panel:

Manage Tools  → Content Type Availability  → Lectopia

Once enabled, it can be selected inside the Edit View of a content area from the drop-down box at the top right of the screen.

This Lectopia link allows you to link all recordings for your semester in one go.
Lectopia: Admin Tool

There is a separate Lectopia Staff Tool that, among other things, lets you isolate individual recordings so you can link them separately from within Learning Hub tools.

https://lectopia.rmit.edu.au/lectopia/staff/

The staff tool lets you access the recordings themselves, as well as view (and download) statistics for both recordings and the course as a whole.

*Note: to get access to the staff tool, you may need to request access from the Lectopia admin. It is not a standard NDS account login.*
Migrating Data

You’ll need to migrate data now and then, in order to create backups, share and hand over course materials for other offerings, etc.

Important details:

• import and export tools
• the auto-import that happens each semester
• how to clean up the auto-import
Both Blackboard and Weblearn have import and export tools, which will let you save the state (and embedded content) of your Learning Hub presence for later use.

Both tools offer some granularity in terms of what gets exported or imported.

Lectopia has no such one-click import/export, but you can download high quality versions of each recording.

One annoying bug: Blackboard has no limit on the size of export file it generates, but will not import a file greater than 250 MB.
Migrating Data: The Auto-Import

When a course runs in a future semester, the Learning Hub will automatically import the previous semester’s content into the new semester.

This is convenient, but is not a completely hands-off process: there are no doubt items that you would want to change or delete from one semester to the next.

*Consider:* assignment specs, solutions, practice exams, study calendars, announcements, old course material, ...
Migrating Data: Cleaning After the Auto-Import

One obvious thing you will want to clean up is the discussion board. With the auto-import, the first post of every thread is copied as an anonymous message.

Cleaning up your discussion board involves either:

• deleting each thread manually, or

• deleting all the boards and creating new ones.

Another annoyance are the announcements: there is no bulk delete, and if you didn’t use date ranges (so that old posts are hidden) you must manually delete each one.

Blogs and wikis have a bulk delete, called “Recycle”.
More Information

A detailed version of the content in this seminar will soon be available on the staff intranet (inside.cs).

Blackboard will receive a major upgrade at the start of next year.

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