The Blackboard system hardware was showing its age during the last academic year. It was slow, and a bug in Java was causing occasional load-sensitive system crashes. There was also frustration reported by the users with having a single person doing system support. The following improvements have been made, or are in the planning stages for the 2006-2007 academic year.

**Hardware improvements in place for the 06-07 academic year, completed September 19th:**
- Replaced the NFS server (file server)
- Replaced storage disk arrays with SAN storage
- Replaced the database server with a newer, faster server
- Replaced an older application server
- Added RAM to the remaining application servers

**Software improvements in place for the 06-07 academic year, completed September 19th:**
- Upgraded from Blackboard 6.2 to Blackboard 7.1
- Blackboard 7 includes desirable new features
- Upgraded the operating system to Solaris 10
- Upgraded to Java 1.5
- Upgraded to Oracle 9.2 (completed October 7th)

**Training and Support Efforts for Fall 2006:**
- Fall term workshops: 43 workshops, 169 participants
- Departments requesting on-site training visits: 9
- Faculty consulting meetings: 6
- GEMS (Generating Educational Mastery System) on-line tutorials created: 10
- GEMS tutorials are based upon feedback from the OSU Computer Helpdesk staff members

**Personnel and support improvements planned for the 06-07 academic year:**
- We hope to have an additional Blackboard administrator in place by January 1st.

**Software improvements planned for the 06-07 academic year:**
- Implement the Content Management module of Blackboard (Thanks to funding from Ecampus)
  The Content Management module gives users the ability to share content with other users, their classes, their organizations and guests. In the current system everything works within either a course site or organization site structure. In addition, it allows students to easily set-up an ePortfolio and choose who can view it.
Hardware improvements planned for the 06-07 academic year:
  • Add an additional “shelf” of disk storage (Thanks to funding from Ecampus)
  • Add an additional application server

Blackboard faculty and student survey planned for Winter 2007:
  • We plan use the results of this survey to improve the Blackboard experience for students and faculty in the areas of training, support and technology.

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- Regarding Content Management Module, will need to come up with changes in ONID procedures; ONID accounts are dropped after graduation but now with e-portfolios, students will need the lifetime of their accounts lengthened (lifetime email addresses from OSU are just aliases, not accounts)
  - one guidelines is to maintained ONID past graduation (with limited services) long enough to sustain a student’s first round of job applications (2 years may be right; 5 years may be too excessive with all the accounts and storage that would be needed)
  - does Content Management Module help with web page design? Or do students have to build an actual web page and lodge the portfolio? Would imagine that it does assist with page design as this is already a feature in Blackboard. The module also allows the user to create an email that invites users directly to the e-portfolio.
  - funding for another sysadmin person from recent TRF grant - this would be a second sysadmin person to join Frank Kessel
  - many of the Blackboard problems are due to Comcast/ISP issues, but OSU Helpdesk support takes care of that also
  - Yuliya has experienced more problems with MySpace than with Blackboard! :-)  
  - digital native assumption does not hold - a new technology to learn still has to be learned and there will always be challenged, plus Mac vs. PC issues
  - SURVEY - wish to do a survey of campus of Blackboard usage - what do you like, don't like, how to improve it - Jon is point person - the consultant to this project (Steve Ermann – sp?) wants to talk to CRC about this - need a conversation before we talk to Steve
  - plan to look for places in improvement, training support and technology

LONG-TERM SUPPORT, Blackboard as permanent infrastructure ➔ One important question that may come up at Faculty Senate - Blackboard is an infrastructure service, hence funding with TRF is now insufficient. How do we move to a model that is more stable and long-term (so that Catherine and staff do not have to compete within the TRF structure) - this might fall to the University IT Committee
  - For example, after latest TRF funding, Frank did not get proposed new hardware until August 23rd - didn't hear back from TRF until late July - extremely difficult to have updates ready in time for fall - would really like to get out of TRF cycle or get goodies at beginning of the summer
- The other 2 large universities in OUS use a TRF process but the money goes straight to Information Services
- Helpful stats - approximately 53-56% of all faculty use Blackboard; nearly 100% of the students use Blackboard at some time or another; more than 90% of students take a course that requires Blackboard each term; EVERY faculty that has significant impact on students uses Blackboard
- actually an irritation to students if a professor does NOT use Blackboard (or at least some kind of course web site where resources can be reached)
- how to avoid taking Blackboard down for critical updates at times near the start of a term or for long periods - (1) they are nowhere close to a point, technology wise, where they can do this seamlessly (e.g., the way Amazon runs) - they run on one Oracle db server (Real application cluster allows running on multiple app servers but is not working with Blackboard yet); (2) funding and staffing issues - lesser of two evils - still break it up and push it out or do it all at once and have long downtime; (3) no day is a good day for down time; extremely small window of opportune downtime, and even then it is not optimal
- what is best forum for discussion? Faculty Senate? ECampus should be part of discussion as ALL of their students use Blackboard and they have K-12 students
- Blackboard is mission critical, requires infrastructure to be permanent, long term
  Perhaps an order of magnitude (4 times the cost) set of hardware, warm spare, but cost of not having it available is getting to be far greater to university; need personnel as well - plan, write, implement, deliver among Catherine's staff
- For example, $350K is spent right now - multiply that by 4
- requires a business decision by the university; needs to be on par with Banner ($1.5 and $2M per year) and central web services
- a committee needs to make these parallels explicit (brick-and-mortar, Banner, etc.); Blackboard kind of edged into being - perception remains that Blackboard is just an add-on to a whole - administrators still unsure about what Blackboard really is, have not seen it in action

- Kathy H. is the CRC representative to the University IT committee formed by Provost. This committee has met once, basically an organizational meeting. TheUITC will first be working on an inventory of campus IT services and an assessment of IT needs (followed by a gap analysis) as the first steps to coming up with a master plan for IT on campus. This puts the UITC a long ways from making any policy decisions on IT infrastructure funding changes.

➤ ACTION - by Dec 11 Jon will supply an outline of Blackboard review goals and suggest ways in which to turn that into a single doc that specifies outcomes of the survey review - need agreement as to what a "review" constitutes
- will talk to Steve about available times in next 3 weeks or in January for a conference call

(4) Use of CRC to Help TAC gauge faculty needs for multimedia assets (Jon)
- in addition to training, they have a small but real set of assets for instructors (cameras, video decks - can dub VHS to DVD, etc.)
- they provide support to faculty to do these kinds of projects; cannot do the projects for them
- good time now to query the faculty on what types of multimedia or training assets they would value - TAC can then make adjustments as to what they offer based on that - want to be able to match capabilities to the needs and market these capabilities accordingly

➤ ACTION - TAC needs to come up with set of questions, pass it through CRC, perhaps ECampus, get feedback, will circulate in next 2 weeks