

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DIVISION

eLearning Technologies

While summer offers a chance to recharge, we're already looking ahead to the Fall semester. This month's newsletter includes important updates to help you prepare, from Fall Blackboard course availability and new features in the July Blackboard release to upcoming professional development opportunities. You'll also find resources and updates related to our ongoing accessibility efforts as we continue working together to create engaging and inclusive learning experiences.

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Blackboard Fall 2026 Course Availability

Beginning July 6, 2026, faculty listed as the instructor of record in Banner will see their Fall 2026 courses.

If you don't see your courses on Blackboard, please contact your department coordinator to assign you as the instructor of record in Banner. Student enrollments will begin in Banner three weeks before the course start date (August 10, 2026, for most course sites).

As you start thinking about your Fall 2026 courses, you may want to take advantage of the following common requests:

- [Merge Course Request](#). Use this request to combine two or more sites into one parent site.
- Follow these instructions for [copying content from one Ultra course to another Ultra course](#)
- [Course Restore Request](#). Use this to restore a course from the Blackboard archives that is no longer available online. Faculty have access to their Blackboard courses for two years and one semester. We retain our archive for three years beyond that.
- [Use this request to schedule a consultation](#) with your eLearning Technologies liaison for assistance with Blackboard.



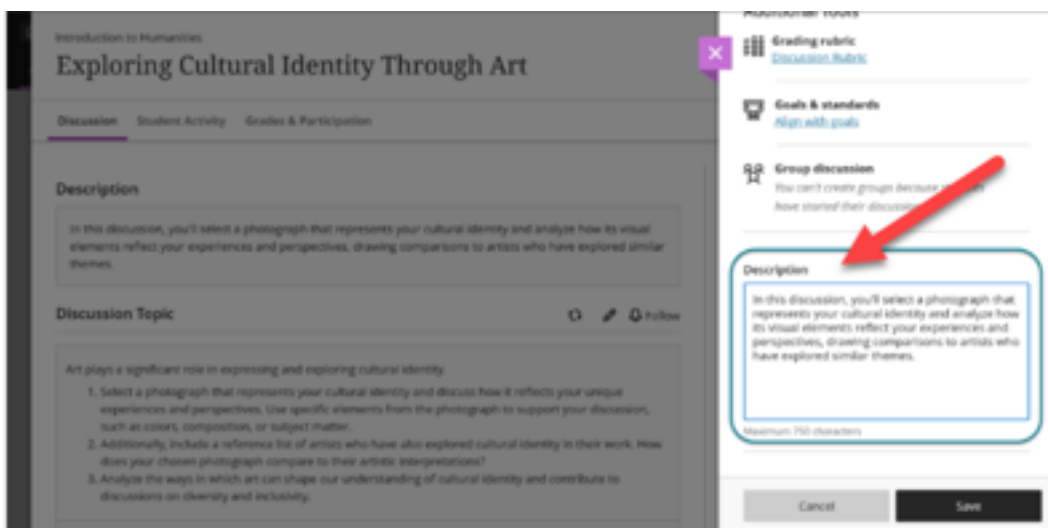
July Blackboard Enhancements

Blackboard uses a continuous release cycle, meaning new features are released monthly. Some new features are significant updates with completely new functionality, while others are minor enhancements. We've highlighted three minor improvements in the release that will be available starting July 3, 2026.



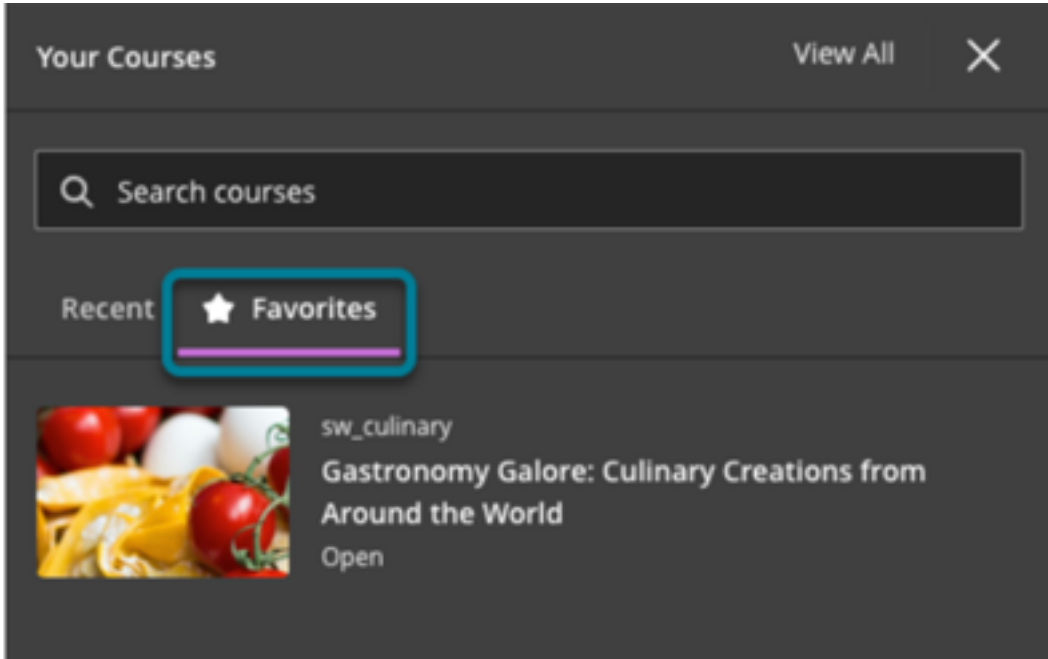
Description Fields for Journals and Discussions

When creating or editing a Discussion or Journal, instructors can add an optional description to provide students with context before they engage with the activity. The description field is separate from the prompt, which is longer and will appear on the Course Content page. Instructors can use the description to set expectations and then reserve the prompt for the engagement question or task itself.



Find your Favorite Courses Faster with the Updated Course Switcher

In the July release, Blackboard has enhanced the Course Switcher to make it easier to access the courses you use most frequently. By adding Favorites to the Course Switcher, users have faster, more flexible ways to move between courses. This centralized experience helps reduce navigation friction and keeps users focused on their work.



Run a Rubric Evaluation Report for Graded Activities

Beginning July 3, 2026, instructors can run a Rubric Evaluation Report directly from the gradebook for any graded activity with an associated rubric. This report aggregates rubric data across all student submissions, giving instructors a clear picture of how students are performing against each rubric criterion. The report supports ongoing course improvement by helping instructors identify areas where students are excelling or struggling. This function can be found by accessing a column in the Gradebook with an associated rubric.

Web Content Accessibility Reminders

As each month passes on the way to our April 26, 2027 deadline for meeting federal accessibility requirements, we want to remind faculty of several ways to start making their content more accessible.



- Visit the [WCAG website](#) for resources and getting started information.
- [Review your Blackboard Ally report](#) for red and orange items, and address the most impactful issues first.
- Use built-in checkers (Blackboard Ally, MS 365, Acrobat Pro)
 - [You can watch video tutorials on the WCAG website.](#)
- Review the [digital accessibility checklist](#) found on the WCAG website.
- [Contact the Digital Accessibility Committee](#) for help, especially for complex materials like PDFs and videos.
- Attend an [Accessibility Workshop](#). We have several self-paced options, including a [15-minute PDF tune-up](#) format.

Blackboard Unavailable during Overnight Campus Network Maintenance, 7/8 – 7/9

From 11pm on Wednesday July 8, 2026 to 4am on Thursday July 9, 2026, maintenance will be performed on the Grand Valley campus network. This will affect both on-campus and remote users. Any University application that requires GVSU Single Sign-On (SSO)—including Blackboard—will be unavailable during this time.



Professional Development Opportunities for June and July

SELF-PACED OPTIONS

- [Accessibility and Blackboard Ally Self-Paced Training](#)
- [Accessibility Best Practices for Respondus Lockdown Browser](#)
- [Adobe Self-Paced Courses](#)
- [Getting Started with Blackboard Ultra](#)
- [MI ExpLOER Learning Modules and Certificate](#) (OER Basics)
- [Padlet 101](#)
- [5 STEPS for Course Design](#)



WEBINAR OPTIONS

Unless specified otherwise, these sessions are held via live webinar on Zoom. Select the webinar title to officially register in Workday Learning and receive your meeting link. If you have difficulty registering, please email Kim Kenward (kenwardk@gvsu.edu).



AI Topics

[Maximizing Productivity with Free Microsoft Copilot Features](#)
7/29/26 • 1pm – 2pm

Accessibility Topics

[PDF Tune-Up in 15 Minutes Using Blackboard Ally](#)
7/8/26 • 12pm – 12:15pm
7/23/26 • 3pm – 3:15pm

[Making PDFs Accessible](#)
7/09/26 • 1pm – 1:30pm
7/20/26 • 3:30pm – 4pm

Connect with eLearning!

There are many benefits to working with eLearning. We can assist in optimizing your Blackboard course structure, enhancing online and hybrid learning experiences, and incorporating innovative tools to foster active learning. You're encouraged to contact your [eLearning Technologies liaisons](#) or submit a [consultation ticket](#) at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Kim Kenward, Director of eLearning Technologies
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GVSU Information Technology



[Visit our eLearning Technologies website](#)

podcast by Jamison Wasser from Noun Project / Question by Adrien Coquet from Noun Project / feedback by Vectorstall from Noun Project / moving by Adrien Coquet from Noun Project / door open by shashank singh from Noun Project / wellness by Adrien Coquet from Noun Project / reminder by conchain from Noun Project / explain by Iconographer from Noun Project / Sit by Adrien Coquet from Noun Project / Tour by Colourcreatype from Noun Project / key by Aaron K. Kim from Noun Project / closed by Gregor Crenier from Noun Project / cleaning by Nubia Karin Bartha from Noun Project / new by Jaka4027 from Noun Project / leaf by Deepz from Noun Project / foundation by M. Oki Orlando from Noun Project / working together by Kholin from Noun Project / Accessibility by mlkison from Noun Project / Toolbox by Daniel Polishin from Noun Project / startup by Gregor Crenier from Noun Project / Training by Adrien Coquet by Noun Project / origami paper bird by Iana Nagata from Noun Project / Sultase by Asah from Noun Project

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