

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DIVISION

eLearning Technologies

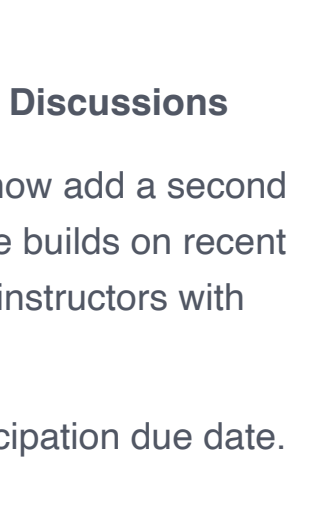
As many of you are looking ahead to spring break, we're sharing several updates and resources to support your teaching. In this issue, you'll find upcoming Blackboard enhancements, Spring/Summer 2026 course availability reminders, time-saving grading tips, and best practices for student video assignments. We're also highlighting communication templates to support student outreach, celebrating innovative faculty work, and sharing upcoming professional development opportunities to help you plan ahead.

Topics:

- [Blackboard Enhancements for March: Adding a Second Due Date for Discussions and Anonymous Grading by Test Question](#)
- [Spring/Summer 2026 Blackboard Course Availability](#)
- [Best Practice for Student Video Assignments: Use Panopto or Padlet](#)
- [Did You Know? Blackboard Grading Tips](#)
- [Respondus LockDown Browser and macOS 11](#)
- [Student Outreach Toolkit for Faculty](#)
- [Faculty Spotlight: VR Courtroom from Courtney Topic and Hunter Bridwell](#)
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- [Professional Development Opportunities](#)

Blackboard Enhancements for March

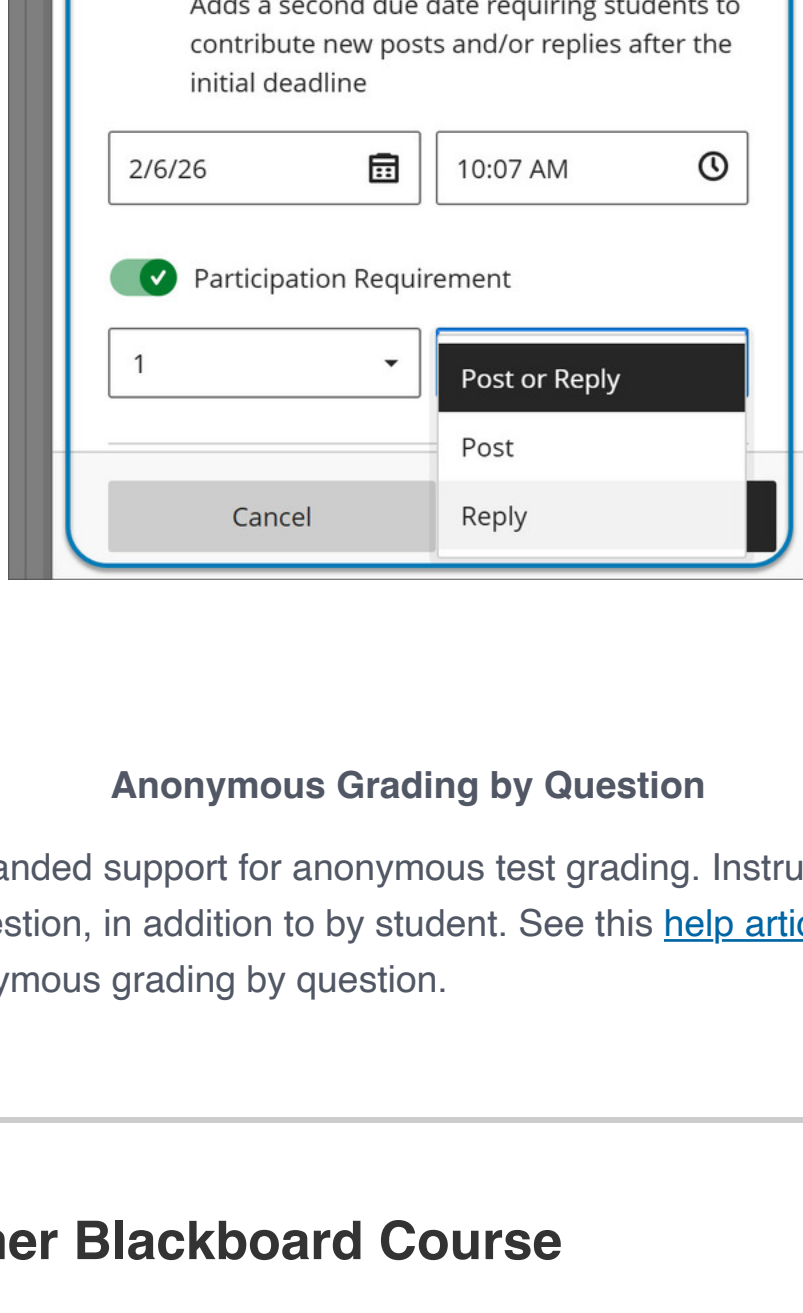
Blackboard releases new features and improvements on the first Friday of each month. This month, we'd like to highlight two changes that will improve the functionality of your Blackboard sites. For a complete list of upcoming enhancements, please review [the March 2026 release notes](#).



Add a Second Due Date and Participation Requirement for Discussions

Beginning March 6, 2026, we're excited to share that instructors can now add a second due date to the participation requirements for discussions. This update builds on recent enhancements to discussion participation requirements and provides instructors with clearer ways to set expectations for discussion activity.

See [this help article](#) for more information about adding a second participation due date.



Spring/Summer Blackboard Course Availability

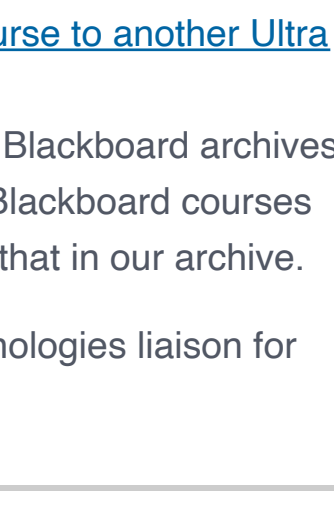
Availability

Starting March 16, 2026, Blackboard courses for the Spring/Summer 2026 terms will become available to instructors. If you don't see your courses on Blackboard, please contact your departmental coordinator to assign you as the instructor of record in Banner.

Student enrollments will begin three weeks before the course start date in Banner (April 20, 2026, for most course sites). As you start thinking about your Spring/Summer 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 three years beyond that in our archive.

[Use this request](#) to schedule a consultation with your eLearning Technologies liaison for assistance with Blackboard.



Best Practice for Student Video Assignments: Use Panopto or Padlet

When assigning student video projects, we strongly encourage faculty to prevent students from uploading video files directly to Blackboard. Instead, please use [Panopto](#) or [Padlet](#) to collect student video submissions within your Blackboard course.

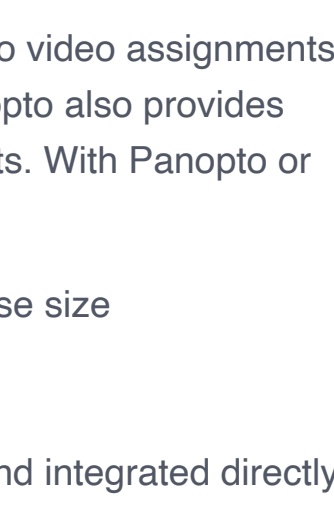
Large video files can quickly and significantly increase the overall size of a Blackboard course. Over time, this can create challenges if a course needs to be archived or restored. In some cases, courses with large numbers of student videos cannot be fully restored, potentially leading to the permanent loss of course content.

Panopto and Padlet both offer a more sustainable, flexible approach to video assignments while keeping Blackboard course sizes manageable. By default, Panopto also provides video captions, which are necessary to meet accessibility requirements. With Panopto or Padlet, faculty can:

- Store student video submissions securely without inflating course size
- Keep videos private to the instructor or selectively share them
- Enable peer viewing and feedback when appropriate
- Provide students with a submission experience that is simple and integrated directly within Blackboard

[Review this Knowledge Base article](#) to set up a Panopto video assignment, or [review this Knowledge Base article](#) to set up a Padlet for classroom video discussions.

Faculty can also [submit a consultation request](#) for individualized support for either tool.



Did You Know? Blackboard Grading Tips

As we approach the halfway point in the semester, grading demands are at their peak. To streamline your workflow, we've gathered a few practical, time-saving Blackboard grading tips to make the process more efficient, without sacrificing meaningful student feedback.

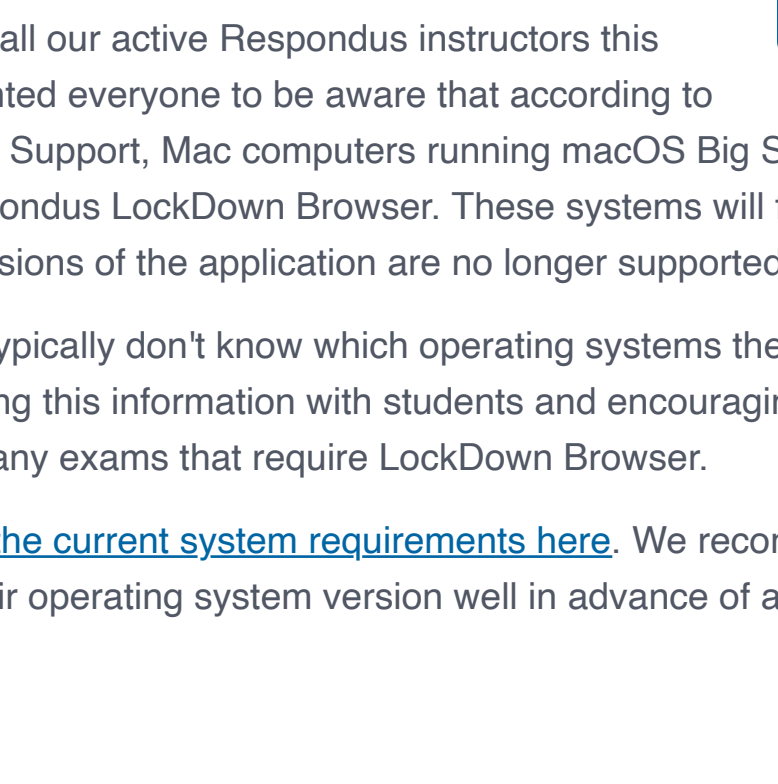


1

Did You Know that you can create a comment library for grading? Blackboard Annotate lets you save a library of reusable comments and feedback that you can insert directly into a student's submission. The comments are stored in Blackboard and linked to your account, so they can be easily used across all your courses while grading! See [this resource](#) to learn more.

2

Did You Know that you can personalize your grading with audio or video feedback? Blackboard also provides auto-captioning to increase accessibility for students.



3

Did You Know you can filter essay questions in your tests for faster grading? If you are grading assessments with essay questions, use the "needs grading" filter to filter out automatically graded questions.

Respondus LockDown Browser and macOS Big Sur (11)

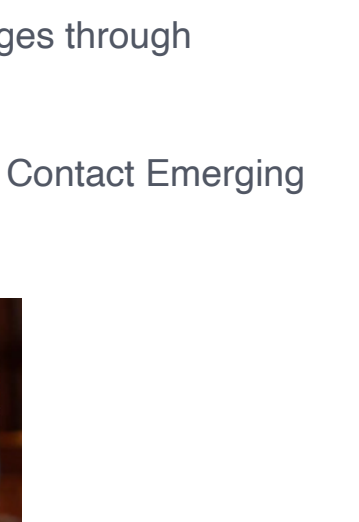


An email was sent to all our active Respondus instructors this semester, but we wanted everyone to be aware that according to Respondus Technical Support, Mac computers running macOS Big Sur (11) are no longer compatible with Respondus LockDown Browser. These systems will fail during launch or update, and older versions of the application are no longer supported as a workaround.

Because instructors typically don't know which operating systems their students are using, we recommend sharing this information with students and encouraging them to update their macOS prior to any exams that require LockDown Browser.

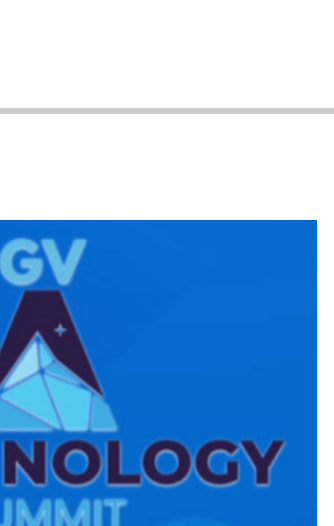
Students can [review the current system requirements here](#). We recommend reminding students to check their operating system version well in advance of any exam to avoid last-minute issues.

Student Outreach Toolkit for Faculty



The Student Outreach Toolkit is a folder available to instructors within each Blackboard course. It replaces the former Messages Manager, and includes optional, ready-to-use message templates to support timely outreach to students, especially helpful during midterms. The templates were created in 2023 and updated in 2025 with input from the Faculty Teaching & Learning Center, the Provost's Office, and the Counseling Center. For help using the toolkit or other Blackboard features, [contact your eLearning liaison](#).

Staff and Faculty Spotlight: Virtual Reality (VR) Courtroom Project, Hunter Bridwell and Courtney Topic



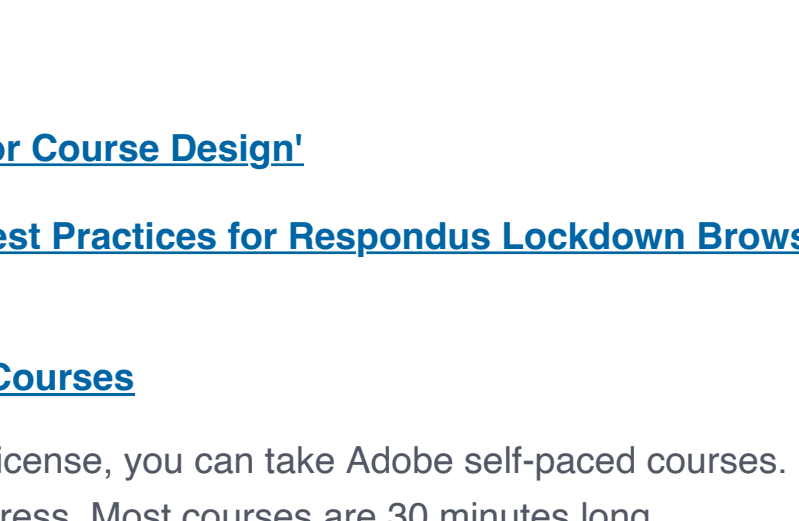
In this month's spotlight, discover how the Virtual Reality (VR) Courtroom project grew from a conversation about increasing student exposure in legal studies courses led by Courtney Topic.

Coordinating field trips around live hearings doesn't always align with course schedules, and there wasn't a strong "out-of-the-box" digital solution to fill the gap.

That's where the Student Technology and Innovation Guild (STING) saw an opportunity. Using 360-degree imagery and extended reality expertise, the team created an interactive courtroom walkthrough tailored to the needs of Legal Studies. What started as a way to help students become more familiar with courtroom spaces evolved into a fully immersive experience—placing learners inside a realistic legal environment where they can explore key areas, understand roles, and build confidence before ever stepping into a real courtroom.

The project highlights how immersive technology can meaningfully enhance curriculum while reflecting STING's commitment to solving pedagogical challenges through innovative, student-led development.

Interested in getting involved with STING or exploring a future idea? Contact Emerging Technologies Coordinator [Hunter Bridwell](#) to start the conversation.



GV TECHNOLOGY SUMMIT

After a successful inaugural year, the GV Technology Summit returns on November 3, 2026. This university-wide event highlights how faculty, staff, and students are advancing technology in learning, research, and daily work across GVSU. Join the conversation—whether you're an expert, innovator, or simply curious.

Date: November 3, 2026, 8:30am – 4:30pm
Location: Kirkhof Center, Valley Campus

- Have a project or tech initiative to share? [Submit a presentation proposal](#) (breakouts, roundtables, or posters). The submission deadline is June 30, 2026.
- Planning to attend? [Register to reserve your seat](#).
- [Bookmark the event webpage for ongoing speaker and schedule updates](#).

Start planning now to join us at the Summit. Email us at techsummit@gvsu.edu

Upcoming Professional Development Opportunities



Self-Paced Options

[Getting Started with Blackboard Ultra](#)

[MI ExplOR Learning Modules and Certificate](#) (OER Basics)

[Padlet 101](#)

[The '5 STEPS for Course Design'](#)

[Accessibility Best Practices for Respondus Lockdown Browser](#)

Adobe Self-Paced Courses

With our GVSU license, you can take Adobe self-paced courses. Register with your GVSU email address. Most courses are 30 minutes long.

Webinar Options

Unless specified otherwise, these sessions are held in a live webinar format on Zoom. Click on the title of the webinar to officially register in Workday Learning and receive your meeting link.

Microsoft 365 and OneDrive

[Maximizing Productivity with Free Microsoft Copilot Features](#)

Learn how to take advantage of Microsoft Copilot's most useful tools at no cost. This session covers core features, time-saving examples, and simple ways to start using AI to work smarter.

3/4/26 • 1pm – 2pm

[Getting Started with Microsoft Teams](#)

3/18/26 • 1pm – 2pm
4/22/26 • 1pm – 2pm

[Twenty Microsoft 365 Tips to Work Smarter, Not Harder](#)

This session highlights twenty powerful Microsoft 365 features to streamline your daily tasks, improve organization, and enhance collaboration. Learn quick wins and hidden tools you can start using immediately to boost productivity.

4/15/26 • 1pm – 2pm

[Microsoft Excel 101](#)

4/1/26 • 1pm – 2pm

Accessibility Trainings

[Making PDF's Accessible](#)

3/5/26 • 9am – 9:30am
3/20/26 • 9am – 9:30am
4/10/26 • 1pm – 1:30pm

[PDF Tune-Up in 15 Minutes Using Ally](#)

3/19/26 • 12pm – 12:15pm
3/30/26 • 1pm – 1:15pm
4/7/26 • 9am – 9:15am

[Accessibility and Ally: Creating Course Materials That Work for All](#)

3/20/26 • 2pm – 3pm
4/30/26 • 2pm – 3pm

Blackboard Webinars and In-Person Events

"Did you know Blackboard Could Do That?" Drop-in Series

This drop-in series is hosted monthly in DCIH 260 (City Campus). Reservations are not required. Faculty are encouraged to bring their laptops. See our monthly newsletters to review the latest updates.

3/19/26 and 4/16/26 • 12pm – 1:30pm • City Campus In-person (DCIH 260)

[Blackboard's Rubric Design Assistant Seminar](#)

3/18/26 • 12 – 12:45pm

[Evaluating Student Performance Outcomes with Blackboard and EAC](#)

3/17/26 • 11am – 11:45am

[Design Higher Order Thinking into Your Course using the Blackboard AI Design Assistant](#)

Discover how Blackboard's new AI tools can help you create dynamic, engaging learning experiences using your own course content. In this hands-on session, you'll explore how to leverage AI to refresh materials, promote higher-order thinking, and design effective assessments aligned with your learning objectives. We'll demonstrate how the built-in tools can help you generate test questions, assignments, module ideas, rubrics, discussion prompts, and even role-playing scenarios tailored to your existing content. Participants will hear from two instructors who participated in our AI Pilot and learn how they leveraged these tools to support their fall course planning.

3/24/26 • 1pm – 2pm

Digital Pedagogy Webinars and In-Person Events

[Hypothesis: Collaborative Annotation Tool for Blackboard](#)

3/25/26 • 2pm – 2:45pm

[The NotebookLM Advantage for Quick Podcasts and More](#)

Google's NotebookLM is best known for its ability to transform a document into a high-quality audio podcast, but in 2026, it has evolved into a sophisticated research and curriculum suite that can instantly generate classroom-ready materials. Join this informative session to see the latest features in action, including how to build flashcards, infographics, and videos in just seconds. We'll also share real-world examples of how faculty are using the new tools to personalize instruction, engage with students, and reclaim hours of prep time.

3/31/26 • 1pm – 2pm

[Partnering with Generative AI for Enhanced Assessment Design](#)

Generative AI tools can act as powerful collaborators in your assessment design process, helping you brainstorm, refine, and align assessments with your course outcomes. In this hands-on session, you'll practice using AI to generate assessment ideas that target different levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, draft assignment prompts and instructions, and create scaffolded assignments—all while keeping your disciplinary expertise and academic integrity at the center. Join us to explore how to thoughtfully integrate AI to build more effective and pedagogically sound assessments.

3/26/26 • 1pm – 2pm • City Campus In-person (DCIH 260)

[Introduction to Quality Matters](#)

In this session, you'll be introduced to the nationally recognized standards for online and hybrid courses. In addition to an overview of each of the eight standards, we'll discuss the QM rubric, what informs it, its value, and how to take the next step toward validating the quality of your online courses and recognizing where you can make improvements.

3/11/26 • 1pm – 2pm
3/16/26 • 12pm – 1pm

Digital Media Workshops

[Using Padlet to Engage Online Learners](#)

3/23/26 • 1pm – 2pm • Zoom & City Campus In-person (DCIH 260)

[Podcasting 101](#)

Step behind the mic with confidence in this engaging webinar all about podcasts. Whether you're launching your first show or looking to sharpen your skills, we'll cover the essentials of preparing to be on the microphone. We'll also give you a first-hand look at the equipment we use at the Bridge to create faculty-driven podcasts and how you can best prepare for a recording session.

3/18/26 • 2pm – 3pm • City Campus In-person (DCIH 260)

[Video Editing with Adobe Express](#)

In this session, you'll learn how to import and organize clips, trim and edit footage, add text and music, apply filters and animations, and customize your video. By the end, you'll know how to confidently create and share standout videos, whether for work, school, or personal projects. These sessions are offered in person at DCIH60 and on Zoom.

4/1/26 • 10am – 11am

[Visit our eLearning website](#) for a complete list of other eLearning Technologies professional development offerings for Winter 2026. Registration is available in [Workday Learning](#).

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
kenwardk@gvsu.edu
GVSU Information Technology

