

English Translation of the Blackboard Patent Claims

The following is a listing of the 44 claims in Blackboard's U.S. patent #6,988,138, along with an interpretation of each claim. The interpretations were written by Michael Feldstein, who is not a lawyer.

1. **A course-based system for providing to an educational community of users access to a plurality of online courses, comprising: a) a plurality of user computers, with each user computer being associated with a user of the system and with each user being capable of having predefined characteristics indicative of multiple predetermined roles in the system, each role providing a level of access to a plurality of data files associated with a particular course and a level of control over the data files associated with the course with the multiple predetermined user roles comprising at least two user's predetermined roles selected from the group consisting of a student role in one or more course associated with a student user, an instructor role in one or more courses associated with an instructor user and an administrator role associated with an administrator user, and b) a server computer in communication with each of the user computers over a network, the server computer comprising: means for storing a plurality of data files associated with a course, means for assigning a level of access to and control of each data file based on a user of the system's predetermined role in a course; means for determining whether access to a data file associated with the course is authorized; means for allowing access to and control of the data file associated with the course if authorization is granted based on the access level of the user of the system.**

Translation: You have a system that is organized by courses. The system can be accessed by different users from different computers. Users can access multiple courses and can have different access privileges assigned to each course based on the roles of student, instructor, and/or administrator.

2. **The system of claim 1 wherein the instructor user is provided with an access level to enable the creation and editing of a plurality of files associated with a course.**

An instructor can create and edit pages in a course space.

3. **The system of claim 2 wherein the course files comprise an announcement file.**

Courses have an announcements page where announcements can be created and edited by the instructor.

4. **The system of claim 2 wherein the course files comprise a course information file.**

Courses have a “course information” page that can be created and edited by the instructor.

- 5. The system of claim 2 wherein the course files comprise a staff information file posted to all registered in the course.**

Courses have a page describing the instructor that can be created and edited by the instructor.

- 6. The system of claim 2 wherein the course files comprise a course document file posted to all registered in the course.**

Courses have a course documents page that can be created and edited by a faculty member and seen by everyone registered in the course.

- 7. The system of claim 2 wherein the course files comprise an assignments file posted to all registered in the course.**

Everyone in the course can see the announcements.

- 8. The system of claim 2 wherein the course files comprise a dropbox file.**

There is a place for students to submit homework.

- 9. The system of claim 2 wherein the course files comprise an asynchronous communication file.**

There is a discussion board.

- 10. The system of claim 2 wherein the course files comprise a synchronous communication file.**

There is a chat room.

- 11. The system of claim 2 wherein the student user is provided with an access level to enable reading of a plurality of files associated with a course.**

Students can read many files in the course.

- 12. The system of claim 11 wherein the student user is provided with an access level to enable modification of a subset of the plurality of files associated with a course.**

Students can edit at least some documents in the course.

13. **The system of claim 11 wherein the user is provided with an access level to enable creation of a student file associated with a file for which the student user is able to read.**

Students are able to create responses (e.g., homework submissions or answers to test questions) that the system recognizes as being a response to another document (e.g., a homework assignment or the test).

14. **The system of claim 13 in which the file that the student is able to read is an assessment file created by the instructor user, and the student file created by the student user is a response to the assessment file.**

Students can answer test questions.

15. **The system of claim 14 wherein the assessment file comprises a plurality of examination questions selected by the instructor user to assess the ability of the student user.**

Instructors can make a test with multiple questions

16. **The system of claim 15 wherein the examination questions are selected by the instructor user from a predetermined pool of available examination questions.**

Instructors can access test question pools from which they can create tests.

17. **The system of claim 15 wherein the examination questions are created by the instructor user substantially at the time of the creation of the assessment file.**

Instructors can create test questions that aren't in the question pool specifically for the test.

18. **The system of claim 15 wherein the student file is reviewed by the instructor user and assigned a grade.**

Instructors can grade student tests.

19. **The system of claim 18 wherein the grade is made available to the student user.**

Instructors can release the grades (i.e., have the system display them) to the students.

20. **The system of claim 18 wherein the instructor user collates a plurality of grades obtained from reviewing a plurality of student files, and wherein the collated grades are made available to all student users associated with the course.**

Instructors can display multiple test grades to the students.

21. **The system of claim 13 in which the file that the student is able to read is an assignment file created by the instructor user, and the student file created by the student user is a response to the assignment file.**

Students can submit an assignment and have it associated with the instructor's assignment document.

22. **The system of claim 8 wherein the dropbox file comprises a plurality of files transferred to the server computer from one or more student users associated with the course.**

Students can upload multiple files to the homework submission area/dropbox.

23. **The system of claim 22 wherein the instructor user is provided with access to the files in the dropbox file, whereby the instructor user may download, edit and upload the files in the dropbox.**

Instructors can download, edit, and upload edited versions of assignments submitted to the dropbox.

24. **The system of claim 1 wherein a user is required to enter a login sequence into a user computer in order to be provided with access to course files associated with that user.**

You have to log in to get access to a course.

25. **The system of claim 24 wherein the user is provided with access to all courses with which the user is associated after entry of the logon sequence.**

Your login enables you to get access to all of your courses.

26. **The system of claim 25 wherein the user is provided with a web page comprising a plurality of course hyperlinks, each of said course hyperlinks associated with each course that the user has enrolled in.**

There is a page with links to all of your courses (and only your courses).

27. **The system of claim 26 wherein selection of a course hyperlink will provide the user with a web page associated with the selected course, the web page comprising a plurality of content hyperlinks to various content areas associated with the course.**

When you click on the link to a course, it takes you to a course home page that, in turn, links to various content areas.

- 28. The system of claim 27 wherein said content hyperlinks comprise an announcement area hyperlink, a course information hyperlink, a staff information hyperlink, a course documents hyperlink, an assignments hyperlink, a communications hyperlink, and a student tools hyperlink.**

The course home page includes links to the announcements page, the course information page, the instructor information page, a course documents page, an assignments page, a communications page and a student tools page.

- 29. The system of claim 28 wherein selection of the announcement area hyperlink provides a web page comprising a group of course announcements.**

When you click on the announcements link on the course home page, it takes you to a page that displays a bunch of announcements.

- 30. The system of claim 28 wherein selection of the course information hyperlink provides a web page comprising information regarding the associated course.**

When you click on the course information link on the course home page, it takes you to a page with course information on it.

- 31. The system of claim 28 wherein selection of the staff information hyperlink provides a web page comprising data regarding the instructors of the associated course.**

When you click on the staff information link on the course home page, it takes you to a page with information about the instructor on it.

- 32. The system of claim 28 wherein selection of the course documents hyperlink provides a web page comprising a listing of documents associated with the course.**

When you click on the course documents link on the course home page, it takes you to a page that lists all the course documents.

- 33. The system of claim 32 wherein the listing of course documents comprise active hyperlinks to the documents.**

On the course documents page, the list of documents link to the actual documents listed.

- 34. The system of claim 28 wherein selection of the assignments hyperlink provides a web page comprising a group of course assignments.**

When you click on the assignments link on the course home page, it takes you to a page where the students can see all the assignments.

- 35. The system of claim 28 wherein selection of the communications hyperlink provides a web page comprising hyperlinks to a group of communication tools comprising an asynchronous communication tool and a synchronous communication tool.**

When you click on the communications link on the course home page, it takes you to a page that links to the discussion board and chat tool.

- 36. An method for providing online education method for a community of users in a network based system comprising the steps of: a. establishing that each user is capable of having redefined characteristics indicative of multiple predetermined roles in the system and each role providing a level of access to and control of a plurality of course files; b. establishing a course to be offered online, comprising i. generating a set of course files for use with teaching a course; ii. transferring the course files to a server computer for storage; and iii. allowing access to and control of the course files according to the established roles for the users according to step (a); c. providing a predetermined level of access and control over the network to the course files to users with an established role as a student user enrolled in the course; and d. providing a predetermined level of access and control over the network to the course files to users with an established role other than a student user enrolled in the course.**

The system makes it possible to (a) check to see that a user has a valid login, (b) generate an appropriate course shell on the server, including the ability to set access privileges on the pages in the course, (c) assign the role of "student" to some users and have pre-determined access privileges go along with that role, and (d) assign some role other than "student" (e.g., "instructor") to some users and have different pre-determined access privileges go along with that role.

- 37. The method of claim 36 wherein at least one of the course files comprises a course assignment, further comprising the steps of: e) the student user creating a student file in response to the course assignment; and f) the student user transferring the student file to the server computer.**

The course shell can contain assignments, including the ability of students to submit responses to particular assignments.

- 38. The method of claim 37 further comprising the steps of: g) the instructor user accessing the student file from the server computer; h) the instructor user reviewing the student file to determine compliance with the course assignment; and i) the instructor user assigning a grade to the student file as a function of the determination of compliance with the course assignment.**

Instructors can log into the course to access and grade assignments.

39. **The method of claim 38 further comprising the step of the instructor user posting the grade to a file on the server computer accessible only to the student user with which the grade is associated.**

The instructor can show individual students their grades without allowing them to see other students' grades.

40. **The method of claim 38 further comprising the steps of the instructor repeating the steps (g), (h), and (i) for a plurality of student users that are enrolled in the course.**

Instructors can access, grade, and release grades on multiple assignments (as described in the last three items) for more than one student in the course.

41. **The method of claim 40 further comprising the step of the instructor user performing a statistical analysis on the grades assigned to the plurality of student users.**

Instructors can see students' cumulative averages for the course.

42. **The method of claim 41 further comprising the step of making results of the statistical analysis available to the student users enrolled in the course.**

Instructors can release cumulative grade averages to the students.

43. **The method of claim 36 further comprising the step of providing an asynchronous communication tool accessible to student users enrolled in the course for enabling asynchronous communication amongst the student users.**

There is a discussion board that is only available to users enrolled in the class.

44. **The method of claim 36 further comprising the step of providing a synchronous communication tool accessible to student users enrolled in the course for enabling synchronous communication amongst the student users.**

There is a chat room that is only available to users enrolled in the class.