

Blackboard Data Synchronization Enhancements

There are a number of changes that can be made to make automatic enrollments work better. Together, these improvements should eliminate the vast majority of the current issues.

Change Blackboard Course ID format

Since the move to PS SA, section numbers are no longer invariable. Because the BB course id is invariable, the format should be changed to eliminate the section number. Currently the format is discipline, number, underscore, section, dot, catalog number, underscore, semester.

For Math 101, section 08, in the spring 2010 semester (with course catalog number 1234):

MATH101_08.1234_SP2010

The simplest alternative format is:

1234_SP2010

This works, but it eliminates a lot of potentially useful information contained in the ID.

The alternative format that remains the most similar to the current format is:

MATH101_1234_SP2010

This simply eliminates the section from the ID, the catalog number uniquely identifies the course within a semester.

Continuous Course Shell Creation

The basic Blackboard enrollment rule is all sections taught by the same instructor are rolled into a single BB course. The current system creates all course shells for a semester on a single date. A fully automated system would have course shells automatically maintained throughout the entire semester. This would allow us to:

Stop Creating Course Shells for Instructor-less Courses

In the one-time run setup, course shells are created for courses who's instructors have not been assigned because it creates less work overall. With continuous course creation this is no longer necessary.

I believe that with just the above changes, the majority of the manual work currently required to keep Blackboard course enrollments in sync with SA can be eliminated. It is possible to fully automate management, but this becomes more complicated.

Continuous Course Shell Management

In order to have automated course shell management, two operations need to be supported: splitting an existing BB course into multiple shells, and collapsing multiple BB courses into a single course.

Splitting a BB Course

Scenario: A course originally who's sections are taught by a single instructor are now being taught by multiple instructors. We'll use sections 01 and 02 in our example.

Operations:

1. A new course shell for section 02 is created.
2. The enrollment directive for section 01 is rewritten to eliminate section 02.
3. All students enrolled in section 02 are unenrolled from section 01.
4. All students enrolled in section 02 are enrolled in section 02.

Questions:

What rules to follow when there are multiple instructors? Do all have to match or just one?

Combining BB Courses

Scenario: A course originally taught by multiple instructors is now taught by a single instructor. We'll use sections 01 and 02 in our example.

Operations:

1. Section 02 is made unavailable.
2. The enrollment directive for section 01 is rewritten to add section 02.
3. All students enrolled in section 02 are enrolled in section 01.

General Automated Management Questions:

1. Do we need to allow explicit exceptions to the rules beyond disabling auto-enrollment?