

Course Structure: Social Learning

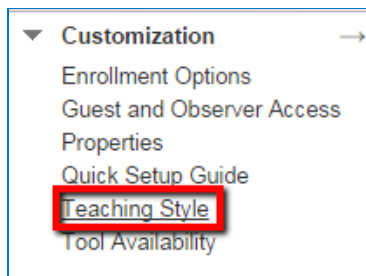
One of the fastest, most powerful ways to customize a course is changing the Course Structure. While it is better to modify a course's structure before adding content, it is possible to change a course that already has some content.

One of the newer Course Structure options available is Social Learning. According to the Blackboard Help site, "Social learning is based on the concept that students learn new information and behaviors by observing and interacting with peers." In this structure, the emphasis is on interactive tools such as Blogs, Wikis, and Chat. However, it also provides The Hub, a central location for students to view their upcoming assignments and readings.

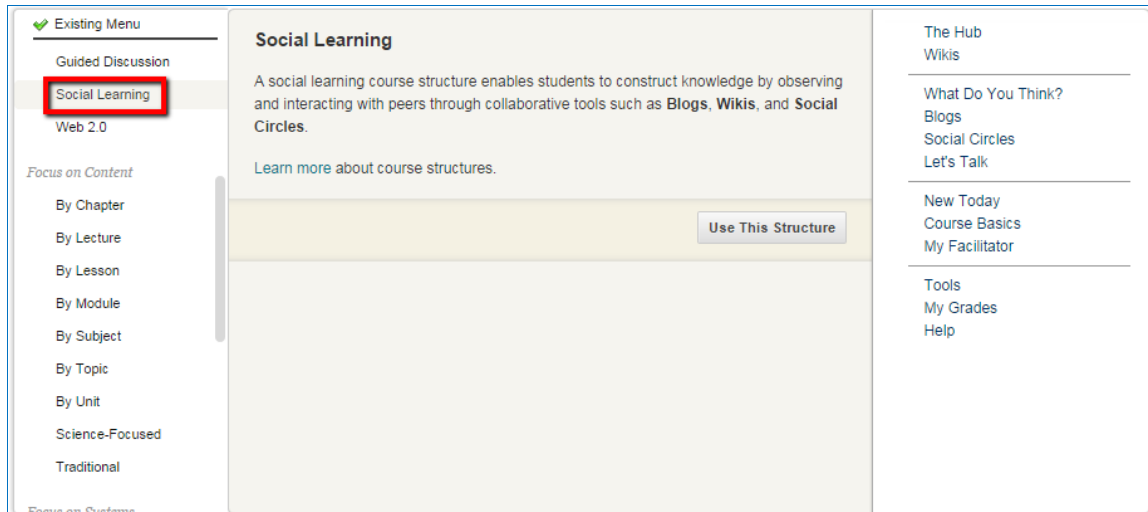
An additional feature of Social Learning is that it expands beyond the university's network and connects to the Blackboard Cloud. If an institution includes Cloud access in its system, Instructors may create a worldwide, interactive network of learners. The Social Circles tool allows students to form interest groups with other users both within and outside the university. Be aware, however, that those external users must also have Blackboard accounts in order to use the services on Blackboard Cloud.

Course Structure is a property found on the Teaching Style page, which is accessible from the Customization section of the Control Panel.

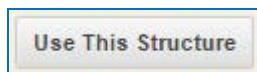
1. Log into Blackboard and navigate to the correct course. Under Control Panel, click **Customization**, and then click **Teaching Style**.



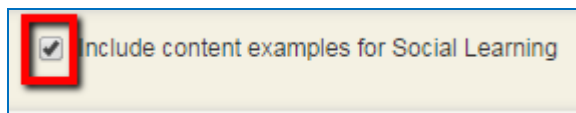
2. In the Select Course Structure section, scroll through the section on the left, and in the *Focus on Communication* category, click **Social Learning**.



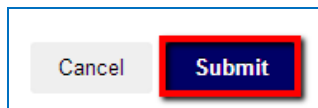
- The middle pane of the sample box explains a brief explanation of this structure, along with a **Learn more** link. The right pane displays the standard Course Menu for the structure; click one of the links to display a brief explanation of that link. The **Let's Talk** link, for example, opens the Chat tool. If this is the structure you want, click the **Use This Structure** button.



- A checkbox appears, labeled **Include content examples for Social Learning**. Check this box to populate the collaborative tools with some sample entries. By default, sample content is not available to students.



- Make any additional changes on the Teaching Style page, and click one of the **Submit** buttons.



Blackboard spends some time adding the Course Menu items and sample content for the new Course Structure, leaving existing Course Menu items and content in place. An Instructor may then use the links on the Course Menu to navigate and add content using the usual tools, such as the aforementioned Blogs and Wikis. The Hub contains some items with basic instructions and suggestions for using the Social Learning structure.



ABOUT THE HUB


Availability: Item is not available.

The Hub Content Area allows you to structure the online environment to guide students in their social learning experience. To provide your students with an easy-to-navigate environment, add folders for each unit or topic that include similar content items, assignments, and tools. Organizing content in folders reduces scrolling on the page.

When students work together to master concepts and skills, they learn more and discover how to effectively work in a team. Wikis, blogs, and discussions enable students to construct knowledge together. Assigning projects to small groups enables students to maximize their own and each others' learning. For students to get the most out of this type of course, you should:

- *Motivate students to contribute and model appropriate behavior to maintain a positive experience for all.*
- *Be clear about the learning goals for cooperative activities.*

To provide your students with an easy-to-navigate environment, add folders for each lesson or topic that include similar content items, assignments, and tools. Organizing content in folders reduces scrolling on the page.

 *Encourage students who are hesitant to share their thoughts online. Consider a first activity that is not graded.*