

Faculty – Getting started with Blackboard Instant Messaging (Bb IM)

1. What is Blackboard IM?

Blackboard IM is an online communication and collaboration platform that includes a variety of tools, such as instant messaging, voice and video conferencing, whiteboard, and application sharing. Voice and video conferencing provides a more personal online interaction between students than text messaging or email. Whiteboard and application sharing can enhance brainstorming and collaborative projects.



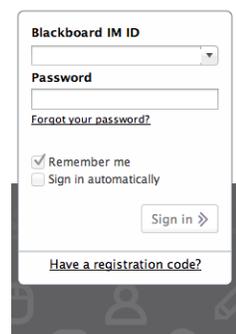
2. Why use Blackboard IM?

Blackboard IM is intended to enhance collaboration and interaction among classmates. Students are grouped by class enrollment (under the 'Classmates' tab). This allows students to easily identify and initiate communication with classmates or their instructors. Students are encouraged to use Blackboard IM to enhance online interaction and collaboration in settings where group-work is required. Many instructors find the 'Virtual Office Hours' option to be helpful (*see #9 below*).

3. What is the difference between Blackboard IM and Blackboard Collaborate?

Blackboard IM program is confusingly labeled Blackboard Collaborate at the top of the window. Bb IM is best thought of as the 'little brother' to the more powerful Bb Collaborate program. Blackboard IM and Blackboard Collaborate share many similar tools, including text chat, voice and video chat, whiteboard, and application sharing. While Bb IM can be set to save chat sessions, **Blackboard IM audio/video sessions cannot be recorded. Although group chats are available in Bb IM, audio/video communication is limited to a one-to-one format.** For any sessions that require audio/video recording or a group audio/video interaction, Bb Collaborate must be used.

Blackboard collaborate >



4. How do I get access to Blackboard IM?

Select the 'Tools' menu item in any of your courses. Select 'Blackboard IM'. On the page that opens, hover over the words 'Blackboard IM' and a link appears. The link takes you to a website for you to create your Blackboard IM user account (not the same as your ATU Blackboard account). This page also allows you to download and install the software necessary to access Blackboard IM. Once you download and install the Bb IM program you can logout of ATU's Blackboard site; you do not need to be logged into Blackboard to use Bb IM.

It is strongly recommended that you enable the following two preferences in Blackboard IM on your personal computer (not on a public access computer):

- "Start Blackboard IM when my computer starts"
- "Sign me in when Blackboard IM starts"

To enable these options, select Preferences from the Blackboard IM menu, then go to the General tab, and locate the area labeled "Sign In". Make sure both of the above options are enabled.

5. One of my courses is not showing up under the 'Classmates' tab. Now what?

- a. Have you made your course available in Blackboard? (*Unavailable courses will not appear in Bb IM.*)
- b. Log into the Blackboard.
- c. Follow the 'Tools' link to the IM setup page.
- d. Locate the 'Course Settings: Arkansas Tech University' area on the page. Underneath '**Course Participant**', you should see a list of all the courses you are enrolled in for the current term. Under

'Course Instructor' you should see a list of all the courses you are teaching. There will be a checkbox next to each course.

- e. Enable your courses by placing checkmarks in the checkboxes next to the courses in which you want to use Bb IM. Be sure to do this in **both** sections of the page.
- f. Re-launch the Blackboard IM client software and sign in. Check the 'Classmates' tab to verify that your courses are now active in Bb IM.

6. **I do not hear an audio alert when I receive a new instant message from someone on my 'Classmates' list. I'm worried that I won't notice new instant messages that arrive. How do I make sure that I'll receive an audio alert when a new instant message arrives from a classmate?**

By default, Blackboard IM only alerts you when someone on your **Contacts list** sends you a new instant message. However, you can easily change your alert preferences so that Blackboard IM will also alert you whenever a **classmate (student)** sends you a new instant message. Here's how:

- a. Click on the **Blackboard IM** menu and select **Preferences**, and then select **Alerts**.
- b. Under Alerts, locate the following preference (located at the very bottom of the Alerts screen): "**Use alerts for my contacts only.**"
- c. By default, this preference will be enabled. Disable this preference by removing the checkmark, and then click OK to save your changes.

Note: You will now receive alerts whenever you receive a new instant message from anyone on your Classmates list or your Contacts list. Make sure that you've set up your speakers or headset correctly, and have adjusted the audio settings on your computer.

7. **I don't like some of the alert notifications that I'm receiving from Blackboard IM. Is there any way to customize my alerts?**

Yes, you may customize your alert notifications:

- a. Click on the **Blackboard IM** menu and select **Preferences**, and then select **Alerts**.
- b. Under Alerts, there are two main sections: "**When this happens,**" and "**Do this.**" These settings control your alert notifications.
- c. For each event listed under "**When this happens,**" select which alerts to receive for that event by enabling/disabling each option under "**Do This.**"

8. **Can I install the Blackboard IM client software on a new or different computer? Where can I obtain the installer for Blackboard IM?**

- a. **You can install the free Bb IM client on as many computers as you need.**
- b. **Log in to Blackboard, follow the 'Tools' link to reach the download page.**

9. **What's this about virtual office hours?**

- a. Under 'Tools' you can setup virtual 'Office Hours'. This allows students to know you are online and available to chat.
- b. Students clicking on your name will be placed in a virtual 'waiting area' until you are available. Students are queued and listed in the order they arrive. You promote each student into your office for private chats. Be sure to log off of Bb IM or change your status to 'unavailable' when not at your computer.

