

Blackboard

Adjusted Release Plan for Learn 9.1 in 2020

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Product: Blackboard Learn

Information:

In the past, Blackboard has targeted two releases of Learn 9.1 each year, one in the first half of the year and another later in the year. For a number of reasons, we have reduced this plan to a single release in 2020.

Why will there be a single 9.1 release in 2020?

Along with our clients, we've been impacted as an organization as we shifted resources and priorities as a result of COVID-19 response, focusing more efforts to work together as a community to support a rapid transition to online and remote learning. Additionally, other enhancements for Learn Original Experience are being delivered in 2020 without requiring version updates or installer downtime. This includes capabilities such as an updated inline grading experience leveraging Blackboard Annotate, session scheduler tools for both Microsoft Teams and Google Meet, and a soon-to-be-announced solution to help students connect with services they may need, particularly when they can't come to campus.

What is planned for the 9.1 release in 2020?

The next release of 9.1 will have significant improvements to the Content Editor used by the Original Experience and in the Original Course View. We know this feature is highly desired by many of our clients, so we've put our focus on completing this work as the primary release of Learn 9.1 this year. We currently plan to release this update in the second half of the year as soon as the improved Content Editor is ready.

What is the impact to version support for self-hosting and Managed Hosting?

The change to a single release of 9.1 in 2020 could have an impact to clients who upgrade annually depending on their release acceptance and deployment processes. As a result, we will review the planned support window for the 9.1 Q4 2019 release and make an adjustment based on the timing of the 2020 release. The [Blackboard Learn Client Support Services Guide](#) will be updated later this year with details of the adjusted support plan for that release.

What is the impact for SaaS clients?

For SaaS clients, the updated Content Editor for Original Experience and Original Course View will be part of a standard monthly release expected in the second half of the year. The exact version and release schedule will be posted on the SaaS [release notes](#) and [schedule](#) pages when the release is ready. To help institutions prepare for this change, additional programs and documentation are planned.

How can I prepare for this release?

We will be facilitating an extended technical preview and early access program for any client who wishes to participate. The program will feature two parts:

- An early access period where participating institutions can try out the tools in both Learn Original and Learn Ultra.
- For self-hosted and Managed Hosting clients, access to a release candidate installer for use in test and stage environments.

To participate in this program and get early access to test out the updated Content Editor, [sign up to join](#).

Additionally, a detailed change management guide for the updated Content Editor will be published for use by institutions to prepare and support their user base during the transition.

I saw earlier communications that this release was planned mid-2020. What changed?

On the Blackboard Community in April, we'd communicated that the next release of Learn 9.1 was planned for mid-year. This has shifted to the second half of the year. Resources were adjusted for COVID-19 response projects, and we've identified some issues in the updated Content Editor that require changes from third parties for which we're awaiting resolution. These factors have further delayed the completion of the project.

What are the capabilities of the updated Content Editor?

The updated Content Editor has many improvements and new features*. Here is a summary of some of them:

- Fully responsive
- Optimized for mobile devices by using overlay modals instead of new windows for configuration pages and add workflows
- Simplified add and edit workflows makes the editor easier to work with
- Accessibility checker helps users author content that works better with screen readers and other assistive technologies
- Improved copy/paste from Word/Excel including images
- Improved HTML editing with code formatting
- Insert, format, and display computer code to better support computer science classes
- Links for sites such as YouTube and Vimeo automatically convert to embedded videos
- Updated spellchecker
- Improved equation editor including automatic formula alt text for improved accessibility

More details about the updated editor will be shared and documented as we get closer to release.

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