Establishing and maintaining regular communication among athletic training faculty, students, and clinical instructors is a challenging task. The increased use of off-campus field experiences and multiple clinical instructors has placed greater demands on athletic training programs and clinical coordinators to ensure that clear, consistent, and timely interaction occurs, with the common goal of providing high-quality clinical experiences for athletic training students. Blackboard™ and WebCT™ are two examples of licensed software programs that can serve as a link for communication between all parties involved in athletic training education. The focus of this article is to describe Blackboard and its use for enhancing clinical education. It is important to recognize that these programs and others that exist have many commonalities, and the features that are described here might differ slightly from program to program. Some programs include similar features yet use different terminology to describe them.

What Is Blackboard?

Blackboard is a software product that was established in 1997, with one of its main goals being the delivery of a Web-based community for online teaching and learning. The program was developed by Blackboard Inc., based in Washington, DC, which first produced a learning-platform software called CourseInfo geared for the education community. The program is a licensed product that can be purchased by colleges and universities to be networked throughout a campus community. It is not typical for an individual to purchase the Blackboard platform, but it is possible for users to register through a college or university program to access the school’s software system.

Features of Blackboard

Blackboard operates under the template for a classroom interface or an organizational clearinghouse. This simply means that one can establish a Web site for a classroom purpose (classroom interface) or for an organizational site (organizational clearinghouse). Classroom-interface templates are typically set up for academic courses, and oftentimes electronic enrollment in the Blackboard system coincides automatically with class registration. Setting up a site for clinical education would fall under the organizational-interface template. Options for categorical design are similar regardless of the template chosen. When Blackboard is used for classroom purposes, user registration is typically automatic and coincides with enrollment through a university’s registration process. Faculty members can also be given the ability to add or remove users.
from a Blackboard classroom site, depending on the institutional policy that has been established.

The setup for an organization is typically used when a group of individuals with a common interest need an electronic platform to communicate with each other. Athletic training clinical education at an institution is an example of a situation in which numerous individuals can benefit from a central computer-linked database of information (Figure 1). Essentially, one or more individuals would serve as a “control manager,” allowing for the addition and removal of individual users, as well as information pertinent for the site.

Following are options available for use as categories when establishing a Blackboard site.

**Announcements**

Announcements can be created and also be designated to appear on the very first page a user sees when logging on to an organizational site. Announcements can be posted for viewing on a temporary or permanent basis. This is a very helpful area because it directs users to important and timely information before they search anywhere else on the site. Furthermore, if a user is a member of more than one academic or organizational Web site, Blackboard has the capability of featuring announcements for all the sites on the main page when a user first logs on.

**Bibliography**

In this area the control manager can place a list of references in any format (e.g., MS Word, .pdf). References can be categorized, and they can be added or removed in real time. Articles can be placed here, if appropriate permission has been obtained, that provide guidance and tutelage to clinical instructors and students alike. Having reference material loaded on the site saves users valuable time searching for the information.

**Faculty Information**

This link allows the control manager to provide information about any faculty member associated with the organization. This can serve as a helpful item in that a control manager can load contact information onto the site for students to access when they are assigned to a clinical instructor.

**Documents**

The document area allows for information sharing similar to the bibliography area. Oftentimes users tend to employ this area for program documents that can be uploaded by the control manager and later downloaded by users for completion of various documentation before they turn in a hard copy of the form to a faculty member or clinical instructor. Student and clinical-instructor evaluation documents, directions to clinical facilities, and learning-style inventories are examples of documents that can be placed in this area.

**Lectures**

This area is typically used to make presentations by instructors available to students. Lectures can be in any form and placed on the site on a temporary or permanent basis. Now that clinical-education experiences are a formal part of classroom credit, opportunities might exist whereby lecture material in the form of outlines, slides, or reference articles can be part of student assignments and found on Blackboard in this area.

**Course Information**

Course syllabi, course schedules, and course expectations are just a few of the types of information that can be loaded into this area. Although instructors often prefer to provide students with written versions of course syllabi and course information at the beginning of the semester, having a resource area for

![Figure 1](Typical screen in Blackboard™)