

UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD

FACULTY CENTER FOR LEARNING DEVELOPMENT

Blackboard's Discussion Board

Blackboard's Discussion Board is one of the most flexible and powerful tools available to instructors. Each course may have several Discussion Board Forums, each used for a different purpose.

Discussion Boards Forums are often used as:

- An arena in which students discuss the course content.
- A place for students to post personal profiles or introductions.
- A place to pose questions about the course or "Course FAQ's"

Discussion Boards are a vital part of blended and online courses, where they provide the primary way in which students interact with each other and with their instructor. Whether or not an online course truly becomes a "Learning Community" often depends on how carefully the instructor has structured, monitored and participated in Discussion Boards.

Discussion Boards can also be useful in face-to-face classes, where they can be used to share practical information or to extend discussions that have taken place in class. Because Discussion Boards allow students time to formulate a response, they can become a safe communication arena for shy or ESL students who might not fully participate in conventional classroom discussions.

It is best practice for instructors to:

- Use Discussion Board settings that provide students sufficient editorial control (see p.3).
- Provide detailed instructions for students regarding how Discussion Board posts are to be written, what information they must contain, and when they are due.
- Explain to students how to respond substantively to the posts of other students, making clear when the replies are due as well as your expectations regarding the number, length and tone of replies.
- Provide model posts and model replies as examples. Typically, an instructor will post the first thread in each forum and provide at least one model reply.
- Monitor ongoing discussions at least once a day, making sure that they stay academically fruitful and socially "safe."
- Take part in discussions. Teaching styles and student needs will differ, but it is usually best to provide some degree of instructor "presence" in discussions without going so far as to dominate them.

Most instructors grade discussions in order to encourage student participation. It is possible to grade discussions right within Blackboard's Grade Center, and instructors often use a Blackboard Rubric with which to grade discussion posts. If you are going to grade Discussion Board posts, it is best to keep current with your grading so that students can adapt to your requirements.

Discussion Board Structure

- Forum** A **forum** is made up of threads and replies to those threads. The **forum description** can be used to explain guidelines for the discussion and describe the general topic. Often, the instructor launches the discussion by posting the “essential question” in the forum description, as well. The “essential question” begins a discussion, and it needs to be open-ended, thought-provoking, and deep enough to allow students to synthesize and analyze course content in their subsequent discussion posts.
- Thread** **Discussion threads** are added by students and instructors to start new topics within a forum. The instructor can begin the discussion by posting an initial thread containing the essential question, so that students can read it when writing their own posts.
- Reply** Discussion participants use the **Reply** button to respond to threads. Like the initial messages that begin a thread, these replies are called ‘posts’. Listed posts are indented, according to which post was being read when the reply button was used.

Setting up a Forum

Instructors can set up several forums, each having its own topic, or they can set up a forum that contains many topics by adding threads. **Note:** Students cannot post to the Discussion Board until instructors create forums.

To begin adding forums to the main discussion board in your course:

- From the course menu, click **Discussion Board**.
- To add a Forum to the Discussion Board, click **Create Forum**. See image below.



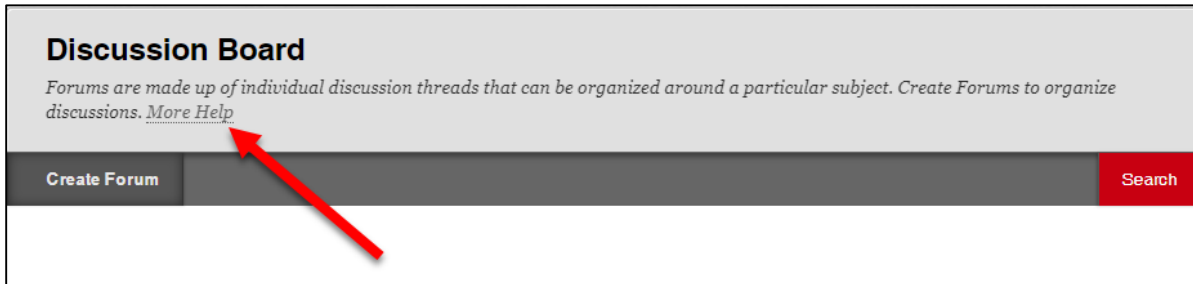
Create a Forum

- Provide a name for the forum and include a general description of the forum. If you choose, you can also include the essential question of the forum topic. If this is the first

forum of the semester, you may want to include general instructions and guidelines for forum participation, such as how often to post or how long posts should be.

- Fill in the forum settings and click **Submit**. (See **Below for detailed information about forum settings**.)

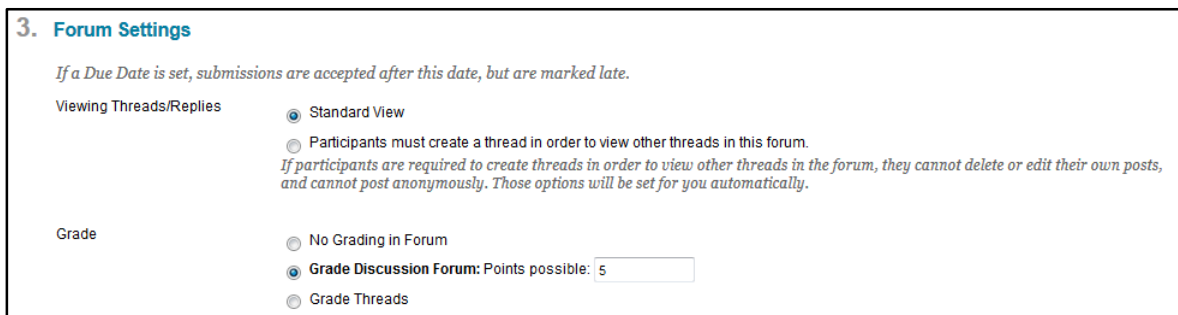
To see detailed descriptions of how to set up a forum and all about Forum Settings click ‘More Help’ on any Discussion Board page:



Getting Help for Discussion Board in Blackboard

Recommended Forum Settings:

The first discussion board setting governs whether or not a student must create an initial thread post before they can view postings by other students. That “blind first post” setting forces students to make their own contributions to a forum before seeing what their peers have written. Secondly, there are settings that govern whether you are going to grade the discussion, and if you are, how many points you are going to assign for participation. It is usually a good idea to grade Discussion Forums.



3. Forum Settings

If a Due Date is set, submissions are accepted after this date, but are marked late.

Viewing Threads/Replies

- Standard View
- Participants must create a thread in order to view other threads in this forum.
If participants are required to create threads in order to view other threads in the forum, they cannot delete or edit their own posts, and cannot post anonymously. Those options will be set for you automatically.

Grade

- No Grading in Forum
- Grade Discussion Forum: Points possible:
- Grade Threads

Forum Settings: “Blind First Post” and Grading

A second group of settings governs the grading process. If you are going to grade the forums, you have the option of having Blackboard prompt you to grade them. If you place a check in the relevant box, Blackboard will list the posts in the “Needs Grading” area of Grade Center after a specified number of posts. (If you anticipate that students will generate several posts per week, you may not want to use this system.)

Blackboard also lets you choose to use a particular rubric for grading posts. This can be a helpful tool in grading; it can also help students understand your expectations if you choose the option here of letting students see the rubric.

Forum Settings: Grading Details and Rubrics

If a student subscribes to a forum, or a thread within that forum, they receive an email each time a post is made to it. For example, if a student has initiated or taken part in a particular thread, he or she may want to know as soon as others post a reply to it. By making subscribers aware of any action occurring on the thread or forum, subscriptions can encourage students to post more often. The sample screen below shows the options for an instructor who chooses to allow students to subscribe to individual threads, specifying that they will only receive a link to the post instead of its full text.

Forum Settings: Subscriptions

The remaining options govern the amount of editorial control that students have over their own posts.

- It is usually *not* a good idea to “Allow Anonymous Posts” unless it is critically important for students to be able to comment honestly without social repercussions.
- It can improve the quality and grammatical correctness of posts to give students the ability to “Allow Author to Delete Own Posts,” particularly “Only posts with no replies.”
- Similarly, it is usually best to, “Allow Author to Edit Own Published Posts.” This allows students to correct grammatical and technical problems with their posts as soon as they appear. However, it is possible that a rapidly-moving discussion could be disrupted if students change the substance of their posts after others have replied to them.
- Most instructors create new Forums themselves in order to specify the purpose of each Forum, but they usually “Allow Members to Create New Threads.”

Forum Settings: Editorial Privileges Given Students

There are several more important forum settings you should be aware of.

- If it is possible that students may want to attach files to their posts (such as images, PDF's or Word documents), then you can “Allow File Attachments.”
- It is very helpful to students to be able to quote each other in replies, so it is often best to “Allow Users to Reply with Quote.”
- You should not choose to “Force Moderation of Posts” unless you cannot trust students to be civil or appropriate. If you do force moderation, *you will need to approve every single post before it goes up on the discussion forum.* That is potentially a lot of work and will slow the progress of the discussion. *See page 9 for a discussion of how to moderate posts.*
- If you “Allow Post Tagging,” it lets students “tag” posts by assigning them descriptive words. This setting is useful if your students are creating large numbers of posts and need ways of categorizing them.
- To “Allow Members to Rate Posts” lets students assign a “One Star” to “Five Star” rating to each post on the Discussion Board. Blackboard averages the ratings given a post and displays that average rating as part of the post. This feature can either be useful or distracting, depending on the nature of the discussion.



Additional Options

- Allow File Attachments
- Allow Users to Reply with Quote
- Force Moderation of Posts
- Allow Post Tagging
- Allow Members to Rate Posts

Forum Settings: Editorial and Tagging Features

Getting into the Forum

To monitor and facilitate an existing Discussion Board, enter the forum by clicking on the Forum name.



Discussion Board
Forums are made up of individual discussion threads that can be organized around a particular subject. Create Forums to organize discussions. [More Help](#)

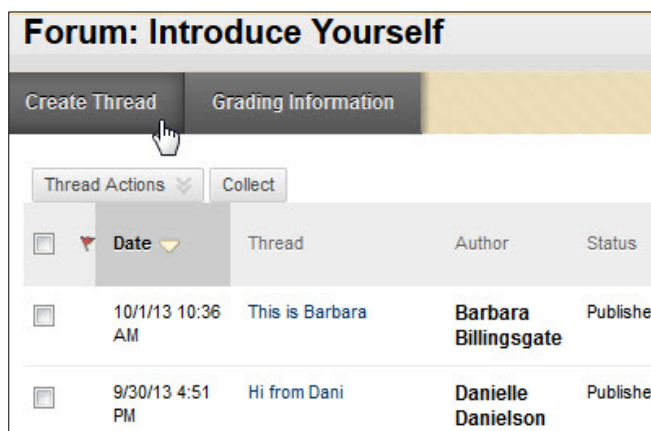
Create Forum Search ↑↓

Forum	Description	Total Posts	Unread Posts	Total Participants
Introduce Yourself		2	0	2

Entering a Forum

Contributing to a Discussion

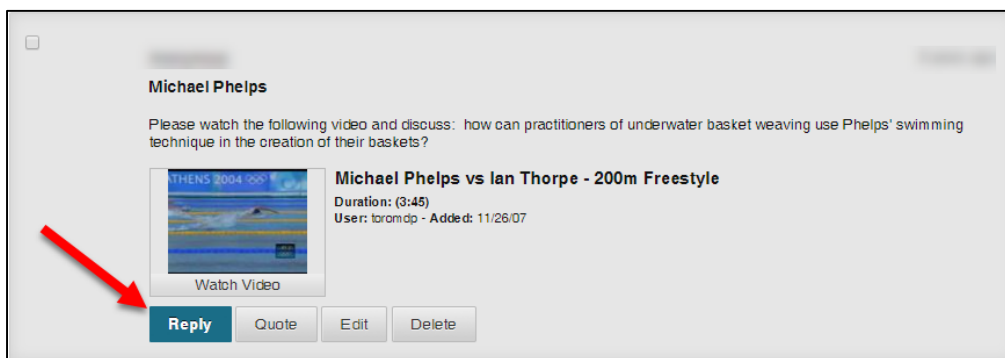
To add posts within a forum, instructors (and students) either click **Create Thread** or click **Reply** to threads already created. *Note:* students only have the power to “Create Thread” if the instructor has chosen to “Allow Members to Create New Thread” in the Discussion Board options.



Creating a Thread from within a Forum

Reading and Replying

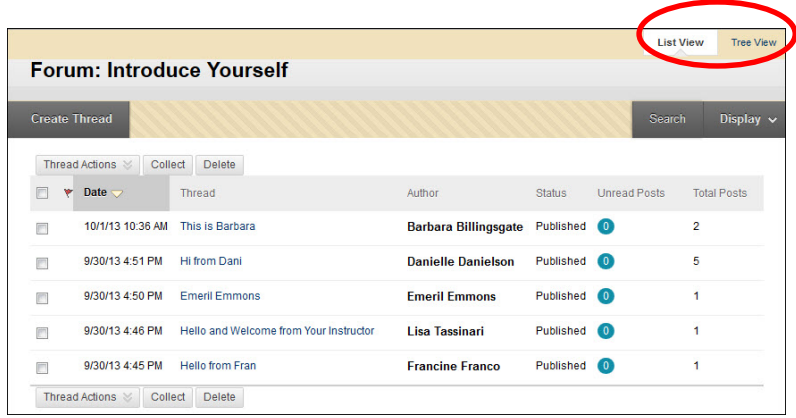
Instructors (and students) can click on a thread or any reply to that thread to read it. When a reader clicks on the title of a thread, all replies to that thread are displayed on the screen. Once readers can see individual posts, they can click **Reply** to respond to them. A link to your response will appear by default in chronological order indented once under the original post you clicked.



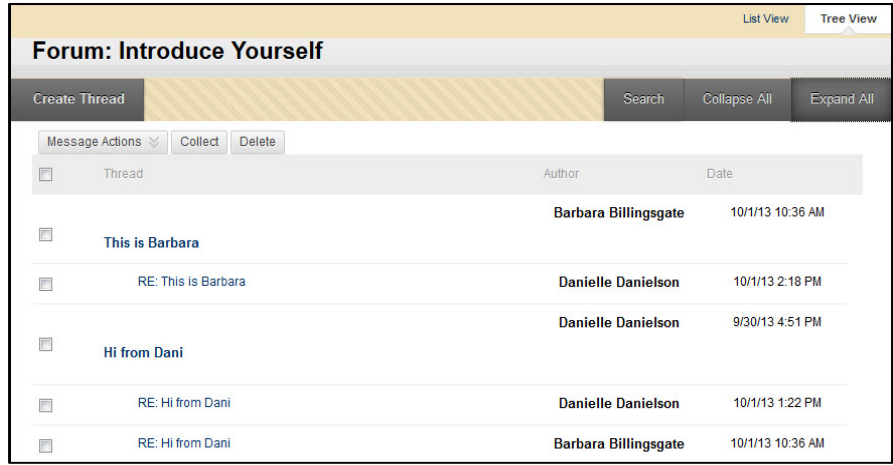
Reading a Post and Getting Ready to Reply

Viewing the Forum

You have two ways to view a forum, **List View** or **Tree View**. Find these buttons in the upper right after you click on a forum. Each view offers ‘actions’ and other tools that might be helpful for organizing and displaying your forum. See samples of each view below:



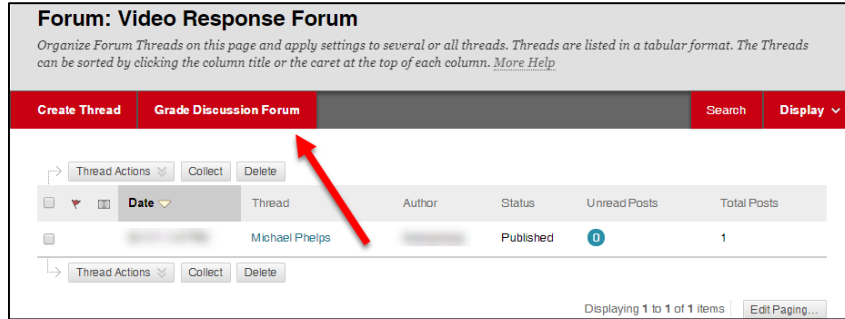
List View – Shows all Threads and a Count of Replies in the Total Posts Column



Tree View, Expanded – Shows all Threads and the Replies to Each

Grading Forums

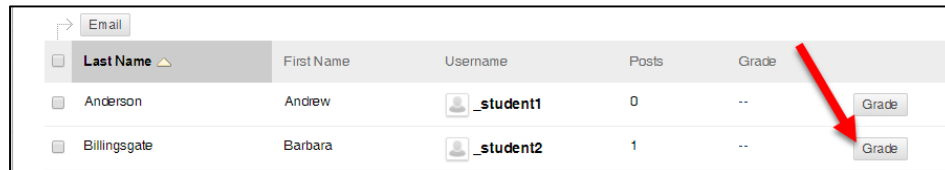
In order to encourage discussion participation, it is best practice to grade forums. If you chose ‘Grade Discussion Forum’ when you created the forum (see Recommended Forum Settings on Page 3), you will have the option to read forums, comments, and grade right directly from the forum itself. To get started, click into the forum you wish to grade, then click **Grade Discussion Forum**.



Grade a Discussion Forum

NOTE: You will not see the **Grade Discussion Forum** button unless you have selected to grade the forum when you set it up.

Select the **Grade** button to the right of the student name.



Choosing a Student to Grade

The Inline Grading Panel

Forum Statistics
Statistics for: Barbara Billingsgate
Total Posts: 3
Date of Last Post: Oct 1, 2013 1:15:13 PM
Average Post Length: 82
Minimum Post Length: 54
Maximum Post Length: 124
Average Post Position: 2

Forum Grade
Edit Grade
Grade for: Barbara Billingsgate
Grade: -- out of 5
Grade Date: --
Feedback: --
Grading Notes: --

Contributors < >
Show All
Barbara Billingsgate (3)
Danielle Danielson (3)
Emeril Emmons (1)
Francine Franco (2)

Once you click the **Grade** button, all of the posts for that student in that forum appear on the page along with a box showing three sections: **Forum Statistics**, **Forum Grade**, and **Contributors**.

Select the **Edit Grade** button (see image at the left) and then add a grade and feedback to the student, and notes to yourself (see image at the right).

NOTE: Grading Notes will only be visible to instructors and Teaching Assistants in the course.

Be sure to click the **Save Grade** button before moving to the next student.

Select the **Show All** in the Contributors section and use the arrows to move to other students' posts when ready.

Forum Statistics
Statistics for: Barbara Billingsgate
Total Posts: 3
Date of Last Post: Oct 1, 2013 1:15:13 PM
Average Post Length: 82
Minimum Post Length: 54
Maximum Post Length: 124
Average Post Position: 2

Forum Grade
Current Grade Value
5 out of 5
Feedback:
Nice work, Barb! Just a reminder to you to please include all sources. -- Prof T
Grading Notes:
Be sure to ask Barb for her links - she found a few terrific resources!
Text Editor Cancel **Save Grade**

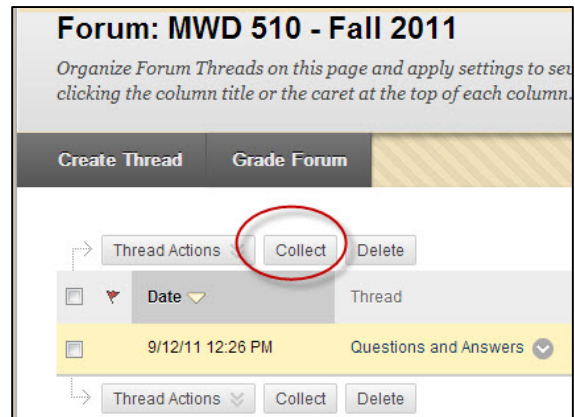
Contributors < >
Show with Posts Only
Andrew Anderson (0)
Barbara Billingsgate (3)
Carl Carlson (0)
Danielle Danielson (3)
Emeril Emmons (1)
Francine Franco (2)

Collecting Posts

If you prefer to read all of a student's contributions on a single page or print out discussion board posts to read later, you can use the **Collect** button.

To "collect" posts, click into any forum or thread on the Discussion Board and click the top box to select all posts. Click **Collect**.

You can then read all posts in the forum on the screen or use the Print Preview button in the upper left corner to print them out to read later.



Collect Post

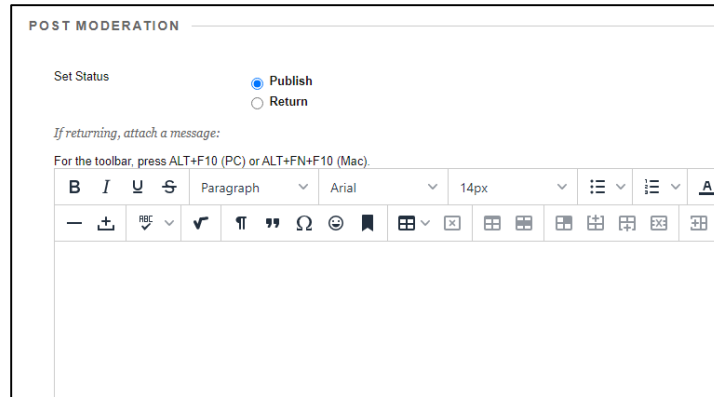
Advanced Forum Options

Moderating Forums

In a Moderated Discussion, *the instructor must preview all incoming posts and decide whether or not to publish them*. Moderated Discussions require constant attention, and they can feel stilted or awkward because of lags between when a post is written and when it is displayed. To create a Moderated Discussion, "**Force Moderation of Posts**", must be enabled when you first set up the forum (see p. 5).

To moderate a forum:

- Enter a moderated forum.
- Select the **Moderate Forum** button which appears at the top.
- A new window opens with a list of queued posts. They will not be published on the forum until they have been reviewed and approved by you as moderator. The posts are arranged chronologically with the newest at the top of the list.
- Select **Moderate** next to one of the posts. This opens the Moderate Post screen. Review the post, and then select **Publish** or **Return**. *Publish* means the post will be published to the forum. *Return* means the post will be returned to the participant. You also have the option of adding a message to the student. Be sure to **Submit**.



Returning a Post to Student

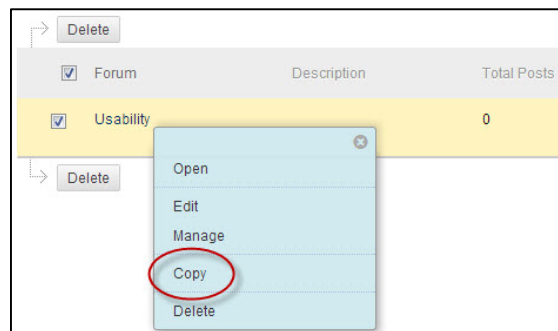
Using Groups in the Discussion Board

Many instructors prefer to break their students up into small groups and give each group its own Discussion Board. When you have too many students discussing and responding to the same question, the first responders have the advantage, since those that follow need to come up with different thoughts if theirs are already represented on the board. To help alleviate this problem and give more students the chance to have an ‘original’ post, you can break your students into groups and post the same questions to each of these groups. Groups cannot see the other’s posts, so this allows more students the chance to post without being penalized for posts similar to their classmates. To create groups, click **Users and Groups** from the Control Panel, then select **Groups**.

Copying Forums

If you do create groups, you will probably give each group the same forum descriptions and essential questions. Blackboard allows you to copy forums and settings from group to group which can save you a lot of time since you won’t have to start from scratch for each group. To copy from group to group, select **Discussion Board** from Course Tools, then select the group in which you have created forums:

- Select a forum you wish to copy, then select **Copy** from the dropdown menu.



Copying a forum

- In the next view, give the forum a name, choose whether or not you want to copy the entire forum or just the settings, which group you want to copy to, and then **Submit**.

Getting Help with Technology at the University of Hartford

Faculty Center for Learning Development (FCLD)

FCLD provides consulting and instructional support to faculty and staff who are using technology in teaching and learning. The FCLD Faculty Lab in Mortensen 203a is available for faculty support and use and is equipped with instructional technology- related equipment including: PCs, Macs, scanners, and projectors as well as support staff. Faculty and Staff needing support with Blackboard or other instructional technologies, should contact FCLD.

Phone: (860) 768-4661 **Email:** fclld@hartford.edu

Website: <http://www.hartford.edu/fclld>

Student Blackboard Support

The following is student support for Blackboard only. All other support technical support issues need to be addressed to the Office of Technology Services (below).

Phone: (860) 768-4636 **Email:** bbsupport@hartford.edu

FAQ/Submit a Ticket: <http://www.hartford.edu/studentbbsupport>

Information Technology Services (ITS) Help Desk

For general computer and Internet/network support questions (not directly related to the classroom but rather passwords, Internet/email problems, Banner/Self-Service, campus Facebook).

Phone: (860) 768-4357 **Email:** helpdesk@hartford.edu

Website: <http://hartford.edu/ots>

Media Technology Services (MTS)

Faculty should contact MTS for assistance scheduling or implementing classroom technology (2-Way interactive video classrooms, Smart Podiums, laptops, etc.), for setting up WebEx accounts, or for scheduling and instruction for a wide variety of media equipment and resources like LCD data projectors, CD/cassette players, TVs and VCRs, digital video, and more.

Phone: (860) 768-4357 **Website:** <http://www.hartford.edu/mts>