Blackboard (http://blackboard.uscupstate.edu) is our USC Upstate Course Management System. It can give students immediate and ongoing feedback and help them and their advisors track progress and estimate overall grade so far throughout the semester.

Purpose and Applications
The WEIGHTED TOTAL column enables instructors to set the weight (or value) of individual assignments and assignment categories independent of the number of points in an assignment. If you set every assignment to 100 points but count one assignment as 10% and another as 25%, this is the column for you.

How to Set Up Your Weighted Total Column

Preparing to Use the Weighted Total Column
To set up the Weighted Total, all required columns and categories you will count in your calculations must pre-exist.

- To prepare, add all course assignments (See Blackboard Tips: Create an Assignment, Create a Discussion Forum, and Create a Blackboard Quiz).
- You may also want to align grade categories with your assessments if you wish to count several discussion posts as a single part of the overall course grade. In the Grade Center, click Edit Column Information for any assignment column and choose the category under the detailed grading options (see Fig. 1 below).
- By default, Bb contains the following categories: Assignment, Survey, Test, Discussion, Blog, Journal, Self and Peer. Custom categories may be created under the “Manage” tab in Full Grade Center.
- You will match your Bb Weighted Total with the assignments and grade categories on your syllabus.

Example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syllabus</th>
<th>Bb Gradebook</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Quizzes       = 15%</td>
<td>Quiz Category = 15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit Tests           = 15%</td>
<td>Test Category = 15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam           = 5%</td>
<td>Final Exam Column = 5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Discussions   = 25%</td>
<td>Discussion Category = 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Assignment 1   = 20%</td>
<td>Assignment 1 Column = 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Assignment 2   = 20%</td>
<td>Assignment 2 Column = 20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For help implementing any Blackboard best practices in your classes, contact academicinnovation@uscupstate.edu.
Customizing the Weighted Total Column

- Open the full Grade Center under Course Management in the left menu. The WEIGHTED TOTAL column will appear to the right.
- To customize the column, click on the grey downward arrow to the right of the column header (1), then choose “Edit Column Information” (2) as illustrated in Figure 1.
- When you are finished, return to that same drop-down menu (Figure 1), scroll down to Set as External Grade to ensure that this is the grade that students and advisors see in Starfish. Also take a minute to delete the regular Total column right away to avoid confusion about student grades (See Blackboard Tip: Total v. Weighted Total).

Setting Up the Weighted Grade Calculation

- After clicking Edit Column Information, a new window will open with options for column name, description, and primary/secondary display formats for the calculated grade.
  - Change the name to Overall Grade or Overall Grade so far for clarity.
  - Set the primary display to “Letter” to give students a clear message they can quickly understand.
  - Set the secondary display (your display) to percentage to give you more detailed information about the students’ grade status.
- Select individual assignments from “Columns to Select” (A) or click on a category under “Categories to Select” (B) in Figure 2. In this example, “Assignments 1 & 2” should be selected, but “Test 1” should not, as it will be included in the “Test” category.
- Click on the arrow (C) to move each item to the “Selected” box. You may add some Columns and some Categories in any combination.

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• Enter percentages based on the grade breakdown on your syllabus, entering the weight for each item (D) and ensuring that Total Weight is 100%.
  o For Categories containing multiple items, you may choose to drop a given number of high/low scores (E), or to use only the highest/lowest score (F).
  o Bb automatically calculates the Weighted Total and warns you if you submit the page with any total other than 100% (G).

Additional Settings
The remainder of the page allows you to:
• Calculate as Running Total
  o “Yes” here allows students easy access to their current standing in the course.
• Include this column in Grade Center calculations
  o “Yes” enables the inclusion of this column into another total column. If this is the course grade, this option is irrelevant
• Show this column to students
  o Choose “Yes” to allow students to track their progress
• Show Statistics (average and median) for this column to Students in My Grades
  o Students often find these statistics confusing and think that their grade is the average grade for the course. Default is “No.”

Quick Tips for Use
• Be sure your Weighted Total column accurately reflects the grade breakdown you have outlined in your syllabus.
• Delete the unused Total Column after setting the Weighted Total as External Grade to avoid having students compare the Total and Weighted Total and choose the one that is highest.
• To ensure the accuracy of the Weighted Total, you must enter a 0 for any missing assignments. Otherwise, the Weighted Total assumes you are not counting that work.

Additional Resources
• If you are not familiar with the Grade Center and the Total/Weighted Total columns, see Bb Tip: Grade Center Total vs. Weighted Total + set external grade.
• For details on how to create assignments in Bb, see Bb Tip: Creating Assignments.

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