Blackboard
Backpack

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With the use of technology, we can improve the learning environment for all students at the Florida State University. Although Blackboard is a popular tool used to coordinate assignments, due dates, syllabi and assisting in the communication between students and instructors, there is room for improvement. Backpack is a tool that can and will improve the current Blackboard system. Blackboard is a great resource in itself, but we need to take the next step in pursuit of enhancing our students' education. As well as operating despite the downtime of the Blackboard system, Backpack has the ability to ensure that students will be able to download and access information for their classes regardless of their current internet accessibility. Backpack is an undeniable necessity for today's students.

Blackboard is a great tool that is used by the majority of classes at Florida Sate. These classes have their own Blackboard page that is kept and stored on one of six dedicated Blackboard servers. One of the main issues with this is that every time an instructor posts a PowerPoint or some other course related file, the Blackboard system stores this information not only for the current semester, but for each semester that the class was taught. As you can imagine, this caused a problem. The six Blackboard servers have become overloaded with information and are running out of room to store it all. The administrators have tried to solve this problem by creating a "content collection". This allows instructors to store documents and to link them directly to the course pages within Blackboard. This will help to decrease information redundancy, but there is still a lot of information that is being posted to the Blackboard site that is not in the content collection. For instance, every time that a file is posted in a discussion board, it is being

hosted and stored by that individual page. Therefore, all of the classes each semester that have teachers that require students to post their assignments on a discussion board, these fifty or so students posting their files on the discussion board are taking up a mass amount of space on the servers. Even though they have reduced the increase of information, they have not really solved the problem. All this information is causing the servers to run slow and sometimes not allowing the students to access the information that they need to succeed in their classes. Blackboard is an essential part of universities academics and if the servers go down, all of the classes that depend on Blackboard will be affected. This in turn disrupts the learning environment.

Blackboard Backpack is a product offered by Blackboard via their website http://backpack.Blackboard.com. It is a software package that essentially lets the individual users to download all of their content from Blackboard filtered by course or semester. It then takes the content and easily organizes the information into a set of course tabs. This tabbing can be paralleled to using Microsoft products. The user interface resembles much of how Blackboard looks currently. This decreases the learning curve and takes very little time for the users to familiarize themselves with how the software is set up. Backpack also features auto synchronization which ensures that offline content is always up to date. This syncing process can also be manually initiated. Backpack is easily downloaded from the Blackboard Backpack website and they offer a free 30 day trial. If you decide to buy the product, during those 30 days, the price of the software package is only $19.98 per license. However, without the free trial offer,

Backpack retails for $49.95.   Even at this rate, Backpack is worth the money for convenience and as a stress reliever.

A number of students enrolled at Florida State University do not have access to the internet from their home. These students without access are at an academic disadvantage. With the current Blackboard system, on its own, there is no way to access any of the information without a connection to the internet. If Backpack was available for all students to use, it would not matter if the students have internet access or not. With Backpack, all of the information on Blackboard concerning a student's classes can be downloaded while on the schools network or anywhere there is internet access. This will then allow the students to view the information on their computer at anytime, anywhere. This is a valuable tool for those who are at the disadvantage of not having access to the internet from home. Backpack will assist students in accessing required class information, which will in turn increase their productivity.

The Backpack software will allow Blackboard to run more consistently for all students and faculty at the University. Currently, the Blackboard group on campus has six dedicated servers supporting the Blackboard application. At full force Blackboard could experience up to 50,000 users at one time. There are times during the semester when Blackboard becomes over whelmed. Class registration causes huge amounts of traffic on these servers. Other high traffic instances include normal nightly events when teachers access Blackboard to upload new course content and when students are logged in to complete assignments and download new information about their classes. During

finals week more students log on to use Blackboard for longer durations causing more server load. Backpack cannot help students with class registration, but during registration, Blackboard usually crashes. Students are not able to view their class websites when Blackboard goes downs from registration traffic. This is why Backpack is the perfect solution to these problems. If all students used Backpack, fewer users will be trying to access Blackboard for class purposes, which will free up the servers for those high traffic times such as class registration. As far as nightly traffic, if less people need to log on to Blackboard because they are using Backpack, then the traffic and server load will diminish on the six Blackboard servers. This can allow more consistent usage of online chat/classrooms, content collection (portfolios, web sites, and storage), secure applications (student profile, schedule, undergraduate check, transcripts, and etc.), organizational content and much more. This can also be said for traffic during finals week. Fewer users logged in at once means that Blackboard will run consistently more often. Soon, the University will grow in student and faculty population and more servers will be needed to support the Blackboard system. This could possibly compound these issues. Consistency is very important on a University level. There is no point in having an online-line organizational system that is depended on if you can not access it. This is why Backpack is a valuable tool.

Backpack is designed to ease the tasks of retrieving, viewing and saving your class documentation and information. All of your classes are organized into tabs which allow you to easily view and search through all of your class assignments and information. Backpack allows you take notes on individual classes' right within the

actual application. It allows for all of your assignments and notes from a given class to be organized in one convenient place. There is also an intergraded time management system built into Backpack. This automatically organizes your assignments and due dates and allows you to mark them off as you complete them. The content download manager will manage the duration between updates and keep you synchronized with the Blackboard server. This allows for the content from each class to be up to updated with Blackboard at all times. If the server goes down, you will still have all the information since the last update. You will always have your information no matter what is going on with the Blackboard infrastructure. All of these features and more make Backpack a very powerful tool in keeping up with your classes.

Backpack is a great solution for the endless problems of the current Blackboard system. Students and faculty alike can easily benefit from this software tool at a small price. With a financial contribution from the university, this software could actually be free for students and faculty. By taking the load off the Blackboard servers with the use of Backpack, the course software will run more consistently and be more available during peak usage times such as finals and course registration. Backpack is by far the best choice to improve the stability problems with Blackboard at the university and will increase student productivity. Backpack is a powerful and useful tool for students. It is inline with the schools mission to provide the best academics for all students attending Florida State University.