Creating Groups & Group Activities using Blackboard Vista’s Group Manager

What if you were teaching a course and wanted to assign your students to work in separate groups on a research project? This document will walk you through the process of using Blackboard Vista’s Group Manager tool to create three groups, create an activity (i.e., a discussion board or chat room) for each group, and then add members to each group. Vista’s Group Manager tool can also be used in conjunction with the Assignments tool to associate assignments with particular groups that you have created.

There are several different ways that you can use the Group Manager to create different types of groups. In this example, you will create groups using the "multiple groups" option.

Create Your Groups

1. From Teach tab, select Group Manager from the Instructor Tools menu.
2. Click Create Groups, select Create Multiple Groups, then click the Continue button.
3. Let’s say that you wanted to create three groups that all begin with the words “Research Group”. Enter that as the group title. You can also enter a generic description of groups (this should apply to ALL the groups).
4. In this example, select the option to create empty groups and add members later.
5. Enter the number of groups you want to create, and then click Continue.
6. Your groups have been created.
7. You will notice that Blackboard Vista has automatically added a number at the end of each of the group name, so I have Research Group 1, Research Group 2, and Research Group 3. If you like, you can enter a short text description that provides more detailed information about the exact topic that each research group is going to be assigned. Once you have entered the description text, click the Save button. Your three research groups have now been created.
Add Members to Each Group

Next, from the **Group Manager**, we’ll add members to our groups.

1. To add members, click on the *Action Links* dropdown arrow next to each group’s name, and select *Edit Groups*
2. Select *Add Members*
3. From the list of students, put a check in front of each of the students that you want to add to that group.
4. Click *Add Selected*.
5. Click *Save*.

Now do exactly the same thing to add members to your other groups.

**NOTE:** If you want to experiment with discussions or chat rooms that you have created for your groups, you might want to add “Demo Student” to one of your groups.

Similarly, if you plan to create an assignment, and assign groups as your recipients, you might want to add “Demo Student” to a group so that you can see what it’s like if a group member submits an assignment, so you can grade it. If you don’t assign Demo Student as a member of one of your groups, you won’t even see the group assignment link!
Create Activities (Discussion Boards or Chat Rooms) for Your Groups

Now, let’s say that you wanted to create some way for members of your research groups to communicate with each other. You have two different options for “activities” that can be associated with each of your groups, that can help members of each group communicate:

- You can create a discussion topic for each group
- You can create a chat room for each group.

Create a Discussion Board for Each of Your Groups

1. First, place a check in the checkbox in front of all of the groups you created, since you want each of them to have their own unique discussion area.

2. Next from the “Create Group Activity” dropdown field, select "discussion topic", and then click the green arrow ("go") button. (As shown below.)

3. Select the type of discussion you want (a threaded topic is recommended), then select Next.

4. Name the discussion topic (something generic like “group discussion”) and then fill in the rest of the properties. (Discussion description, whether or not it’s gradable or not, etc.)

5. After you create the discussion, you’ll see that your new groups have been associated with discussions, and that there will be an individual topic created for EACH of the groups.

6. Click Save, and you will be returned to the Group Manager tool.
Check the Discussions Topics That You Created for Each Group

Because you created your discussion activity using the Group Manager, Blackboard Vista will automatically limit the access of students to each group activity. In other words, Selective Release criteria are automatically applied to restrict access to group members only.

You might be curious to see the two discussions that Group Manager just created for your groups. To check this out, do the following:

1. Navigate to the Discussions tool.
2. You will see that there are now new, distinct discussion topics there, one for each of your groups.
3. You should also notice that the word “Conditional” appears after each of the discussion topics for your groups. This is because when you use Group Manager to create discussion topic (or Chat room) activities for groups, Selective Release criteria are applied to restrict access to those activities so that ONLY members of each group will be able to use them. In other words, only members of “Study Group 1” (in the example above) can see the discussion in that group’s discussion board, and only the members of “Study Group 2” can see that group’s discussion.

Those who are not a member of a particular group will not even see the link to the discussion if it’s added to your home page, or to a folder, or to a learning module. They will ONLY see the link if they are a member of that particular group.

Create a Chat Room for Each of Your Groups

To create chat rooms for each of your groups, you follow exactly the same process as you did to create your Discussion Topics for each group.

1. Next from the “Create Group Activity” dropdown field, select "chat room", and then click the green arrow ("go") arrow button.
2. The rest of the steps are essentially the same as creating your group discussion topics. You name the chat rooms and save them. If you go to the Chat tool on the Course Tools toolbar, you will see the chat rooms listed there.
Add Links To Your Group Activities (Discussions or Chat Rooms) Into Your Course

Since your students cannot navigate directly to the Group Manager tool (it's only available to Section Instructors on the Teach tab), in order to enable your students to access the activities you have created, you need to make them available to students by either ensuring that students can access the group activities by clicking on the Discussions or Chat buttons on the Course Toolbar, or by placing links to these activities into your course (i.e., on the Home Page, inside Folders, or inside Learning Modules.

In the following example, I will add links to the discussion topics I created for two groups for a Career Project into a learning module. (The exact same process would be used if I were creating links to group chat rooms.)

1. From the Build tab, open the Learning Module where you want to add links to the group discussions.

2. Click the Add Content Item Link button.

3. Select Discussions from the dropdown menu, and then select ALL of the discussions that you created for all of your groups. (You can select multiple items in the inventory by holding down the Ctrl key and clicking each one.) Then click the Add Selected button. (Note: To create links to group Chat rooms, I’d select the “Chat” tool from this dropdown menu)
4. Links to each of the group discussions will be added to your learning module. Note that new links ALWAYS appear at the bottom of the module, so you’ll need to re-order them if you need be. Note that the word “conditional” appears, indicating that Selective Release “group” criteria have been applied to that those discussions.

5. Students ONLY see links to the group discussion boards or chat rooms for groups in which they have membership, whereas Instructors see links to ALL group discussions or chat rooms.

Because this student has only been made a member of the “Career Project 1” group, he only sees the discussion topic for the group of which he’s a member. In contrast, the instructor (on the Teach tab) sees links to ALL group discussions.