

## Help Document Series: CICADA

### A Guide to CICADA Blocks

*This document provides a summary of the Blocks available to add to a course in CICADA..*

The CICADA system is accessed via the address: <https://cicada.clarku.edu>

You may use Internet Explorer or Firefox, though CICADA is optimized for best performance with Firefox.

[Mac users: Safari is not fully supported in CICADA at this time.]

### What are Blocks?

Blocks in CICADA provide faculty with a method for customizing the student experience of a course by offering additional features, activities, or information in persistent blocks that bracket the core course content on the page. Some blocks are system-related in nature, and may not be of particular use to academic courses.

The following is a guide to the blocks available in CICADA, along with information about why a faculty member may or may not want to include the block in his/her course.

### CICADA Blocks

#### Blog Menu

*What it does:* The blog menu block provides links to

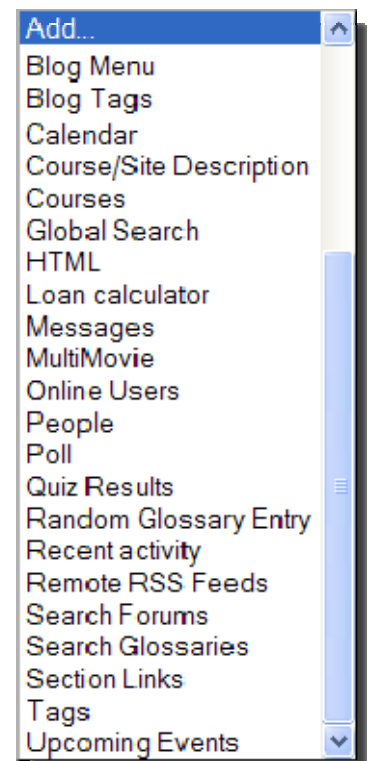
- Add a new entry
- View your entries (in the Blog tab of your profile page)
- Blog preferences
- View site entries (in the Blogs tab of the site participants page)
- Add/delete tags (in a pop-up window)

*Course usefulness:* If you encourage students in your course to use their CICADA blogs as part of course interaction you may want to enable this block.

#### Blog Tags

*What it does:* A Blog Tags block displays a list of tags (keywords) that users have associated with their blog entries. Words in the list of tags are distinguished by font size to visually indicate each blog tag's use. The more frequently used terms appear in a larger font size and least used in smaller fonts. This format is sometimes called a "tag cloud."

*Course usefulness:* If you are using blogs with your students, this tag cloud may be useful in spotting thematic trends. By clicking any of the words, you can



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quickly access entries that are “tagged” with a particular keyword.

## **Calendar**

*What it does:* The Calendar block provides a monthly-view calendar that includes color-coded highlights to indicate the following events:

- Site (event viewable in all courses - created by admin users)
- Course (event viewable only to course members - created by teachers)
- Groups (event viewable only by members of a group - created by teachers)
- User (personal event a student user can create - viewable only by the user)

*Course usefulness:* If you intend to include due dates on assignments or create entries for other events that are of interest to your students (such as related lectures or performances), this is probably a good block to add. Otherwise, not.

## **Course/Site Description**

*What it does:* The Course/Site Description block provides a summary and/or description for your course by displaying the information you complete as part of the “Summary” text on the course settings page.

*Course usefulness:* This may not serve any particular pedagogical value to the course, but it does provide a kind of “branding” for your course. You can include small images if you wish to do so. You may also choose to achieve this by modifying the zero block of your course page to contain this information.

## **Courses**

*What it does:* The Courses block lists and allows navigation between all of the courses in which the logged in user is a participant. When added to the page, the block title shows as "My courses" and allows one-click access to a course's home page.

*Course usefulness:* While this block offers no pedagogical value to your course, it does provide a courtesy to your students in allowing them to quickly navigate to other course in which they are enrolled.

## **Global Search**

*What it does:* The Global Search enables users to search all activity modules.

*Course usefulness:* As with any search tool, this block provides a convenient way to search for content in CICADA. It is currently not enabled.

## **HTML**

*What it does:* The HTML block is used to add text or images on a site or course page. The block is flexible and can incorporate a variety of functions and uses in the content area. It has the standard CICADA HTML editor for formatting text, adding images or creating links, switching to code view and allows any valid HTML markup to be used. This enables embedding video, sounds, Flash, and other files which can add unique elements to a course or site page.

*Course usefulness:* The HTML block is very versatile depending on your skill and/or understanding of basic web pages. You can create a block of useful links, embed multimedia content, add a splash of color, or even embed content from other sites. In some ways, this is the most customizable block available to you in CICADA.

## **Loan calculator**

*What it does:* The loan calculator block allows users to calculate interest and payments on loans.

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*Course usefulness:* Clearly, this block is limited in scope and is likely only to have relevance to courses in basic math or finance. Of course, it could prove useful to students calculating their student loan payments, too.

## **Messages**

*What it does:* The message block displays a list of new messages you have received, with a link to your Messages window. These messages are internal to the CICADA system and are completely independent from the Clark e-mail system. Messages provide a 1-to-1 communication system for users within the CICADA environment.

*Course usefulness:* Messages are private so, while users may find this feature handy, this feature offers little pedagogical value to the course.

## **MultiMovie**

*What it does:* The Multimovie block allows you to easily embed videos from YouTube, Google Videos, and TeacherTube using a simple syntax.

*Course usefulness:* If you use video from any of these sources in your course, the MultiMovie block offers the convenience of left/right screen real estate. However, the same syntax can be used to embed these videos on any rich text page within CICADA, using the “MultiMovie filter,” instead.

## **Online Users**

*What it does:* The Online Users block shows a list of users who have been logged into the current course. The list is updated every 5 minutes. Note that even though a user may have been logged into a course within the last 5 minutes, it does not necessarily mean that this user is still online.

- Bold type indicates a teacher
- If you hold the cursor over somebody's name, you will see how long ago that person was last "seen" in the course
- If you click on the envelope icon next to somebody's name, you will be able to send a private message to that person (using Moodle's messaging system)
- You must keep your messaging window open to receive notice of messages being sent to you

*Course usefulness:* This block may be useful if you are asking your students to participate in synchronous communication activities or if you are trying to foster a greater sense of connectivity (many social networking sites feature a similar online status indicator). Some, however, may view this feature as a potential invasion of privacy.

## **People**

*What it does:* The People block simply contains a link to the list of course participants.

*Course usefulness:* An instructor can access the enrollees of the course via the Gradebook, but the People block allows members of the course to “see” and contact each other. By including this block, you may be able to increase the sense of community among class participants, especially if students are encouraged to or have already customized their user profile.

## **Poll**

*What it does:* The Poll block allows you to quickly create polls that you can then include on your course page.

*Course usefulness:* Polls provide a way to add a quick survey capability to the course in a way that can be fun, interesting and spontaneous. They may be used to broadly gauge student comprehension of course content or may be used to take the pulse of the class on topics that arise in class or in preparation for class. They may

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provide a motivating factor for returning to your course content site. Once a user submits their responses to a poll they can quickly see the combined results for the class entries so far.

### **Quiz Results**

*What it does:* The quiz results block displays the highest and/or lowest grades achieved on a quiz within a course. There must be a quiz in the course to correctly configure this block. Options for this block include the ability to obscure user names from the results and to determine how many high/low scores are displayed.

*Course usefulness:* This block provides a feedback mechanism to students so that they can have a better sense of how their performance compares to that of their classmates. Depending on the nature of the “quiz,” this block may also serve as a tool to encourage competitiveness for a particular class activity.

### **Random Glossary Entry**

*What it does:* The random glossary block is used to display random entries from a glossary activity that you have added to your course. Usually, glossary entries take the form of dictionary style definitions. However, the flexibility of the glossary activity allow users to adapt this block for other purposes, such as FAQs, Q&As, 'Quote of the Day,' or a random picture gallery that changes each time the page is refreshed.

*Course usefulness:* In bringing a course glossary (whatever form it takes) to a front page block, the instructor can encourage repeat visits to the site as well as showcase student contributions to a class-generated activity. For a foreign language class, for example, the glossary block provides a way to introduce new terms, photos, or cultural snapshots.

### **Recent Activity**

*What it does:* The Recent Activity block lists course activity, such as forum posts and assignment submissions, since the user last accessed the course.

*Course usefulness:* This block is more of a convenience or time-saving tool. If a member of the course arrives at the course page to catch up on discussions or new additions to the course content, this block will alert the user to such changes, saving an unnecessary trip into the various resources or activities only to find that no changes have been made. Naturally, some may feel that this block represents a privacy concern, too.

### **Remote RSS Feeds**

*What it does:* The RSS feeds block enables subscriptions from external websites to be displayed within CICADA. As the information on the other site (e.g., New York Times headlines) is changed the block will update to show the latest information. One or more RSS feeds can be added to a course by selecting them from an existing list.

*Course usefulness:* Many web sites now offer RSS feeds of the information. This block allows an instructor to provide an up-to-date feed of information that is specific to the course content (e.g. news from *Scientific American*, the American Psychological Association, or *Le Monde*).

### **Search Forums**

*What it does:* The Search Forum block allows you to search the course forums for a word or phrase. For basic searching of one or more words anywhere in the texts, just type them separated by spaces. All words longer than two characters are used.

*Course usefulness:* This block provides a convenient way to locate discussion contributions, which may be of use for reference or citation reasons.

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## **Search Glossaries**

*What it does:* Similar to the Search Forums block, this block allows users to perform searches against all the glossaries in a course.

*Course usefulness:* This block provides a convenient way to locate glossary contributions, which may be of use for reference or citation reasons.

## **Sections Links**

*What it does:* The Section Links block helps the student or teacher to quickly navigate to a particular topic/week section of the course. The numbered links displayed within the block are the numbers assigned to the course topic/week sections. Where a topic/week section is highlighted, the link to that section within the "Section Links" block appears in bold. In addition, a link for the highlighted section ("Jump to the current topic/week") is displayed. If there are a large number of topic/week sections, the block displays every other even number i.e. 2, 4 etc. or every fifth numbered topic/week section.

*Course usefulness:* This block provides a convenient tool for navigating a course organized into a large number of topic/week sections. It is designed to reduce scrolling through a lot of content.

## **Tags**

*What it does:* Tags allows students and teachers to describe their interests in a way that is easy for people with similar interests to find them. The user's profile has a place to enter interests, which will create or add the user to an existing tag. User blog posts can also be tagged. This block organizes tags into a "tag cloud," in which the size of each tag is related to the amount of items associated with it. The larger the tag, the more items associated with it.

*Course usefulness:* If an instructor is encouraging students to write blogs, tagging is a useful way to identify shared themes. Clicking on a tag will display all blog entries or user profiles that include that tag. On the down side, tags are system-wide, not course-specific.

## **Upcoming Events**

*What it does:* The Upcoming Events block displays future events in a summarized list and is generated directly from the calendar and/or activity deadlines, providing a link to full details or directly to the activity.

*Course usefulness:* If you identify due dates for your activities or include other course-related events in the course calendar, this block provides a more informative way of communicating those dates to your students, as opposed to only the color-coding of dates on the Calendar Block.