

Emergency Alert Notification System

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Taft College Emergency Alert system, Blackboard Connect?

The Taft College Emergency Alert system is a way for the college to send voice, email, and text messages to you during an emergency or to provide you with other time sensitive and critical information. This facility is provided using a service called **Blackboard Connect**.

How does the Blackboard Connect system gain access to student and staff contact information?

If you are a student, the phone and email information you provided during the application process or during registration is used to populate the Blackboard Connect database. If you are an employee, the information you have provided to the Human Resources Department fulfills the same function.

Blackboard Connect provides an encrypted, online process to securely import Taft College's existing data into the school's account in a secure and reliable manner. Taft College also updates the information in its databases with the Blackboard Connect system on a regular basis.

How do I update my information if it is not correct?

If you are a student or an employee of Taft College, you may update your phone information – permanent, work, and cell – and your email address(es) by going to our Taft College [Emergency Alert Portal](#). After logging in, please navigate to the **Personal Information** tab and then select **Update addresses and phones**.

Does Blackboard Connect share the school's information with anyone?

No. Blackboard Connect does not sell, lease, share, or rent personally identifiable information (names, addresses, phone numbers, etc.) to any companies or persons outside of Blackboard Connect or their service providers.

Why does Taft College test Blackboard Connect each semester?

During an actual emergency is never the best time to test emergency preparedness; hence, the college tests Blackboard Connect each term to make sure everything is functioning properly and give administrators, students, faculty, and staff experience with the system.

How does the Blackboard Connect for Higher Education notification service work?

The Blackboard Connect service combines the power of the Internet with the pervasiveness of the telephone. This service helps college administrators reach out to students and staff via:

- o Voice messages to home phones, work phones, cell phones, and even emails
- o Text messages to cell phones, PDAs and other text-based devices
- o Written messages to e-mail accounts
- o Messages to TTY/TDD receiving devices for the hearing impaired

How many calls have been sent through the Blackboard Connect service?

Blackboard Connect is currently sending 20-25 million time-sensitive calls per month solely on behalf of government entities and schools via its Blackboard Connect family of services.

How many campuses are using the service?

Over 150 campuses are using the Blackboard Connect to send messages to 1 million students and staff.

Additionally, over 14,000 non-college sites nationwide are using one of Blackboard Connect services to reach over 9 million recipients.

What is multi-modal communication? Are text messages alone sufficient?

With the Blackboard Connect service, campus officials can reach their community members in their own voice (at landlines, cell phones, and via e-mail) and via text messages (at cell phones, PDAs/other text-receiving devices, e-mail accounts, and TTY/TDD receiving devices for the hearing impaired).

During a time-sensitive situation, multi-modal communication is critical as it is a more comprehensive way to reach people in the environment they may be in at the moment an issue arises. Communication is sent simultaneously to all available contact points for each person.

Relying on any single way to reach constituents (whether it is through just voice calls or just text messages) introduces a single point of failure. Additionally, text messages to cell phones, while a great back-up communication medium, are not stable enough to rely upon solely for time-sensitive communication. Cellular carriers did not design SMS (Short Messaging Service) as a reliable medium for transmitting high volume, time-sensitive communication within geo-centric communities (such as a college campus). As with any communication vehicle, it is important to combine voice, text-messaging, and e-mail to better ensure you can be reached in as many ways possible.

How has the Blackboard Connect system been used?

The Blackboard Connect system has been used to communicate vital information when a critical situation has taken place. It is also used to issue alerts to campus members as outlined in the Clery Act. Additionally, some campuses use the service for more routine communication, including communicating during the admissions process and to alert students to important financial aid and/or payment deadlines.

What if an emergency occurs and the school can't access the Internet to send a message?

Each administrator who is authorized to use Blackboard Connect is given a personal, wallet-sized Emergency Messaging card. In case of an evacuation or power loss, school administrators can use the information on this card to send a time-sensitive notification to all their contacts or to a pre-determined emergency response team using just a telephone. Blackboard Connect maintains client care representatives to assist users 24/7/365 should alternative methods be necessary such as encountered throughout both Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Wilma.

How long has Blackboard Connect provided this service?

The first Blackboard Connect client sent its first communication in early 2001. Since then, Blackboard Connect has delivered hundreds of millions of messages on behalf of schools and public officials.

How can the Blackboard Connect service reach thousands in minutes?

The company's mass notification engine supports the Blackboard Connect system. Blackboard Connect maintains access to tens of thousands of phone lines originating from multiple locations throughout the United States to ensure that its communications are delivered quickly and efficiently. Moreover, Blackboard Connect employs sophisticated call throttling logic to identify the proper schematics needed to deliver calls based upon whatever congestion the local telecommunications providers are experiencing at the moment calls are being attempted.