

Free Hosting of Online Courses

Teaching a course online involves delivering digital content to students, typically through a Learning Management System (LMS). An LMS provides a place to store and display digital content, organize users into courses and give the users roles such teachers, students, etc, deliver messages to users through email and announcements, deliver tests and manage a grade book, and so on.

There are several LMS products with significant market shares, including Blackboard (www.blackboard.com), Canvas (www.canvaslms.com), Desire2Learn/Brightspace (www.brightspace.com), etc.

If an instructor does not have access to an LMS through their school, there are free-to-use options. This document describes how to use CourseSites by Blackboard (www.CourseSites.com) to host a course submitted to SkillsCommons. Through CourseSites, an instructor can teach up to 5 courses at no charge and invite students to enroll.

The CourseSites website provides plenty of help materials, but here is an overview of the process:

Signing Up

While CourseSites is free, you do need an account. Visit the website and sign up as either an instructor or student:

1. Sign Up 2. Create Course 3. Invite Students

1. Create New Instructor Account

Not in the mood for another account? Sign up using:

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Otherwise, please let us know more about you below.

First Name
First Name

Last Name
Last Name

Email Address
Email Address

Country
Not Selected

Institution/District/Company
Select your Institution/District/Company

Username
Username

Password
Password

CourseSites Create New Instructor Account Form

Creating a Course by Importing a Blackboard Course Export

Once you have an account, you have the option to create a course. You can build a course from scratch, uploading materials as appropriate. You can also use materials that you have downloaded from SkillsCommons. Note that materials in SkillsCommons carry the Creative Commons attribution license, which allows you to reuse the materials. In some cases, the SkillsCommons submission includes either a Blackboard course export file or an IMS Common Cartridge file. Either of these files will contain material you can import into your CourseSites course as a head start.

Let's say you want to teach a course on Audiometry. There is such a course in SkillsCommons you can use as a base.

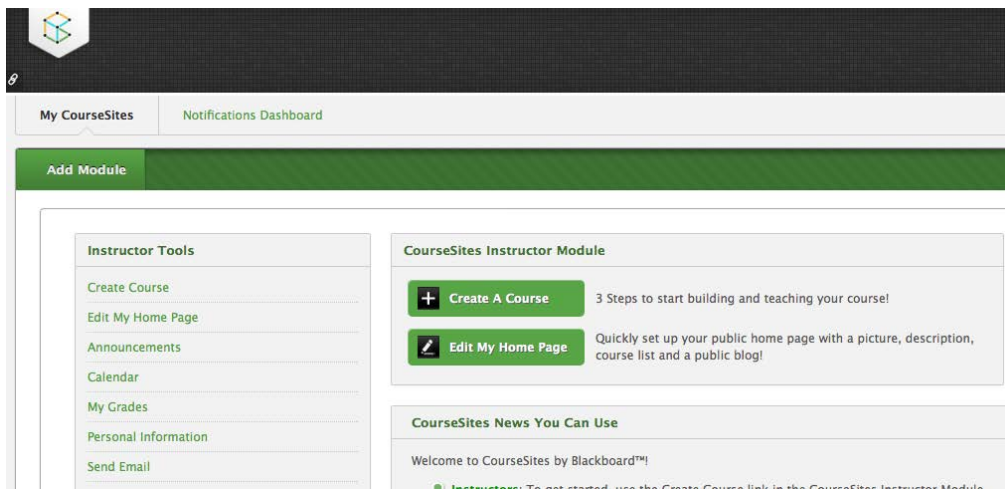
<https://www.skillscommons.org/handle/taaccct/1888>

The screenshot shows the SkillsCommons website interface. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links for HOME, ABOUT, BROWSE, CONTRIBUTE, SUPPORT, CONTACT, and LOGIN. Below the navigation is the SkillsCommons logo and a search bar with a 'Go!' button. The main content area displays the title 'HIS 130 Introduction to Audiometry' by Ozarks Technical Community College. It includes a description: 'This is the Blackboard course materials for HIS 130 Introduction to Audiometry.' Below this, two file download links are provided: 'OTC_ExportFile_HIS-130A.zip (4 MB)' and 'OTC_CommonCartridge_HIS-130.imsc (26 MB)'. A metadata section lists: Date: 2012; Primary Material Type: Hybrid/Blended Course; Institution: Ozarks Technical College; Project Name: MoHEALTHWINs; TAACCCT Round: 1; and Subjects: MoHealthWINs, OTC, Ozarks Technical Community College, Workforce Training Program, Healthcare Career Pathway, Therapeutic Services, Health Care and Social Assistance, Audiologist, Audiometry, Hearing Instrument Specialist. On the right side, there are two 'Browse' sections: 'Browse all of SkillsCommons' and 'Browse this Collection', both listing categories like Grant Projects, Material Type, Credential Type, Institution, Industry, and Industry (Wheel).

SkillsCommons Submission Page for Audiometry Materials

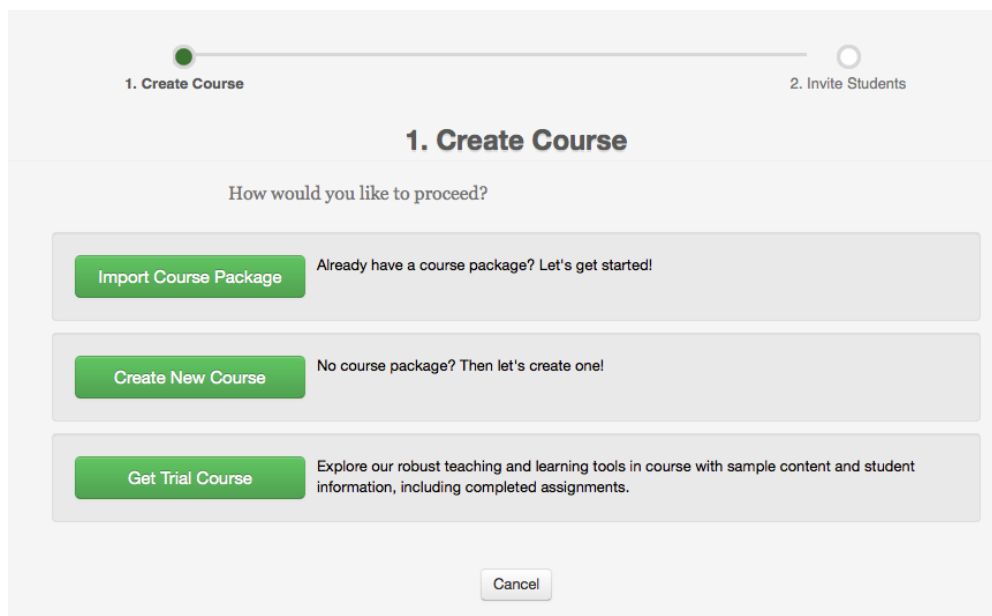
This course has both a Blackboard export format and an IMS Common Cartridge format available. Since CourseSites is based on Blackboard, the preferred format is the export

In CourseSites, choose to create a course from your Home Page.



CourseSites Home Page with Create A Course Button

Clicking on the Create A Course Button gives you a wizard to guide you through the process.



Create Course Form

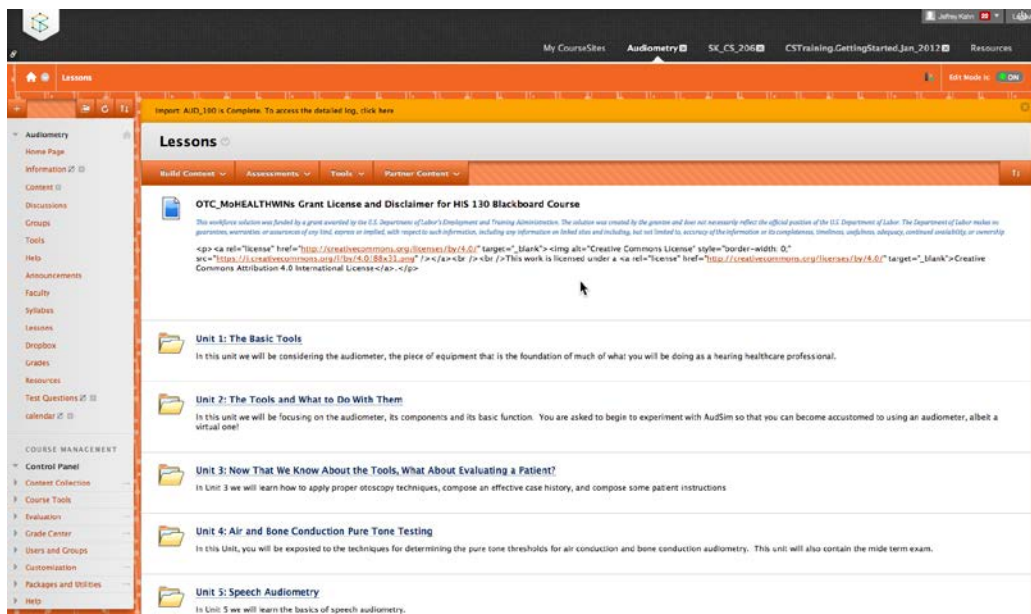
Import Package Form

You will want to use the Blackboard export file and then any course ID, name, and description. *Note that when you download the export file from SkillsCommons, your browser may unzip the file. The file needs to be in zipped format before it can be imported into CourseSites. If you only see the unzipped form, zip all of the contents into a file for import.*

After import, you are prompted to invite students, which you can do right away or later.

Invite Students Step

The imported course contains the content in the SkillsCommons submission. You can control the styling, colors, layout, etc. using Blackboard menus.



Imported Course Content

Creating a Course by Importing an IMS Common Cartridge

The process for creating a course given an IMS Common Cartridge is the same, just upload the imsc file in place of the zip. An export file from Blackboard will provide a better experience since nothing is stripped out in making the export. In making the cartridge, some content such as announcements are stripped out and there are some other concessions to a common format. Still, the content will import and this is a much better start than a blank course.

Create a Course from Scratch

If there is no SkillsCommons export file, create a new CourseSites course and use the Blackboard menus and features to assemble your materials. No matter the method by which the material is placed into the course, the benefit of a free LMS remains.



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This workforce solution was created through a cooperative agreement between the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration and the California State University-Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching (MERLOT).