



# Eagle Bluff Enterprises

## BB->RSS

### User & Installation Manual

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## Overview

BB->RSS is a program that will extract the Announcements from any number of courses in the Blackboard Learning System (Basic or Enterprise) and create a separate RSS feed XML file for each. BB->RSS is not a Blackboard Building Block and does not require any changes to your Blackboard environment.

## Key Features

- The number of announcements can be set per course or use a default value that you specify.
- The RSS feed file name is based on the Blackboard Course ID or you can specify any name for any RSS feed.
- No installation required, simply copy the files to your web/app server, edit the properties file and schedule it to run as a Windows “Scheduled Task”.
- System Announcements can be included in their own feed (course id = System) or may be included with any or all feeds. Any feed can override the default and include System announcements or not.
- The “Title” for each feed is based on the Name of the Blackboard course with the course id.
- The Feed description is specified for all feeds, such as “Sand College Blackboard Announcements”.

## Installation

The easiest way to install BB->RSS is to create a folder on your Blackboard web/app server, copy the files to the folder, edit the “bb-rss.properties” file and schedule the “BB-RSS” file to be run by the Window Scheduled Task applet (in Control Panel).

As an alternative you can install BB->RSS on any server in your environment as long as you can create an ODBC connection from that server to your database server.

Note: The preferred installation method is to have BB->RSS installed on your Blackboard web/app server but have the resulting RSS files created on a different web server.

To install BB->RSS installation follow these simple steps:

1. **Identify the Server.** Identify the server that you want to install BB->RSS on. This server should be able to connect to your Blackboard SQL server via ODBC and be able to connect to a web server where the RSS files will be hosted.
2. **ODBC Information.** If the server is not the Blackboard server you will need to create an ODBC connection to your SQL server. To create the ODBC connection you will need to have the “bbadmin” password from your “bb-config.properties” file. If the server is the Blackboard web/app server you can use the ODBC connection setup by Blackboard. If you need help with configuring an ODBC connection see Appendix A.
3. **WEB Server for RSS Feeds.** It is highly recommended that you do not attempt to host your RSS feeds from your Blackboard web/app server. Select another server in your environment that your students and instructors have access to. Have the web master of your server setup a folder for you to put the RSS XML file in. You may need to have a domain username and password setup to allow the BB->RSS process to create files in the folder.
4. **Copy the Files.** On the selected server create a folder that you want to contain BB->RSS. Do NOT put BB->RSS in either the Windows or System32 folders. For example on the “C:” drive create a folder named “BB-RSS”. Copy the files from the distribution zip file into the folder.

5. **Configure the “Properties” File.** Open the “bb-rss.properties” file with a text editor (Notepad normally is the default) and put in the information about your environment. Usually start with only the minimum information to ensure that BB->RSS is configured properly before you define all of the feeds that you want to create. It is recommended for this test that you only use the “SYSTEM” course ID. Be sure to save your changes.
6. **Do a Test Run.** After you have your basic setting completed and they have been saved, double click on the “BB-RSS.BAT” batch file. This file will run BB-RSS, it will only take a couple of seconds or it may just flash and be done. After BB-RSS has run check the folder on your web server and see if an XML file has been created from your course(s).
7. **Schedule you RSS Feed creation.** Once you know that you have BB->RSS configured to communicate with your Blackboard server and your web server use Windows Task Manager to schedule the “BB-RSS.CMD” file to run as often as you want it to. For most institutions this should only be once per day. If you need help with Windows Task Manager see Appendix B.

## Properties File Settings

The “bb-rss.Properties” file is where you tell BB->RSS about your environment and how you want it to work. The “Properties” file is also where you list the courses that you want RSS feeds created for. There are two types of settings in the properties file: System Settings and Course Settings. All settings use the format of “Setting Name=Setting Value”, where “Setting Name” is a specific setting that you want to assign a value to and “Setting Value” is the value. Note: any line in the properties file that starts with a pound sign (#) is treated as a comment, also blank lines are ignored.

## System Settings

These setting tell BB->RSS how to communicate with your Blackboard and how you want your feeds to look and work. Most of these settings can be overridden at the course level.

Setting	Sample Value	Description
RSSPath	C:\inetpub	This is the folder that you want the output RSS feeds to be created in. This value can be on the same server or on another server. Both “drive letter” format and “UNC” formats are supported. If this is not specified the RSS feed files will be created in the same folder that BB->RSS is installed in.
System	N	This is the default setting for if System Announcements will or will not be included in each RSS feed generated. Values are: Y – Include System Announcements N – Do not include System Announcements
TimeZone	EST	Each RSS feed needs to know how to handle dates and times. Specify the time zone that your Blackboard server is running in. Some examples are: EST, PSD, MSD, etc.
URL	http://www.sandu.edu	This is the URL for your Blackboard main

		gateway or login page.
DSN	Bbadmin	By default Blackboard created an ODBC connection in the DSN tab of the ODBC connection applet in Control Panel. In some cases you may not want to use the default ODBC connection, or if you plan to run Bb->RSS on a different server, specify the ODBC connection name.
Password	blackboard	When you installed Blackboard it setup and ODBC connection from your web/app server to your database server. During the installation process you were asked to setup a "User" password. This is the password on the "bbconfig.database.bbadmin.db.password" line in your bb-config.properties file.
Description	Sand U Bb Announcements	This is the description to use for the RSS feeds that are generated. This description usually states that the RSS feed is from a particular Blackboard system at a particular institution.
Rows	5	The default number of announcements that will be included for each RSS feed. This value can be overridden for each course.

### Course Settings

For BB->RSS to know which of your courses to generate an RSS feed for you need to provide at least a Blackboard Course ID for each course. Each course has a section in the properties file that starts with a "<course>" tag and ends with a "</course>" tag. Inside these tags one course is defined. Any number of courses can be specified in the properties file, but each must have its own <course> and </course> tags.

Setting	Sample Value	Description
<course>		This is the required opening tag for a course. Required.
ID	SYSTEM	The course id of one course to have an RSS feed created from its announcements. Note: the value of "System" will generate a feed of only System Announcements. Required.
Rows	10	Overrides the default for this course only of the number of announcements to be included in the feed. Optional.
FeedName	Abc123dhick	By default the name of the RSS XML file is a derivative of the course id. Use this setting to use a different name for the RSS XML file. You may want to specify the name if you have security concerns with students

		subscribing to RSS feeds for courses other than their own. Optional.
SysAnn	Y or N	Overrides the default setting for this course if System Announcements are included in this RSS feed for this course. Optional.
</course>		Required closing tag for a course. Required.

## Sample Properties File

Below is a simple sample Properties file. All lines that start with a “#” sign are comments.

```

## Path to Create Files In, Optional, by default Rss Feed Files
## will be created in current folder

RssPath=\\myserver\bb\rssfeeds

## Include System Announcements in Feeds

System=N

## Timezone your Blackboard server is running in.

TimeZone=EST

## Password for bbadmin - from the bb-config.properties file line
## bbconfig.database.bbadmin.db.password

Password=MybbUser

## Description to use for all feeds

Description=Announcements from Blackboard Courses

## Default number of announcements (can be specified for each course)

Rows=5

## List of Courses to generate RSS Feeds for
## Each course must be in a <course> ... </course> format

## This will generate a feed of system announcements only
<course>
  ID=system
</course>

```

```
## This is a typical instructor course or organization
<course>
  ID=Fall.Math.101.1234
  Rows=10
  FeedName=DrSmith-Math-1234
  SysAnn=Y
</course>
```

### Explanations

#### System Settings

- This system will create file on the server “myserver” in the “bb\rssfeeds” folder. If this is the same server as the web/app server a path could have been entered, ex: “d:\bb\rssfeeds”
- By default System Announcements will not be included in each of the course RSS feeds.
- Date/Time values be displayed with the EST time zone.
- The URL in the feed is the main Blackboard page at <http://www.sandu.edu/blackboard>.
- The database user password that was setup with Blackboard is “MybbUser”, this value is case sensitive. This value is used to connect to the database via the ODBC connection.
- All of the feeds will have the description of “Announcements from Blackboard Courses”
- Unless overridden at the course level, the RSS feeds will contain only 5 announcements per course.

### Course Settings

```
<course>
  ID=system
</course>
```

### Explanations

This will create a feed of only “System” announcements, it will have the name of “system” and will have the default number of lines.

```
<course>
  ID=Fall.Math.101.1234
  Rows=10
  FeedName=DrSmith-Math-1234
  SysAnn=Y
</course>
```

This is a typical course,  
The course ID is “Fall.Math.101.1234” it will have 10 rows in the RSS Feed (overrides the 5 set as a default).  
The name of the output file will be “DrSmith-Math-1234.xml” and it will include the system announcements (overrides the default value).

## Complex Sample file.

This sample properties file uses most of the options available and had good internal documentation using comment lines. This sample is included in the distribution zip file.

```
## BB->RSS Property File.  
## Use this file to configure the RSS feeds from your Blackboard system.  
##  
## Usage Notes:  
## - Blank lines are ignored  
## - Lines that start with the # sign are treated as comments  
## - The format for each line is the property name followed by an equal sign and the value  
## - Do not put quotes around each property value  
## - If you decide to not set a property don't delete the line, simply make it a comment  
##
```

```
## License Key  
## When you License BB->RSS you will be provided with this license key.  
## If you don't have a license key BB->RSS will be running in "Demo" mode  
## Licensed copies of BB->RSS can generate any number of RSS Feeds  
## When running in demo mode only 2 RSS Feeds will be generated
```

```
LicenseKey=none
```

```
## Path to Create Files In, Optional  
## This could be a UNC Path such as \\mywebserver\rss\bbfiles  
## - Be sure the scheduled task has appropriate permissions to write to the folder you want  
## - This defaults to the current folder
```

```
RssPath=\\mywebserver\inetpub
```

```
## Include System Announcements in Feeds  
## If you choose system announcements can be included in each RSS feed generated.  
## This value can be overridden for each course so set this to the most used value.  
## Note: to have a feed of only System Announcements use the CourseID of "System"  
## see below.
```

```
System=N
```

```
## Timezone  
## RSS feeds need to understand the time zone the feed was produced in  
## This value defaults to EST (for Eastern Standard Time)
```

TimeZone=PST

## URL for your Blackboard System  
## Specify the complete URL for your Blackboard server

URL=http://www.sandu.edu/blackboard

## ODBC Connection Name  
## Normally this can be left to the default of "badmin" but in some load balanced  
## configurations the ODBC connection may not work as created by the  
## PushConfigUpdates utility.  
## If you create your own ODBC connection to your database specify the DSN name here.

DSN=bbodbc

## Password for ODBC Connection  
## Be default the ODBC connection created uses the password of the database user account  
## created by the PushConfigUpdates utility.  
## This is the value from the "db.password" line in your bb-config.properties file.

password=BBUser

## Description to use for all feeds  
## High level heading to be placed in all RSS Feeds,  
## typically this has your institution name and mentions Blackboard  
##

description=Sand University Blackboard Course RSS Feeds

## Default number of announcements  
## This is the default number of announcements to be included for each course  
## this value can be overridden for each course so specify a value to be a default for  
## your institution

rows=5

##### Course List  
#####  
##  
## List of Courses to generate RSS Feeds for  
## Each course must be in a <course> ... </course> format  
## Some settings at the course level can override defaults set above  
## the only required property is the Course ID enclosed in <course> ... <course> tags.  
##  
## Note: To have an RSS Feed of only System Announcements, use a course ID

```
## of "System" (without the quotes)
##
```

## Example

```
## <course> Required to start each course definition
## ID=My.Fall.Course This is the Course ID, required
## Rows=10 optional, Number of Announcements, overrides Default
## FeedName=478ijy21sd optional, Don't name feed from course ID, See Below
## SysAnn=Y optional, Include System Announcements in this course,
## overrides the system default
## </course> Required to complete each course definition
```

## Feedname Property

```
## By default each RSS feed is named from the course ID with most special characters
## removed or changed to underscores. If for some reason you do not want the RSS feed
## name to have any resemblance to the course ID use this property to set the name of
## the RSS feed for this course. Remember this is an optional property and by default
## the feed name will be derived from the course ID.
```

```
<course>
  ID=system
  rows=10
  FeedName=sandu-Bb-System Announcements
</course>
```

```
<course>
  ID=2006.SPRING.6063
  SysAnn=Y
</course>
```

## **Licensing & License Types**

BB->RSS requires an annual license to run. When you purchase an annual license you will be sent an encrypted license key code. Without a license key code BB->RSS will only run in “Demo” mode. When in Demo mode only 2 RSS feeds will be generated regardless of how many courses are specified in the properties file.

After receiving your license key code place it in the properties file. When BB->RSS validates your license it will run in “Enterprise” mode. When running in Enterprise mode any number of RSS feeds can be generated.

License codes are valid for one year from the date of purchase, at the end of the year BB->RSS will revert to Demo mode unless a new license key code is installed before the end of the year.

## **License Fees**

No fee is required to operate BB->RSS in Demo mode, however, Demo mode is intended to allow institutions to try BB->RSS before they purchase a license.

The only license level available for BB->RSS is the “Enterprise” license. For a limited time (through the end of August 2006) a one year Enterprise license of BB->RSS is only \$250.00.

To purchase a license key e-mail [Sales@eaglebluff-enterprises.com](mailto:Sales@eaglebluff-enterprises.com). We accept purchase orders from most institutions, payment should be made within 30 days after the receipt of our invoice. Or you can mail your purchase order to:

Eagle Bluff Enterprises  
PO Box 72206  
Phoenix, AZ 85050

## **Liability**

Eagle Bluff Enterprises, its principles, nor its subsidiaries will have any liability for the use, non-use or the consequences from the use for BB->RSS in any way. Each institution uses BB->RSS at its own discretion and risk with no warranties either expressed or implied.

## **Support**

Eagle Bluff Enterprises provides support for BB->RSS primarily via e-mail and information on our website.

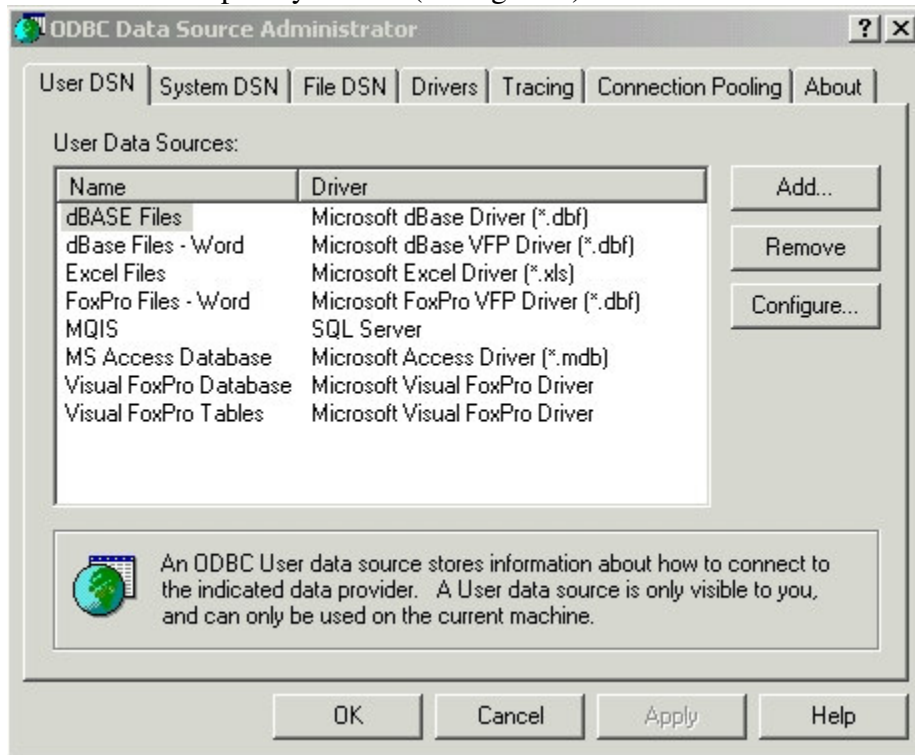
e-mail: [Support@eaglebluff-enterprises.com](mailto:Support@eaglebluff-enterprises.com)  
Website: <http://www.eaglebluff-enterprises.com>

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) will be posted on the BB->RSS page and possibly even discussion boards will be added.

## Appendix A - How to Configure an ODBC Connection

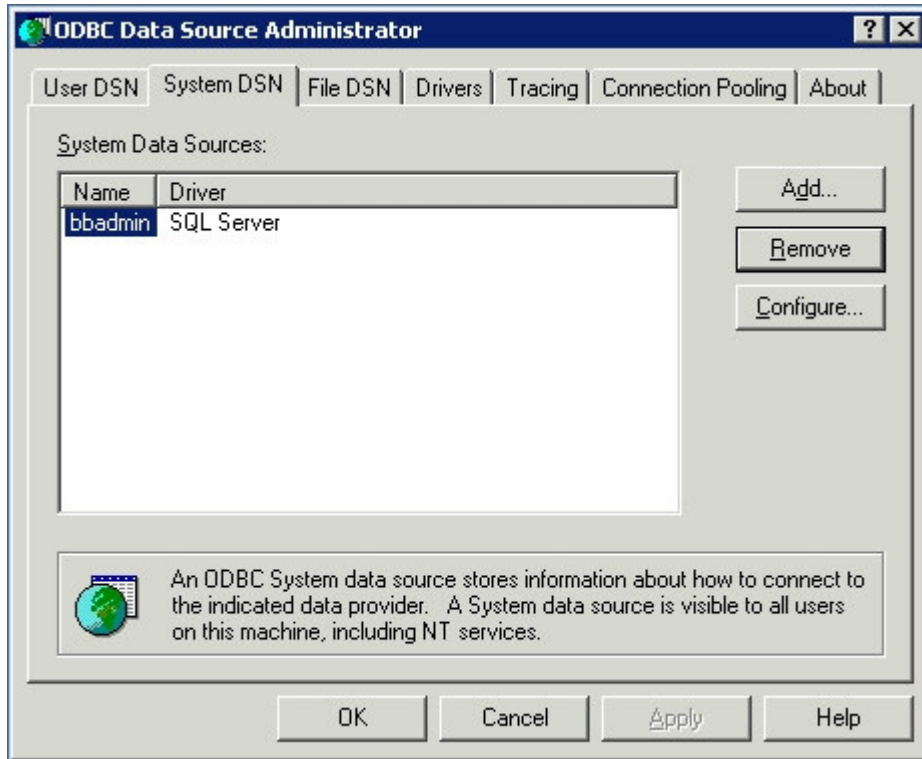
Complete information on how to configure and ODBC connection is available from Microsoft or from any of your IT professionals. This “How To” only covers the normal steps, however, each environment is different.

1. Click the “Start Button” and select “Settings” then “Control Panel”
2. From the list of applets select “Administrative Tools”
3. In the list of Administrative Tools select “Data Sources (ODBC)”.
4. When the ODBC applet opens you will see a series of tabs across the top of the window. The first tab “User DSN” is open by default (see figure 1).

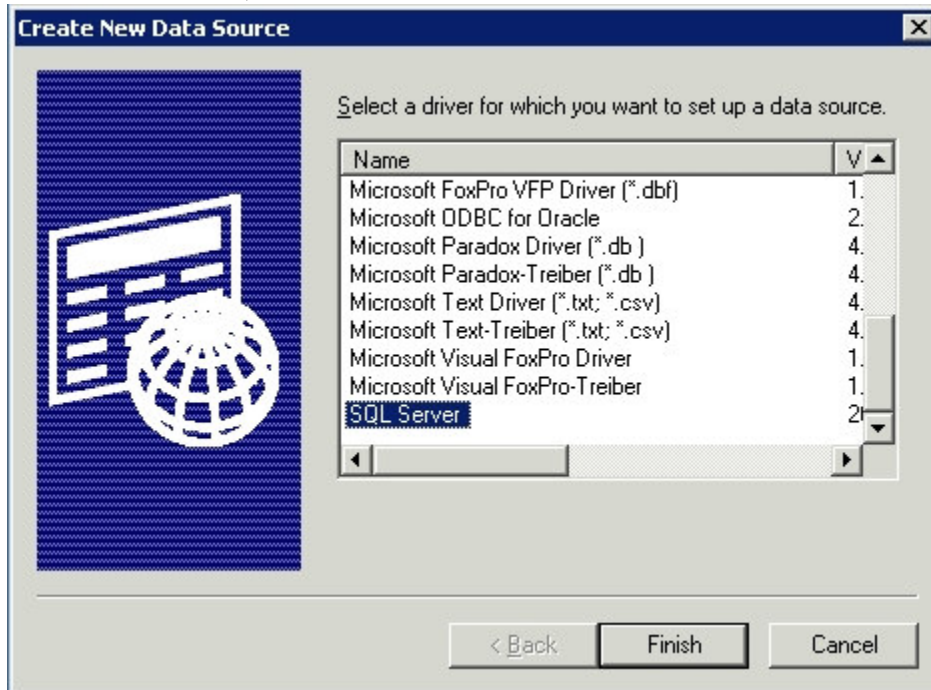


Click on the “System DSN” tab.

5. After clicking the “System DSN” tab your existing system ODBC connections will be displayed. If this is a Blackboard web/app server you should have an ODBC connection named “bbadmin”. If this is not a Blackboard web/app server you can create an ODBC connection to connect to your Blackboard SQL server.



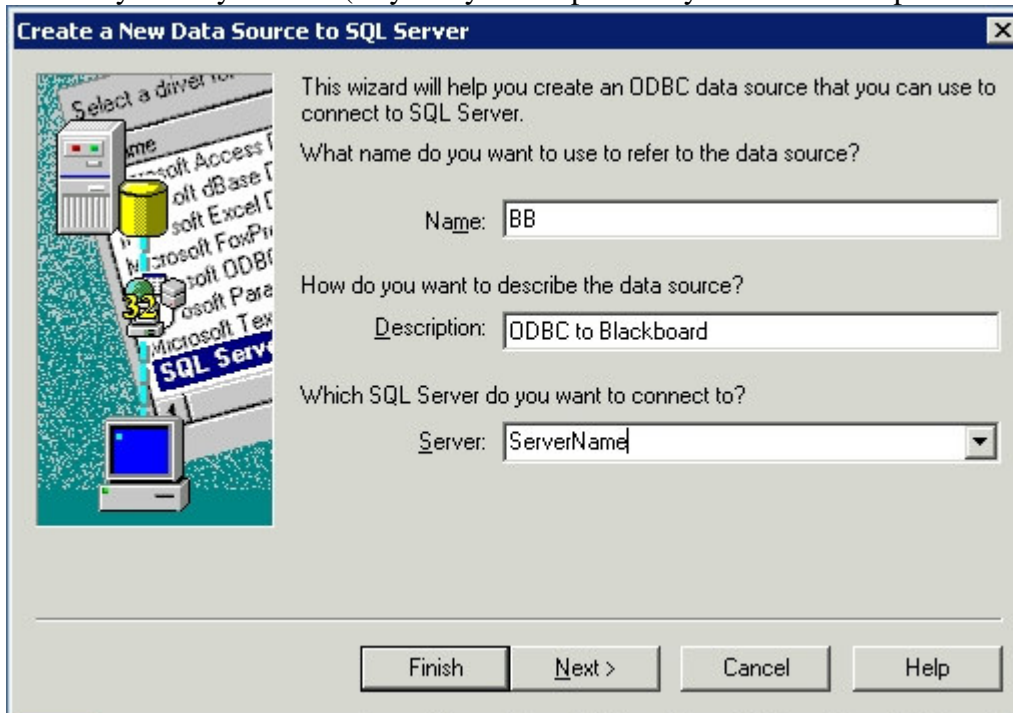
6. To create a new ODBC connection click on the “Add Button”. You will first need to pick the type of ODBC connection, for Blackboard scroll to the bottom of the list and select “SQL Server”.



Click “Finish” to go to the next screen.

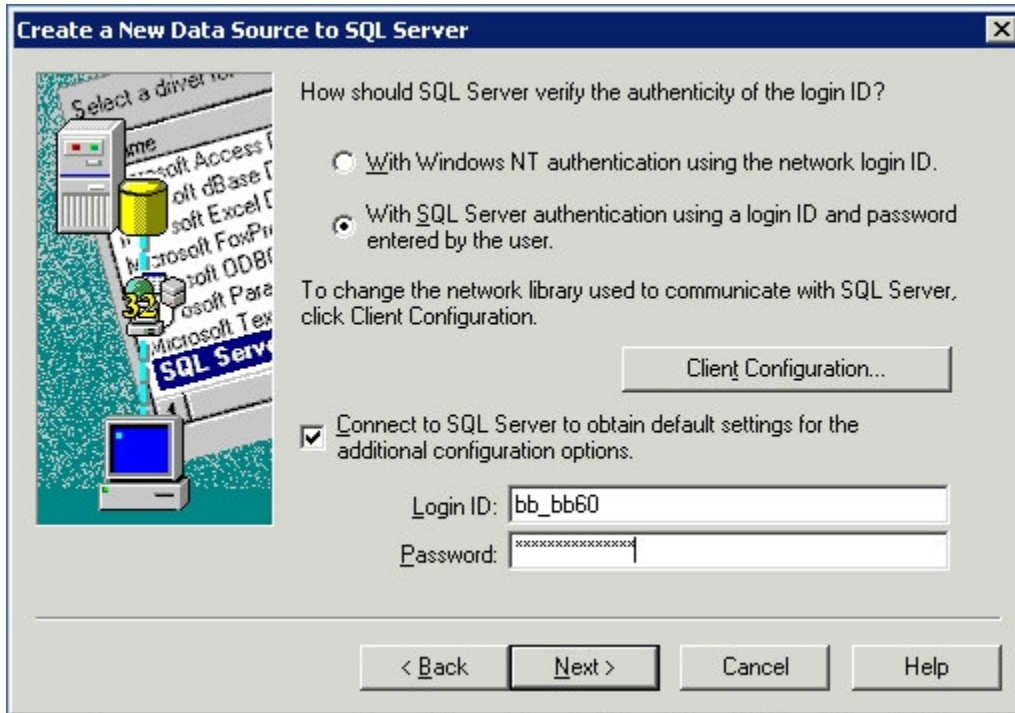
7. Next you need to give the connection a name, if this is a Blackboard web/app server you already have a connection named “bbadmin”. In this example we will name the connection “BB” but you can use just

about any name you want (stay away from spaces in your name and special characters).



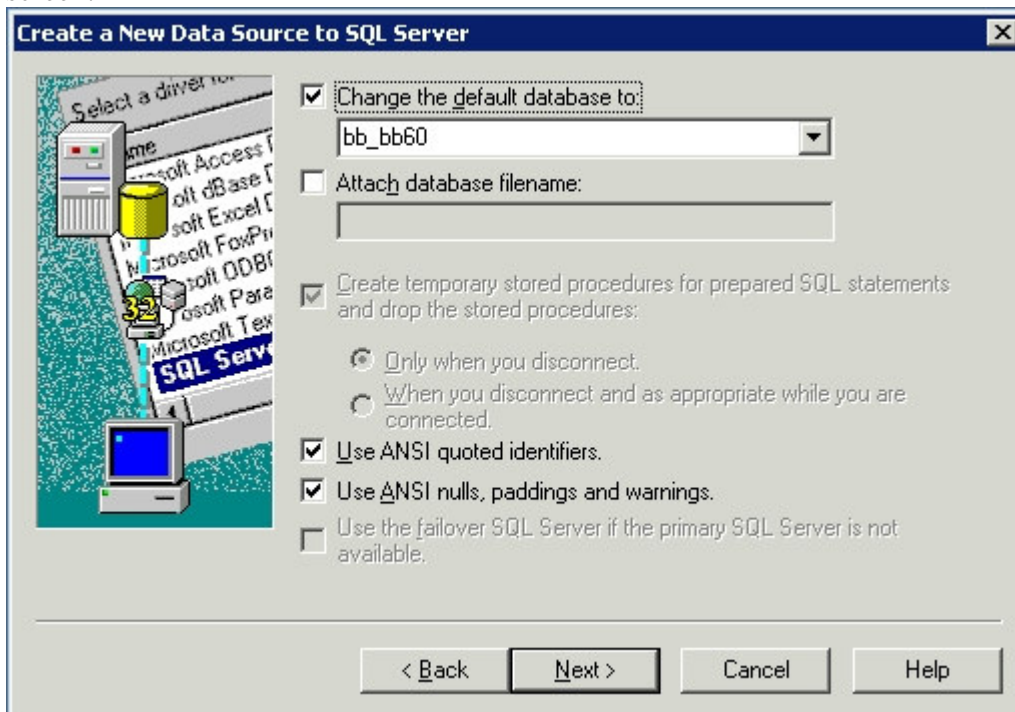
Fill in your connection name, a description if you want one and the name of your SQL server. If you have a “one server” Blackboard configuration (very popular) than you have SQL server running on the same server that is your web/app server. If you have a two server setup (also very popular) you have one server that is your web/app server and a second server that is your SQL server. Place the name of your SQL server in the “server” box. Note: You may be able to use the drop down list to select your server. When finished with the form click the “Next” button.

8. On the next screen there are two radio buttons at the top and some fields at the bottom. Most of the time the fields at the bottom are “grayed out” and you cannot put data into them, until you select the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the two radio buttons.




Once you have selected “With SQL Server Authentication” you will be able to put the Login and Password in. Blackboard already configured a “bb\_bb60” username when you installed it. The password is the “bb-User” password from your Blackboard configuration file. Click “Next”

9. If you new ODBC connection cannot connect to your server you screen will freeze for about 30 seconds and you will get an error message. If you can connect to your server you will see the next configuration screen.

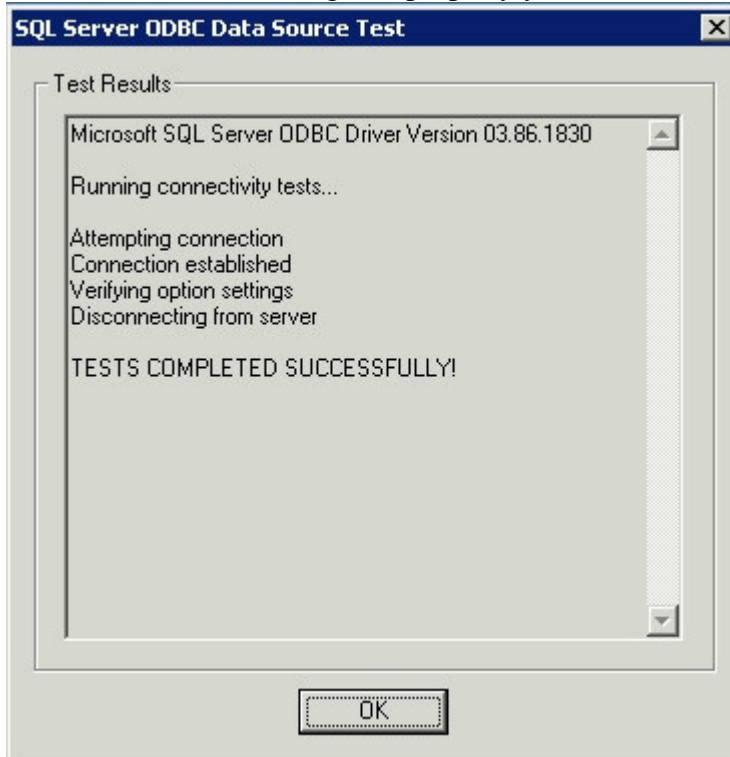


Check the “check box” at the top of the window and then using the dropdown list select “bb\_bb60” database from the list. The other items on this screen should default to the proper values. Click “Next”.

10. On the next screen simply click the  button to continue.
11. You now have an opportunity to test the ODBC connection to the database server. In the bottom left corner click the “Test Data Source” button.



If the connection is configured properly you should see a screen that looks like this



- Click the “Ok” button and then the “Ok” button again to exit the prior screen and then again click the “Ok” button again to go back to the “Source Administrator” screen.
12. You have now configured and tested your ODBC connection, select the “X” in the upper right had corner of the screen to close the ODBC applet.

## Appendix B – How to Use Windows “Scheduled Tasks”

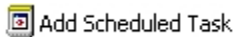
Complete information on how to use the Windows “Schedule Tasks” applet is available from Microsoft or from any of your IT professionals. This “How To” only covers the normal steps, however, each environment is different.

1. Click the “Start Button” and select “Settings” then “Control Panel”
2. From the list of applets select “Scheduled Tasks”



Scheduled  
Tasks

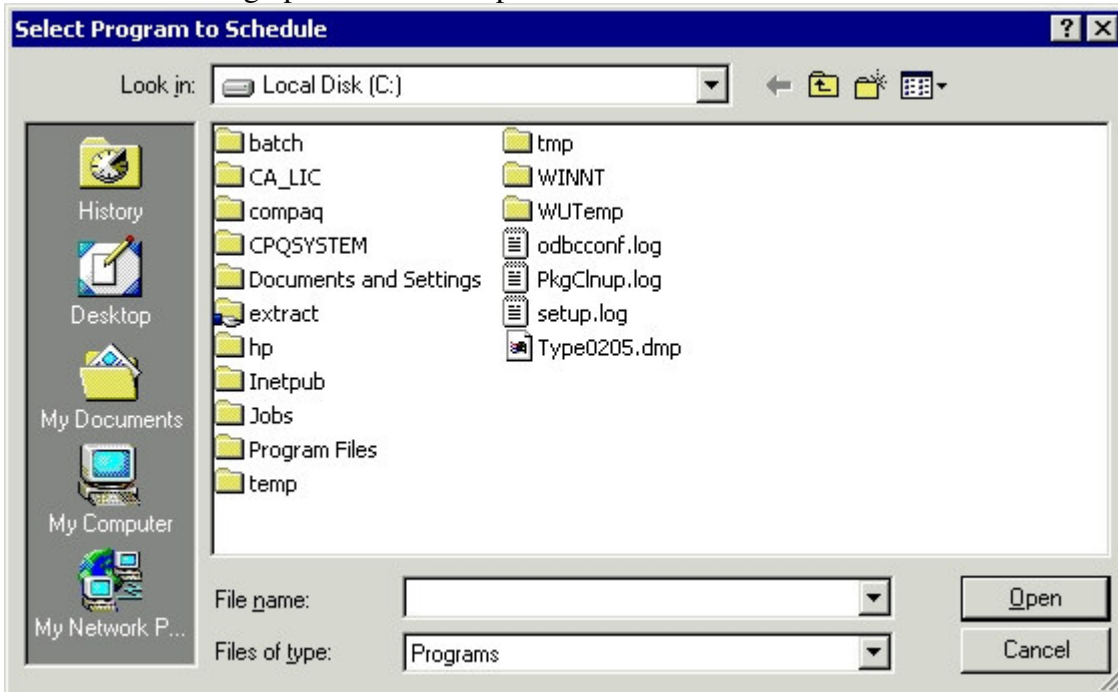
3. The next window will have the list of scheduled tasks for this server, if any. To add a new scheduled task click the “Add Scheduled Task” icon.



4. The “Scheduled Task” wizard will walk you through the steps. After the first screen comes up click “Next” to get started, this may take a minute or two depending on your server.
5. The next window that opens will have a list of some of the Applications that Windows thinks that you may want to schedule. BB->RSS will not be in the list so click the “Browse” button.

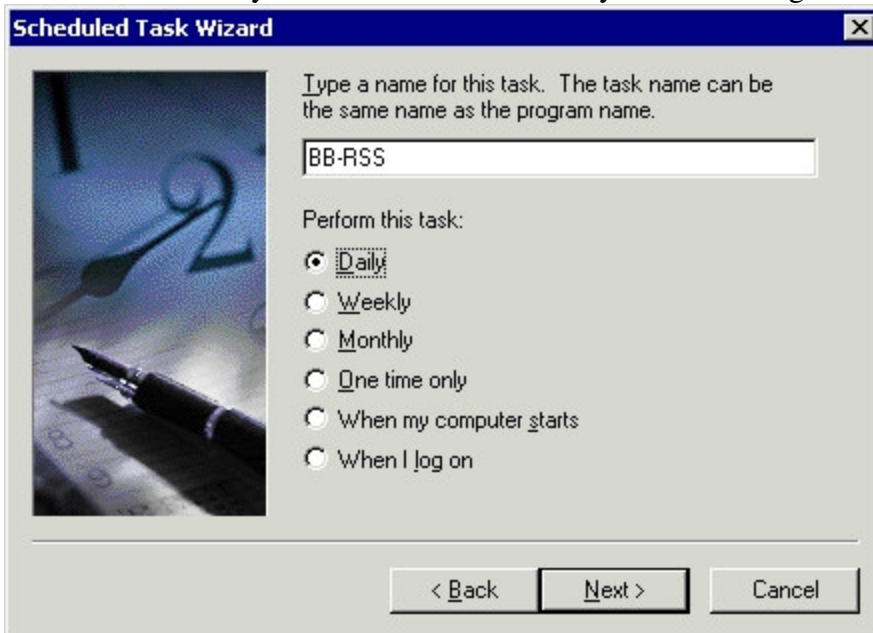


6. Windows will bring up a standard “Explorer” window



using this window find the disk drive and folder that you copied the BB->RSS files into. When you find the folder, highlight the “BB-RSS.CMD” file and click the “Open” button.

7. On the next screen you can name the task that you are creating.



You can use just about any name but it is recommended that you use a name that best describes the task that you are scheduling. After deciding on a name click the radio button next for “Daily”, then click the “Next” button.

8. The wizard then needs to know when each day you want the RSS feeds to be created.



For example this task will run each day at 6:30am starting on 06/01/2006. If you want your RSS feeds to be created more than once per day, put in the first time for each day. Click the “Next” button.

9. Each scheduled task needs to be run by a user. Fill in the user login information that will run this task. This is not the same as the SQL username and password that you used when you configured the ODBC connection. This is usually either a service account or the username and password that you used to log onto the server.



The username is your domain name followed by your user name. If you don't you're your domain name ask one of your IT professionals, or next time you log onto this server look at the last box at the bottom of the window, most of the time that is your domain. Click the “Next” button.

10. If you specified a correct username and password you will see the following screen



if you only want to generate your RSS feeds once per day simply click the “Finish” button. If you want to schedule BB->RSS to run more than once per day check the “Open Advanced Properties” check box before clicking “Finish”.

11. You have now scheduled your BB->RSS job to run once per day.

12. To force BB->RSS to run right away (or at any time), from the Scheduled Task screen find the “BB-RSS” task (or whatever name you used when you scheduled it) and then right-click on it. When the menu comes up select the “Run” option, it is usually first. BB-RSS will run right away.