

# Synchronous Collaboration Sessions

Be Free To Teach



## Highlights:

Collaboration Tools  
Virtual Classroom  
Lightweight Chat  
Blackboard  
Create Sessions  
Modify Session  
Remove Session  
Filtering Sessions  
Search for Sessions  
Join a Session  
Inside the Chat  
Accessing Archives  
Inside the Classroom  
Technology Trouble

## The Collaboration Tools

Blackboard's Collaboration tools let you create and participate in real-time lessons and discussions with your students. Instructors put these tools to a wide variety of uses - both with students who are participating from their own machines and students engaged in work in a computer classroom.

There are two versions of the Collaboration tool: the **Virtual Classroom** and the **Lightweight Chat**. Though both collaboration tools give you the ability to record archives that you can make available to students, the Virtual Classroom tool lets you and your students browse the web, participate in question and answer sessions, and take part in chat sessions, while the Lightweight Chat is a simpler tool designed to only let you and your students participate in chat sessions.

## The Virtual Classroom

Blackboard's Virtual Classroom is a useful tool for students working synchronously at a distance as well as students working together in a computer classroom.

In conjunction with the American Association of Higher Education's "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education" the Virtual Classroom:

- Encourages student-faculty contact
- Encourages cooperation among students
- Encourages active learning
- Gives prompt feedback
- Emphasizes time on task
- Communicates high expectations
- Respects diverse talents and ways of learning

You can use the Virtual Classroom in a variety of ways. You might use it to involve students in active learning or to create a more personal environment. You might find that it allows you to work



"The quality of our discussions hinges on the quality of the questions we ask. Three high quality questions equal five highly informative lectures."  
-UO Faculty

more effectively with students of diverse needs and backgrounds. The Virtual Classroom is also effective for "hot topic" conversations. Think about ways that you can put this unique learning environment to good use.

For instance, you might conduct an online review session that students can log into from their home computers, or you might schedule your class in a computer classroom in order to use the Virtual Classroom for a brainstorming session that you can then save and distribute.

In the Virtual Classroom, you can facilitate or you can hand the floor over to a student facilitator. You can designate "workgroups" so that, for instance, groups take turns in their conversation roles -- one group poses key questions from a reading or lecture, and another group provides feedback or ideas. As you rotate through the groups and roles, the conversation gets increasingly sophisticated as students build on the ideas of others.

You can create and share a slide show in the Virtual Classroom using a variety of web sites that students can link out to and then return from to discuss. You can also use the Virtual Classroom's whiteboard, where you can write and draw.

## The Lightweight Chat

You can use Blackboard's Lightweight Chat to hold office hours online. Virtual office hours can be offered during a set time, on a regular basis, or they may be scheduled as drop-in or by appointment.

Virtual office hours are beneficial and productive in that they allow us to:

- Increase overall student success in our courses.
- Encourage more contact with students who live off campus, are working with us from a distance, or otherwise have limited access.
- Provide comfortable and productive access for students who might be reluctant to approach us in person.
- Manage our classes effectively.
- Ease our own schedules and open up new possibilities for how we "do" office hours.
- Encourage and participate in the use of technology for effective communication.

A wide range of students benefit from being able to access your office hours through a chat environment, and virtual office hours can be used even with classes that do not otherwise carry an online component. In particular, you'll find that virtual office hours work well for:

- Personal interaction and connection.
- A chance for students to show their interest and engagement.
- Demonstrations, explanations, and clarifications of course concepts.
- A private atmosphere for conversation.
- Approval of ideas and approaches.



Virtual office hours also work well with an established course FAQ in the Blackboard Discussion Board. When students ask a question that has been resolved in the FAQ (policies on late papers, for instance, or formatting issues), you can refer them there, and use your one-on-one chat time with them to work on issues that are individual to their learning (developing a thesis statement or brainstorming potential sources for a research paper).

How can you stimulate students to access virtual office hours? Consider one or more of these techniques:

- Put it in your syllabus.
- Mention it in class, often.
- Schedule regular hours (open to everyone) and appointments (such as midterm conferences).
- Be available (unscheduled) as much as possible during peak times.
- Feed the culture by getting students to use the chat feature with one another for projects, questions, etc.
- Make it fun.

So, what are the potential problems? Be sure you that you are comfortable dealing with:

- Technical difficulties disallowing you from logging on during scheduled times.
- Students bringing nonproductive "Instant Messaging culture" into your virtual office.
- Some fumbling at the onset as you learn how to use the technology most effectively.
- Dealing with the difficulties of written communication.
- Slow typing - theirs and yours.

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"Killing discussions is an art form. I can kill a discussion by asking a question to which I know the answer."  
-UO Faculty

At first, you may find it awkward to communicate with students online, but many students use instant messaging every day in their social lives, to communicate with their families, and for recreation. As you engage in chat more often, you'll find that you are increasingly comfortable.

## Blackboard

The **Collaboration Session** page is used to manage the Collaboration Tools available in Blackboard. From this page, instructors can access all of the Collaboration Sessions for the course, including those that have already taken place and are archived and those that are scheduled for the future. This page also allows instructors to schedule new Collaboration Sessions and modify those already created. To access the Collaboration Session page:

1. From inside your Blackboard coursesite, locate the **Course Management** and **Control Panel** section (lower left corner of your menu bar).
2. Locate the **Course Tools** section and click on the **Collaboration** link.

Each coursesite begins with two default sessions. The **Lecture Hall** is the default Virtual Classroom, and **Office Hours** is the default Lightweight Chat. These default sessions can be modified if necessary, used as-is or removed from your coursesite.


**NOTE:** Removing a session is irreversible.

## Create Collaboration Session

Instructors create new Collaboration Sessions using the Virtual Classroom or the Chat tools, which one can schedule sessions for specific dates and times.

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"The wise man doesn't give the right answers, he poses the right questions."  
-Claude Levi-Strauss

1. From inside your Blackboard coursesite, locate the **Course Management** and **Control Panel** section (lower left corner of your menu bar).
2. Locate the **Course Tools** section and click on the **Collaboration** link.
3. Click the **Create Collaboration Session** button. 
4. In the **Session Name** text box type in a **name** that will help distinguish this session from others that have already occurred or will occur during the term.

5. From the **Schedule Availability** section, select a **Start** and **End date and time**. If these are not selected then the session is always open and available for users.  
**NOTE:** If you set an End date and time, be sure to mark the **End After** checkbox.
6. Determine whether or not you want to make this session **Available** and select the appropriate **radio button**.
7. Locate the **Collaboration Tool** section and select the tool you want to use for this session from the **pull-down menu**.
8. Click the **Submit** button.



## Modifying a Collaboration Session

The Create Collaboration Session page and Modify Collaboration Session page function in a similar manner. The Modify Collaboration Session page opens with a session already populated. To modify an existing session:

1. From inside your Blackboard coursesite, locate the **Course Tools** section and click on the **Collaboration** link.
2. Click the double down arrows to the right of the session name and choose **Edit**.
3. Change the **session information** as desired and click the **Submit** button.

## Removing a Collaboration Session

**NOTE:** This action is irreversible.

1. From inside your Blackboard coursesite, locate the **Course Tools** section and click on the **Collaboration** link.
2. Click the double down arrows to the right of the session name and choose **Delete**.
3. In the pop-up window click **OK button**. The session you just removed should be gone.

## Filtering Course Sessions

1. From inside your Blackboard coursesite, locate the **Course Tools** section and click on the **Collaboration** link.
2. Select a **filter** from the drop-down menu.
  - **Show All** - The default filter that displays all of the Collaboration Sessions.
  - **Available Sessions** - Displays all of the sessions that are currently being used.
  - **Sessions with Records** - Displays completed sessions that have an archive.
  - **Future Sessions** - Displays sessions that are scheduled to take place in the future.
3. Click the **Go** button. Blackboard should now display just the sessions you requested.

## Searching for Sessions

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Problems and questions  
get thinking going.

1. From inside your Blackboard coursesite, locate the **Course Tools** section and click on the **Collaboration** link.
2. Select a **search by option** from the drop-down menu:
  - **Session Name**
  - **Start Date**
  - **End Date**
3. Enter the search text in the text field and click the **Search** button.
4. Blackboard will display only those sessions that match your search criteria.

## Join a Collaborative Session

1. From inside your Blackboard coursesite, locate the **Course Tools** section and click on the **Collaboration** link.
2. Click the **session name** link you want to enter.
3. Now will get either one or two pop-up windows, when you get these windows select **Run** or **Trust**.
4. Now the session will appear in a new browser window.
5. **Note:** Do not click on the OK button on the **Launching Chat Tool** screen for this will close out your chat session.

## Inside the Lightweight Chat

Inside a Lightweight Chat session, students interact with each other via a text-based chat.

### Familiarize Yourself with the Menu Bar

- **View** - Allows for the customization of the chat display.
  - Select **Show in-line** to view private messages within the chat area.
  - Select **Show in separate frame** to view private messages in a separate window
- **Controls** - Allows the moderator to change the session mode and end the session.
- **Clear** - Allows the moderator to clear either local displays or displays for all users.
- **End** - Ends the current session.

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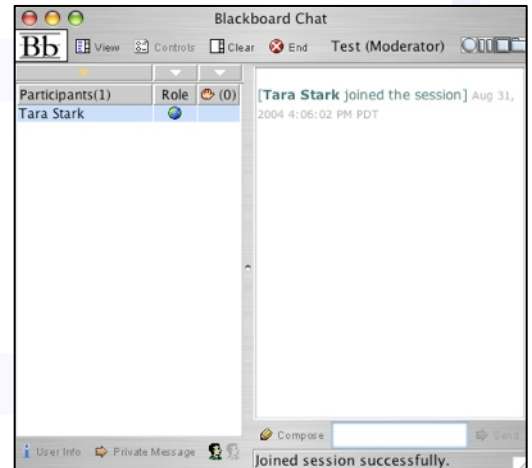
"Eighty percent of  
success is showing up."  
-Woody Allen

**To enter a message for the class to read:**

1. Click in the **Compose** field, toward the bottom right-hand side of the screen.
2. Type your message and click the **Send** button (or you can press your enter/return keyboard button). The message will appear in the chat area. **NOTE:** There is a 1000 character limit for chat messages.

**To send a private message to a user:**

1. Click once on a **Username** in the **Participant list** to select that student.
2. Click the **Private Message** button located at the bottom left-hand portion of the window.
3. Type your message and click the **Send** button.



Virtual Classroom and Chat sessions can be recorded. Recording can be started and stopped, as well as paused and un-paused by the instructor during the session. A session can have more than one recording. If the instructor selects **End** to stop a session, the recorder will automatically stop recording the session.

**To record a chat**, locate the record controls in the upper right-hand corner of the chat window.

- Click **Start**, the first button, to begin recording a session. When prompted, enter a **name** for the recording and click **Ok**.
- Click **Pause**, the second button, to pause a recording once it has started. Click this button again to **Un-pause** the recording and begin recording again. Pause and un-pause will be marked and time stamped in the recording.
- Click **Stop**, the third button, to stop recording the session. When **Stop** is selected the recording is completed and a stop marker and time/date stamp will be included at the end of the recording.
- Click **Bookmark**, the last button that looks like a file folder, to insert a bookmark anywhere in the recording of the session.



## Accessing the Session Recordings

1. From inside your Blackboard coursesite, locate the **Course Tools** section and click on the **Collaboration** link.
2. Click the **Recordings** button next to the session you want to view.
3. From the **Session Recordings** page, instructors can read, manage and remove listed recordings.

**To read the Session Recording:**

1. Click on the **name** of the recording you want to read.
2. When you are finished viewing the recording, click the **Ok** button.

The **Manage Recording** option gives instructors the ability to rename the archive and/or hide it from student view. **To Modify the Session Archives:**

1. Click the **Manage** button next to the session you want to modify.
2. Change the **session information** as desired and click the Submit button.
3. Click the **Ok** button to return to the **Session Archives** page.



**To Remove the Session Recording:** **NOTE:** This action is irreversible.

1. Click the **Remove** button next to the session you want to delete.
2. Click the **Delete** button. The recording you just removed should be gone.

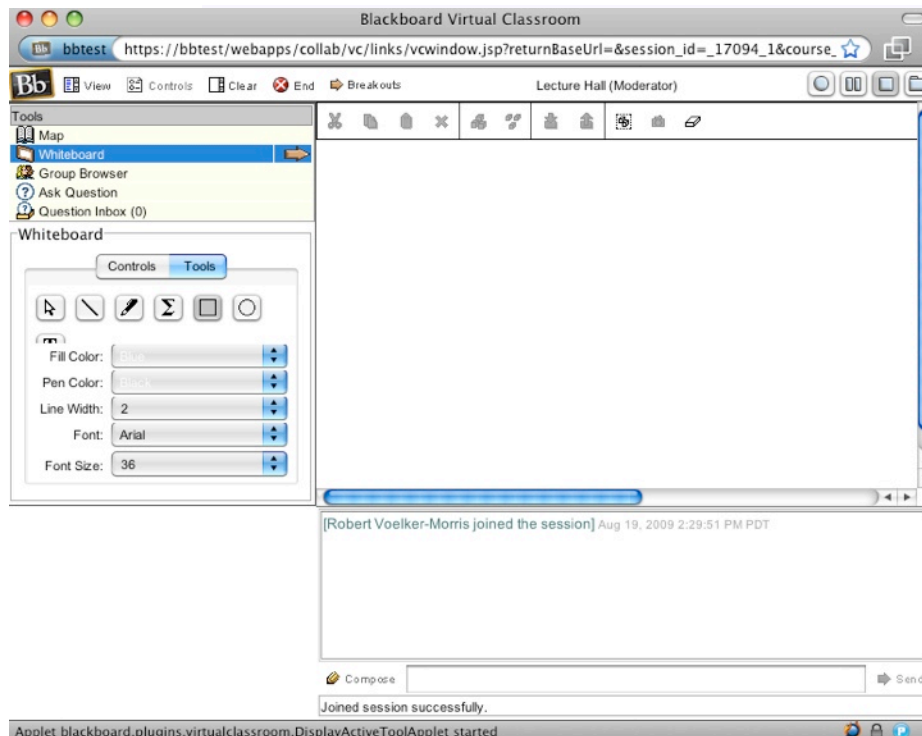
"The real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing in the right place but to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment."

-Dorothy Nevill

## Inside the Virtual Lecture Hall/Classroom

Inside the Virtual Lecture Hall/Classroom, students can ask questions, draw on the whiteboard, and participate in breakout sessions. The Session Administrator establishes which tools in the Virtual Classroom students can access. There are many features to this application and for more detailed information about using the Virtual Classroom, contact:

- The Center for Media and Educational Technologies Consulting (346-1942), or
- The Teaching Effectiveness Program (346-2177)



## Technology Troubles?

### Java Plug-in

The Java 2 Run Time Environment 1.3.1\_04 or higher is required to use the Collaboration Tools. The plug-in may be downloaded from the page that appears when a user joins a Collaboration Session, or may be found at <http://java.sun.com/products/plugin/index.jsp>. Take care to uninstall any existing Java plug-ins before installing a new version.

### Macintosh and the Collaboration Tool

Macintosh users running OS X and Netscape should run Netscape 7. When opening the Collaboration Tool, Netscape may put the tool in the background. If this happens, check under the Window menu for the Collaboration Tool. Netscape 6.2 does not work well with the Collaboration Tool and should be replaced with Netscape 7. For those users that wish to use Safari, be aware that Pop-Up Window Blocking must be disabled.

Macintosh users running OS 8 or OS 9 must use the Accessible version of the Collaboration Tool. See below for more information on running the Accessible Collaboration Tool.

### Accessible Collaboration Tool

An accessible version of the Collaboration Tool is available. Users running Macintosh Operating System 8 or 9 should also use this version.

A link to this version appears when Join is selected on the Collaboration Sessions page. This link will open the Accessible version of the Collaboration Tool. Links to items that appear in the Virtual Classroom, such as items in the Course Map and Group Browser, will appear in this version. Documents created on the Whiteboard may be viewed if the Session Admin takes a snapshot. A link will be created to the snapshot for users to view.

The sound of a door opening or closing will be audible to all participants when a user enters or leaves a session through the accessible version.



## About Our Organization...

The University of Oregon supports the teaching endeavors of its faculty and graduate students through the Teaching Effectiveness Program (TEP), a division of the University Teaching and Learning Center.

The Teaching Effectiveness Program offers a variety of activities and services to engage the academic community in viewing, assessing, and improving undergraduate instruction. TEP services are free to faculty members, graduate teaching fellows (GTFs), and university departments.

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