



Collaborative Tools

What are they?

A collaborative tool is one that allows people to work together by sharing information dynamically in a way that boosts performance and productivity. There are many free collaborative tools on the Internet that are easily integrated into coursework, allowing students to build knowledge within their discipline. Some you might have heard of include: Google Docs, Wikis, and Voice Threads. There are collaborative tools that would be appropriate for use in any course of study.

Why are they Significant?

The most effective way to learn new material is by engaging with it, talking and writing about it. Web-based collaborative tools allow students to do this using simple structures and an easy-to-use format.

It is easy to lose track of the most current document when files are being e-mailed around the department. Some faculty are using Google Docs to organize documents and store them in a place easily accessible for all members of the department. Implementing a wiki into their course helped two members of HSSM facilitate the peer-review process seamlessly. All students were able to edit the website and access was restricted to those participating in the course.

Pros...

- Giving students an opportunity to build knowledge in an authentic way prepares them to make positive contributions in the workplace.
- Using collaborative tools, students are able to interact with each other in a constructive and organized way. Clearly outline goals, expectations, and etiquette for online interactions to prevent any misuse.

Cons...

- There are so many collaborative tools to choose from, clearly identify your goals and objectives before picking the tool to implement.
- Most web-based collaborative tools are free and sometimes the features are limited, if one doesn't do what you're looking for try utilizing a different one. For example, there are at least 5 good wiki tools, each with different features sets.

How to Use them...

Implement a collaborative tool in one of your courses to start, get comfortable with it before adding additional ones or expanding use to multiple courses. They're easy to set up, most are free but require an id and password. Here is a list of the most popular collaborative tools and how they could be utilized with your courses:

Google Docs Upload a file (text, spreadsheet, or presentation) and grant access to others who can then edit. Great for developing group projects.

Wikis Essentially a website that can be edited by many people. You set up the site and invite users (students) to participate at different levels (author, reader, administrator, etc). Wikis are great for building course content and can be public or private.

Voice Thread Great for group projects, students upload a Power Point presentation or set of images and then record audio or text "comments", even use the pen to highlight something important. Others in the class can also add comments.

Blogs A web-log or Blog is a journal that lives on the Internet. Posts are organized with the most recent at the top and people can add comments to any post.

Who used it...

Harold Kollmeier Blogs and e-Portfolios

Patricia B. Kendall Building student project websites.

Chris Gleason/Beth Anne Cooke-Cornell Writing Online - Creating Webzines

For further reading...

This article from **Campus Technology** profiles faculty who have successfully implemented wikis into their courses.
<http://campustechnology.com/articles/60298/>

"**Minds on Fire**", by John Seely Brown is an article featured in Educause Review that discusses the importance of collaboration for learning.
<http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ERM0811.pdf>

Google Docs Check out the WIT partner page at:
<http://partnerpage.google.com/wit.edu>