Life Beyond Blackboard Collaborate Ultra

Published 6/23/2021 by Ashley Ribbel

by Alex Venis, the Teaching & Learning Centre

in the June 2021 issue

In September 2021, Blackboard Collaborate Ultra will be leaving. That means that faculty who currently use Blackboard Collaborate Ultra will need to transition to another web-conferencing platform. Seneca has a few options out there: BigBlueButton, Microsoft Teams, Webex, and Zoom. While they are all equally capable to replace Blackboard Collaborate Ultra, there are a few general differences between them. Below is a quick summary of each, so that you can best determine which tool would work best for you.

BigBlueButton
BigBlueButton is the closest thing to Blackboard Collaborate Ultra. Its user-interface is simple, and students aren't required to activate an account anywhere. If you were frustrated with Blackboard Collaborate Ultra's lack of features, then BigBlueButton probably isn't right for you. It has similar limitations. On the other hand, if you prize simplicity, and found Blackboard Collaborate Ultra to meet all your needs, consider using BigBlueButton.

Microsoft Teams
Microsoft Teams is a different beast altogether. At its heart, it is an office collaboration tool. This means that in addition to allowing virtual meetings, it also allows asynchronous chat, group work, file sharing, and many more collaborative functions. Use this if you'd like to change your learning environment more generally. With so many features, it has a steeper learning curve, so be prepared for a longer period of growing pains as you and your students orient yourselves to the program. The meeting function is a little lackluster, especially compared to Zoom. Some faculty have chosen to use a combination of two programs: Microsoft Teams for collaboration + Zoom for meetings. This works well but has the perennial danger of overloading students and faculty with too many tools. Reflect on your students' skills, education level, and program to determine whether this is the right move for you.

Webex
Webex has been around for a long time at Seneca and is a favourite of the administration to

host meetings, company-wide webinars, and various workshops. However, ITS has reported numerous challenges with integrating it into Learn@Seneca. If you are extremely comfortable with Webex, and do not want to use another web-conferencing platform, you might consider it, being aware that there may be complications on the IT side. If you are platform agnostic, Webex is probably not the one you want to dive into.

Zoom

Zoom is a feature-full web-conferencing tool. While it is integrated with Learn@Seneca, students still need to activate their account from Zoom's website and will need to download the application onto their computer. With respect to features, Zoom has all the features one might want: automatic captioning, creating advanced polls and breakout rooms, screen and audio sharing, among many other controls. If you're comfortable with learning new tools and want as many features as possible at your disposal, give Zoom a shot.

The Bottom Line

Generally, to determine which tool is best for you, you should reflect on what you like about Blackboard Collaborate Ultra, what you don't like about it, how you want to use a virtual conferencing tool in your class, and what your own personal technological skills are. Having an honest reflection with yourself about these questions can help you (and the Teaching & Learning Centre Team) determine which tool is right for you.

The Teaching & Learning Centre team has created a quiz that can help you narrow down which platform you want to use. Try it out here.

The Teaching & Learning Centre has a new webpage to help you: Web conferencing Platforms at Seneca. On this webpage, we describe each web-conferencing platform and offer a chart that compares all four across various functionalities. From there, we link to pages that will support you as you teach with and learn more about each platform:

- Teaching with BigBlueButton
- Teaching with Microsoft Teams
- Teaching with Webex
- Teaching with Zoom

View the June 2021 issue of the Academic Newsletter.

June 2021 issue

tags : educational-technology, educational-technology-tools, june-2021, learn@seneca, teaching-and-learning, the-teaching-and-learning-centre