

Synchronous Teaching Tools: Collaborate

Accessing the Collaborate Tool

To access Collaborate, log into Blackboard and access your course. The course menu panel is on the left side of the page. It should say your course name at the top, with links below. If you do not see it, look for a slim blue bar on the very edge of the screen. Click that and it will pop the menu out, as sometimes it can be collapsed.

Your campus may have added the Blackboard Collaborate link to the course menu. You can click on that link to go directly to the tool; if not, you will always be able to find it in the control panel. The control panel is the lower half of the menu panel on the left, which only instructors have access to; students cannot see these options in their course menu.

Click on Course Tools, and it will expand a sub menu. Click on Blackboard Collaborate Ultra. Ultra is the most updated version of the tool; some of you may see two listed, please only use the Collaborate Ultra tool. Clicking the link will take you into the tool menu.

We can add it to our course menu for ease of access by hovering the mouse over the plus symbol so the menu drops down; click on Tool Link. There are three steps: give it a name, select the correct tool from the dropdown menu, check the box to make it available to users (so students can access it), and then click Save. If you leave the box unchecked, it will only be accessible by you.

Blackboard Help article: <https://help.blackboard.com/Collaborate/Ultra/Moderator>

Creating a Session

To create a session, click the large grey Create Session button. This will pop up a session settings menu on the right side of the page.

Event Details

Give it a name, and then you can set the details.

- Start date and time
- End date and time

No end (open session) means that you will be able to continuously go into the same session. This can be helpful if you want to be able to use a single session link for all Collaborate sessions you schedule with your students. Setting availability dates helps dictate when students can enter the session.

If you want to schedule sessions that occur during your usual class times, you can set the start and end date/time and then check the Repeat session box. If you set it to repeat weekly, you can select the individual days of the week you would like it to recur.

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Session Settings

Once you are done with the event details, click on the Session Settings header to expand further options. The default attendee role is automatically set to Participant, meaning anyone aside from you, the moderator, that joins the session will be a participant - they cannot make changes to the session or share content without your permission.

If you plan to record your session and want to allow students to download the recording, make sure to check the box under Recording. Once a session has concluded, all attendees can find the recordings listed in the Recordings tab on the main tool page. If you enabled downloads, they can download the recordings there.

An important consideration when creating your session is deciding how you want to interact with students; this can change depending on the express purpose of your individual sessions. If you have a session set up for “office hours”, you may want to ensure that everyone’s microphone is enabled when they enter so that you can speak with them freely. If you are delivering a lecture, you may want to ensure they are muted automatically; you can then direct them to either use the Raise Your Hand feature and you can unmute them, or type their questions into the chat so that you can address them at your discretion.

This can be facilitated in the “Participants can” section, where you can set what they are able to share. Unchecking the box for audio or video will remove the opportunity for them to speak or use their camera.

Blackboard Help article:

https://help.blackboard.com/Collaborate/Ultra/Moderator/Schedule_Sessions

Join a Session

Click on the name of a recurring session to view all occurrences. Click on individual sessions to view the start and end dates and times or to Join Session.

When someone joins your session, you will see a pop up notification in the top right corner with their name.

To leave a session, you click on the hamburger symbol in the upper left corner to access the Session panel; at the bottom of this panel you will see the option to Leave the session.

Enabling Audio & Video

When creating a session, you have the option to enable call-to-join; if this option has been selected, attendees may call in to join the audio. This can be helpful for students who do not have access to a device with a built in microphone, or who only have a smartphone to access the internet.

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As Collaborate is a browser based application, attendees must grant their browser access to their microphone and camera if they wish to share audio and video in a session. When an attendee first joins a session, these requests will pop up before they can join.

If you encounter an issue with audio or video, it is either browser or device based; ensure that you and your attendees have properly granted access through the browser, and that the devices you are using are working correctly. This can be tested by trying a different program that uses the microphone or video as well.

Per Blackboard, “some users experienced an issue where they were unable to dial-in to join their session. This was due to the increased demand exceeding our current capacity for dial-in. We are working with our telephony provider to evaluate options to increase our dial-in capacity. In the short-term, users who wish to join their session via a mobile device should use their mobile browser, with audio and video. Collaborate is optimized for the Safari browser on iOS devices and the Chrome browser on Android devices.”

If you have an issue with your devices, you will need to contact your campus help desk or the company that produced the devices. If the issue is with your browser or Collaborate settings, please reach out to the Open SUNY HelpDesk.

Blackboard Help article:

https://help.blackboard.com/Collaborate/Ultra/Moderator/Moderate_Sessions/Audio_and_Video

Session Tools

You can access a variety of session tools and additional settings through the Collaborate panel, which is a small purple button in the bottom right corner of your screen when collapsed. Clicking on the double arrow << will expand the panel. You have a variety of options for interacting with the session itself as well as the participants in your session.

Raise Your Hand

There is a button to allow participants to raise their hand, letting you know that someone would like the opportunity to speak. You can make use of this function especially if you have everyone muted, so that you can unmute individual students. A notification will pop up in the upper right corner of the session screen, which won't disappear until you click the Lower Hand link on the notification.

Chat

Chat enables students to communicate with each other and the moderator in an unobtrusive way; students can ask their questions as you are giving your lecture, so you can go back and answer their questions when you have concluded your thought, or a TA can respond to student questions as you continue.

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You can turn the chat feature on or off by opening the Collaborate panel and selecting My Settings > Session Settings > Post chat messages.

Collaborate uses notifications to let you know when there are new chat comments, with a push notification appearing in the top right corner of the session window with the name and comment.

Typically in the chat window you will be able to see when someone is typing; in an effort to relieve some of the system stress on the tool due to the increased traffic, Blackboard has temporarily disabled that feature, as it is merely cosmetic and not integral to the functionality of the tool itself.

When you record a session, the chat history for the general chat channel will be recorded; private messages will not be recorded.

Blackboard Help article:

https://help.blackboard.com/Collaborate/Ultra/Moderator/Moderate_Sessions/Chat

Participants Panel

If you are in a different part of the Collaborate panel, you will always be able to see the number of attendees currently in the session. The number superimposes over the people icon in the menu along the bottom. You can view a full listing of all attendees by opening the Collaborate panel and selecting Attendees.

The attendees are grouped by role, breaking out Moderators and Presenters from Participants. If students are accessing through your Blackboard course, their names will appear. If you choose to provide the guest link instead, it will not automatically fill out their name; they will have to enter it in, so make sure to give guidance on how you want them to format their names.

You will also be able to see if they have their audio connection enabled, if they are muted or their microphone is active, and if they have their hand “raised”. To access options for a particular attendee, click on the ellipsis in the circle. From this menu, you can send a private message, change their role, make them a captioner, or kick them from the session.

Blackboard Help article:

https://help.blackboard.com/Collaborate/Ultra/Moderator/Moderate_Sessions/Manage_Attendees

Closed Captioning

The Ultra version of Collaborate includes a live closed captioning function, although it is a manual process and does not use any AI software. As a moderator, you would need to designate another attendee a captioner, someone who is able to type in the captions real time. Captions entered in this way are included in any recordings.

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Again, to enable an attendee as a captioner, navigate to the Collaborate panel > Attendees > ellipsis in a circle > Make captioner.

Blackboard Help article:

https://help.blackboard.com/Collaborate/Ultra/Moderator/Moderate_Sessions/Live_Closed_Captioning

Sharing Content

As a moderator or presenter, you are able to share content with the other attendees in the session. To do so, click on the Share Content icon in the Collaborate panel menu, shaped like a rectangle with an arrow.

- Whiteboard (allows you to draw on the screen)
- Share a single application or full screen
- Share files from your computer
- Create a poll

Blackboard Help article:

https://help.blackboard.com/Collaborate/Ultra/Moderator/Moderate_Sessions/Share_Content

Recording Sessions

Collaborate Ultra has built-in functionality to record your sessions, allowing students to go back and reference past lectures or catch up on anything they've missed. Recorded sessions are saved in an .MP4 video format. You can turn on and pause recording at any time during the session. Recordings have a 500 GB limit in Ultra, and have no limit on the number of views allowed.

Start Recording

Open the session menu by clicking on the hamburger symbol in the upper left corner of the session screen. In this expanded menu, you will see the first option is to Start Recording. A red dot appears in the camera icon while recording is in process. When you are ready to stop the recording, you can do so by clicking the Stop Recording option in the same menu.

View & Download Recordings

Returning to the tool page in your course, you can find the recordings in the Recordings tab of the menu; just click on the hamburger symbol. It will break out a listing of all recordings; you can play the recording by clicking on the name of the session and then clicking Watch now, or by accessing the recording menu.

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Click on the ellipsis in a circle and you can view the different options; you can edit the name, delete, download, and share out a link of the recording. You can also go back in and add captions if you did not have someone available for live captioning.

Blackboard Help article:

https://help.blackboard.com/Collaborate/Ultra/Moderator/Moderate_Sessions/Recordings

Session Attendance Report

There are session reports available to Collaborate moderators to provide instructors with an overview of student participation in their session. This can provide insights such as who was present, when they joined and left the session, and how long attendees were present on average. This will capture all attendees, regardless of whether they joined by mobile app or browser.

Session reports are generated each time a session is used and closed; so, if you set up a single recurring session you will be able to get a new report for each occurrence.

Once you have concluded a session, navigate to the Collaborate Ultra tool. You can select “All Previous Sessions” in the filter to narrow down the concluded sessions. Click on the ellipsis in the circle and select View Reports.

Please note that despite the name, these “Attendance” session reports do not directly relate to grades in Blackboard, Grade Center columns, nor the normal Attendance tool. This is merely a snapshot to help you understand participation within your sessions, which you can then extrapolate for grading if you so choose.

You can download the report by clicking on Export Report, which will export as a .csv file; you can open this type of file in Microsoft Excel. If you would prefer to avoid using Excel you can click the word Printable to get a printable version.

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As part of preparation for increased use of this tool, the session reports have been temporarily disabled; although you cannot generate a report at this time, the information is still being recorded and so once it is re-enabled you will be able to access those reports.

Blackboard Help article: <https://help.blackboard.com/Collaborate/Ultra/Moderator/Reports>

Information for Attendees/Participants

Here are some helpful links to provide to your students to help them navigate using the Collaborate tool as participants:

- https://help.blackboard.com/Collaborate/Ultra/Moderator/Join_Sessions/Collaborate_Teleconference
- https://help.blackboard.com/Collaborate/Ultra/Moderator/Join_Sessions

Troubleshooting

Common troubleshooting steps include checking for browser compatibility and internet connection. Most issues are going to be related to the user's browser, device, connection, or the volume of users currently utilizing the Collaborate tool at a campus.

If you or your students encounter issues, check the following troubleshooting FAQ:

- <https://help.blackboard.com/Collaborate/Ultra/Moderator/Support>
- https://help.blackboard.com/Collaborate/Ultra/Moderator/Get_Started/Browser_Support

Recordings from the CPD Remote Teaching Clinic webinars can be found here:

<https://sunycpd.eventsair.com/QuickEventWebsitePortal/suny-remote-teaching-clinic/site/ExtraContent/ContentPage?page=3>