

## Rationale for Recommending Collaborate for Synchronous Delivery

The Remote Teaching and Learning Task Force needs assessment revealed a strong interest in limiting the number of platforms used for remote course delivery. Limiting the number of platforms will provide a consistent learning experience for students and make it easier to support faculty and students.

StFX already uses Moodle, so it is a natural recommendation for asynchronous course delivery. While some faculty members or courses may have unique needs that require use of another platform, **Blackboard Collaborate has a number of features that make it a strong contender to be recommended as the primary platform for synchronous classes.**

Collaborate was built with education in mind:

- pedagogically useful features are given priority in development
- features are designed for ease of use by instructors and students
- features are customized for online classrooms as opposed to business meetings; for instance, breakout groups are not housed in separate tabs, it is easy to circulate between groups, and information can be transferred to and from rooms
- features are optimized for promoting active learning in online classes
- wide range of features are provided to make learning interactive and engaging, and to mimic aspects of the face-to-face classroom (e.g., breakouts, polling, timer, whiteboard, chat, transferring information to and from breakouts, streaming videos, presentation area for uploaded PowerPoints, etc.)
- accessibility features are available and continue to be enhanced
- PowerPoints can be uploaded ahead of time to save bandwidth and to reserve screen sharing for other pedagogical purposes, as required
- chat area and attendees panel (including class list, raised hands, feedback icons, mic status, etc.) can be viewed at the same time as the presentation area (e.g., slides, whiteboards) so instructors can “read” the class while teaching

StFX has available on-campus expertise and support:

- Faculty/teaching staff in the Faculty of Education have been using Collaborate for many years and are able and willing to share their knowledge through PD sessions and coaching/mentorship.
- CDE has a wealth of experience and knowledge in best practices for setting up, using, and supporting Collaborate.
- CDE is available to collaborate/ mentor staff in IT Services to ensure they develop capacity to support faculty/teaching staff and students.
- Collaborate enables tech support personnel to provide technical support for multiple classes from “behind the scenes” in a way that other platforms do not.
- StFX already has a Collaborate license.

Collaborate integrates seamlessly with Moodle:

- Students and faculty/teaching staff enter the online classroom directly from Moodle, and are automatically assigned the correct name and privileges.
- There is no need to create, distribute, and keep track of different links for each online class; in fact, online classes can be held at any time using the same link.
- Guest link is available for someone from outside the class to give a presentation.
- Sessions cannot be “bombed” easily because of Moodle-controlled entry.
- Recordings (if used) are stored centrally (i.e., repository) and are made available directly through Moodle.
- Recordings (if used) can be blocked from being downloaded, and cannot be accessed by third parties.