DMU Replay title: **Collaborate for distance learning**

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If you’ve used Skype or similar tools before you’ll already have some idea of what a virtual classroom is like.

*"I've just done the Collaborate environment and I am just saying how exciting the next bit is going to be"*

[Laughter] *"Right I am going to begin by typing in myDMU"*

But virtual classroom packages – such as Blackboard Collaborate – also offer additional features useful for teaching and which you may not have encountered before.

OF course, because it’s only an online or virtual tool, it will never be quite the same as having your students in a real classroom; but it can still be a really useful tool for teaching students and for getting them to engage with each other and with you.

Virtual classroom applications such as Blackboard Collaborate are sometimes referred to as ‘online or virtual synchronous classroom’ applications.

Synchronous because participants are able to interact in real time in contrast to, say, Blackboard Discussion Board which is asynchronous; because in Discussion Board, participants are not usually interacting with it or each other at the same time or simultaneously.

Virtual classroom applications are sometimes also described as ‘webinar’ applications: ‘webinar’ is simply short for web-based seminar.

Blackboard Collaborate is probably the most commonly used virtual classroom application at DMU. Though other comparable applications are available, Collaborate has two key advantages:

Because the university has already purchased the licences for it, neither you nor your students need to apply for any new licences.

Collaborate has been integrated into Blackboard.

As with many other virtual classroom applications, tutors and participants can share with the class PowerPoint presentations, videos, web pages and other multimedia.

Participants can interact with and write on the shared screen or slides using whiteboard tools.

Classes can break up into smaller groups, to allow private group discussions.

You can also record your Collaborate sessions and make these recordings available to students.

To use Blackboard Collaborate, the only equipment you or your students need is a computer and an internet connection. But it is also desirable to have a combined microphone and headset and you may use a webcam if you wish.

Collaborate requires a decent internet connection. It is like to run more smoothly on new machines and works particularly well on Windows PCs and laptops; although in theory students should be able to use Collaborate on a Mac, iPads, tablets or smartphones.

Note that Collaborate currently requires participants to download and install a ‘Launcher’ app the first time they use it; and students – using some devices – may occasionally encounter a problem at this stage.

But checking Blackboard’s system requirements first should normally mitigate most installation problems.

The DLD Team can also help alleviate these problems by providing induction sessions with students to ensure they are set-up and ready to go for when the teaching starts.

Equitable alternatives also need to be considered to comply with the UDL policy of the University.

Collaborate Ultra is a more recent version of Collaborate that is purely browser based so it doesn't need to use a Launcher at all. It also integrates with Blackboard and will make a favourable alternative in the future.

*"Okay, so I am just going to stop sharing and go back to the whiteboard"*

*"I think we have covered quite a lot of things there"*

*"I'm gonna stop the recording here and then if anyone has got any questions afterwards ..."*