

Conducting Office Hours Online

Introduction

If your course is fully online, you likely require some method to conduct office hours successfully, in addition to being available by email or phone. There are a number of options. This document will cover free tools provided either by Blackboard or other sources.

Before selecting a solution, consider the needs for your course and students. Will you need audio or just text chat? Is it necessary to have some way to show Web sites and/or a computer screen?

The options below offer a variety of features for consideration. Your ideal solution might include a combination of these tools. Don't forget to make your selected tools available to students.

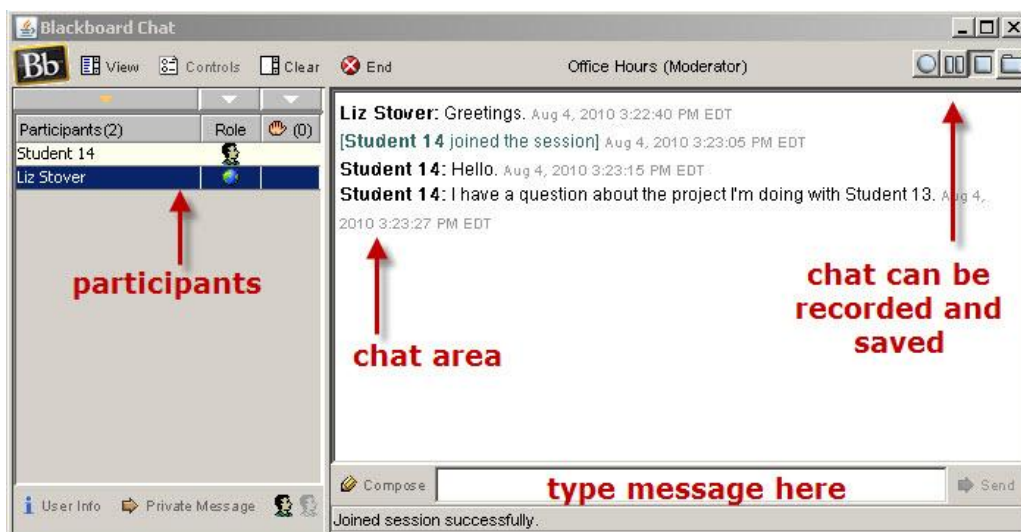
This document covers:

- **Chat tool** (Blackboard tool)
- **Virtual Classroom** (Blackboard tool)
- **Vyew** (third party tool)
- **Bb Collaborate vRoom** (third party tool)
- **WiziQ** (third party tool)

Chat (Blackboard tool)

Blackboard has a built-in text chat tool which can be used for office hours or other communication needs. Bb Chat includes text chat (no audio or video), whiteboard, web tour, and chat recording .

Access this tool under **Collaboration** in the **Course Tools** section of the **Control Panel**.



Virtual Classroom (Blackboard tool)

Similar to chat and accessed through the same area (Collaboration under Course Tools in the Control Panel), this tool also provides a whiteboard area and web pages can be displayed. This tool also can be recorded. This tool does have text chat, but no audio or video option.

Access this tool under **Collaboration** in the **Course Tools** section of the **Control Panel**.

The screenshot displays the Blackboard Virtual Classroom interface. On the left, a 'Tools' sidebar lists 'Map', 'Whiteboard', 'Group Browser', 'Ask Question', and 'Question Inbox (0)'. Below this is a 'Group Browser' section with a red arrow pointing to the 'web address displays page' text and another pointing to the 'can be used as whiteboard' text. The main content area shows the Cape Fear Community College website with navigation links like 'Apply Now', 'Future Students', 'Business and', 'Schedule of Classes', 'Current Students', and 'Employees'. Below the website is a 'News and Events' section with a red arrow pointing to the 'chat' text. At the bottom, a chat window shows a participant list with 'Liz Stover' and a chat log with messages like '[Liz Stover joined the session] Aug 4, 2010 3:30:09 PM EDT' and '[Liz Stover displayed the following URL: http://cfcc.edu] Aug 4, 2010 3:31:12 PM EDT'. A 'Compose' field and 'Send' button are also visible.

Third Party Tools

While the Chat and Virtual Classroom tools are built into Blackboard, there are some external options that you might consider. The following three tools include audio, video, whiteboard, and screen capture options. Other features are available, depending on the tool and version selected. For the purpose of this document, only features in the free versions of each are described.

VYEW (external application - up to 10 users)

This web-based conferencing application offers audio, video, whiteboard, screen sharing, text and voice notes, and file sharing. This is another external tool that is not built into Blackboard.

Up to 10 users can access the conference room with the free version.

The instructor creates an account and is provided with a link for students to access VYEW. Students are not required to sign up for an account.

[View a demo or sign up for a VYEW meeting room.](#)



The screenshot displays the VYEW web conferencing interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with icons for MENU, INVITE, HOME, ROOM, SCREEN SHARE, and HELP. A banner for Equifax is visible on the right side of the top bar. Below the navigation bar, the interface shows a central video player displaying a woman in a pharmacy setting. To the right of the video player, a list of features is displayed: Screen Sharing, Audio, Webcam, Video Sharing, Web Tours, Whiteboard, Interactive Buttons, Text Chat, and Voice or Text Notes. On the right side of the interface, there is a sidebar with a webcam feed, a user list showing '1 User Online' (Istover), and a chat area with a message: '(4:30 PM) me: This is the chat area.' The bottom of the interface shows a status bar with '1/1' and navigation arrows.

Collaborate vRoom (external application – up to 3 users)

Bb Collaborate (old Elluminate) is a popular eLearning web conferencing tool that provides 2-way audio, video, text, whiteboard, polling, web tours, and much more. This tool is *not* built into Blackboard. While the standard version costs money, there is a free version that allows up to three users at a time.

As the instructor, you will sign up for a free account and then provide a web address for students to access your room. Students are not required to sign up for an account.

Since this tool is limited to three participants, it will be good for private meetings/ office hours/ tutoring. This application has many great features beyond what is available in the chat and virtual classroom tools. For instance, you can give students moderator privilege so you can watch them work in an application. There is a file exchange and media player to further enhance your interactions. If you are meeting with just one or two students, this might be a good option.

You can create an account at LearnCentral.org. Don't forget to have students check their computers before entering a session by going to the [Collaborate Support](#) page.

whiteboard, web tour, application sharing, or slideshow

WizIQ (external application – unlimited number of users)

WizIQ is another web conferencing tool similar to Elluminate (third-party tool, not included in Blackboard). This application has a free version with no limits on attendees.

With the free version, students must sign up for an account to login to your session, but this is free.

The features include 2-way audio, text chat, video, screen sharing (with free add-on download) whiteboard tools, video sharing and more. This application might be a little more difficult to use than Elluminate for the first session, but it generally works smoothly.

To create your free account, visit WizIQ.com.

