

# Online Conferencing Tools for Outreach & Instruction

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## what is this?

As liaison to The University of Alabama's Early College program, I utilized Blackboard IM, an "instant collaboration system" designed for academic use, to offer library instruction to high school students earning college credit by taking online classes. In spring 2012, I worked with the University's College of Continuing Studies to hold Blackboard IM "office hours" for distance learning students enrolled in English 102 courses.

Blackboard IM offers such features as audio/video conferencing, instant messaging, application and whiteboard sharing, and queued chat. It is an excellent resource for librarians to whom it is available; however, not every institution offers (or can afford to offer) access to the tool.

This poster offers an analysis of both proprietary services (such as Blackboard IM) and no- and low-cost alternatives, such as Google+ Hangouts, Skype, and join.me. Best practices and lessons learned regarding library use of online conferencing tools will also be shared. A laptop and iPad will be made available to those interested in trying out the services, and poster session attendees will leave with tools to help them apply these emerging technologies in academic library outreach and instruction.

## (re)sources

scan QR code



read online

[bit.ly/msuleets12poster](http://bit.ly/msuleets12poster)

## selected tools

### Adobe Connect

<http://www.adobe.com/products/adobeconnect.html>

- proprietary
- no software download for participants
- screen sharing
- text chat

- video conferencing
- audio conferencing
- VoIP
- file uploads
- mobile access

### Blackboard Collaborate

<http://www.blackboard.com/Platforms/Collaborate/overview.aspx>

- proprietary
- software download required
- screen sharing
- text chat

- video conferencing
- audio conferencing
- VoIP
- file uploads
- mobile access "later this summer"

### WebEx

<http://www.webex.com/>

- proprietary
- no software download for participants
- screen sharing
- text chat

- video conferencing
- audio conferencing
- VoIP
- file uploads
- mobile access

### Big Marker

<http://www.bigmarker.com/>

- public conferences free; private \$9/mo. & up
- no software download
- screen sharing
- text chat

- video conferencing
- file uploads
- mobile access

### Google+ Hangouts

<http://www.google.com/+learnmore/hangouts/>

- up to 10 participants free
- requires plugin(s)
- screen sharing
- text chat

- video conferencing
- file uploads via Apps
- mobile access

### join.me

<https://join.me/>

- free (pro version available)
- software download required
- screen sharing
- text chat

- video conferencing
- audio conferencing
- VoIP
- file uploads
- mobile access (viewer)

### Skype

<http://www.skype.com>

- free (premium version available)
- software download required
- screen sharing
- text chat

- video conferencing
- audio conferencing
- VoIP
- file uploads
- mobile access

## best practices & lessons learned

### Experiment with different service models

- I worked with an instructor to schedule office hours around weeks in which assignments involving library research were due.
- At the 2012 Fifteenth Distance Library Services Conference, librarians shared how they're using web conferencing tools:
  - Using Adobe Connect to offer synchronous, interactive webcasts archived for later viewing
  - Holding office hours one night/week; students access the Adobe Connect room via a URL in a LibGuide for DE students
  - Using the Tungle.me free online scheduling tool to schedule Bb Collaborate research consultations
  - Using Doodle to schedule group Wimba sessions accessed via the LMS

### Offer multiple access points

- I asked the course instructor to include my Bb IM username in her syllabus so students could contact me outside of office hours.
- Other librarians distribute session links or information via DE student newsletters, LibGuides or the LMS.

### Team up to offer online instruction sessions

- Some librarians use a team teaching approach in which one librarian facilitates instruction while the other handles technical difficulties and monitors the chat box.
- One solo librarian uses a second monitor to view his webcasts from a participant's perspective.

### Be prepared to "fail"

- Possible solutions to address low participation: offer research consultations by appointment instead of open office hours. Advertise a session on a specific resource or topic, then open the floor for Q&A.

### ... or succeed

- Consider potential staffing and scalability issues of a successful service.

### Don't dismiss chat

- Users may have difficulty with or prefer not to use screen sharing, VoIP, and other advanced features. Be prepared to use text chat, use the mic to speak aloud to the user while they type back, or talk on the phone while using screen sharing.

### It's not just for distance students

- Authors of one article suggested web conferencing as response to space constraints.
- It's also applicable in blended environments and as a tool for embedded librarianship.

### Share session archives with participants

- Email chat logs to participants or post session archives in the LMS.
- Avoid posting student info, such as a recording in which a list of participants appears, on the open web.

### Incorporate assessment

- Provide users with opportunities to evaluate and give feedback.
- Mine data from chat logs and recordings.