UW-IT Campus Technology Research

Pilot Summary FY 2020-2021: Discussion Tools

Date: 4/26/22

Tool name: Harmonize (https://harmonize.42lines.net/)

Description:
Harmonize is a broadly applicable tool that offers discussion, Q&A, and 1:1 or group chat. The discussion component provides a visually engaging grid view as well as traditional list view. In addition to formatted text, images, and videos, posts can contain math formulas, non-executable code, and image and video annotation. Users can flag a post for instructor review and tag instructor(s) or classmates, and all uploaded videos (instructor and student) are auto-captioned. Posts can be generally viewable or anonymous. The Canvas integration allows for both ungraded and graded discussions. Harmonize also allows users to set up auto-grading for multiple participation milestones and view activity reports.

Pilot dates: Spring 2021, Summer 2021, Autumn 2021

Recruitment method(s): Canvas banner; targeted outreach to Foster School, UWB, Tri-Campus Digital Learning Alliance; word of mouth

Pilot participants: 43 instructors, 64 courses, approx. 3200 students

Data collection method(s): Quarterly surveys of students and instructors; usage analytics

User feedback (summary): Tool ratings on quarterly surveys varied greatly among both instructors and students. For many, Harmonize was an improvement over Canvas discussion; for many others, especially students, it wasn't enough of an improvement to warrant using an additional tool. (See quarterly survey reports for more information.)

	Instructors (N=18)	Students (N=181)
Overall assessment *(scale 1-4: poor, fair, good, great)*	2.75/4	2.6/4
Comparison to other discussion tools *(scale 1-3: less than, about the same, more than other tools; ratings aggregated across six statements)*	2.0/3	2.0/3
Ease of use *(scale 1-5: very difficult - very easy)*	2.8/5	3.4/5
Endorsement (would use again) *(scale 1-5: very unlikely - very likely)*	3.5/5	n/a

Support burden (during pilot): **Low**/Medium/High

Need for support was low among students during the pilot, higher among faculty (⅔ of faculty and ⅓ of student survey respondents in the summer and autumn 2021 pilots required support and were able to get it when they needed it).

While in-tool tips and tutorials and online support for Harmonize is good, documentation for the tool is primarily in the form of short videos and very brief introductory text; instructors cannot quickly scan written documentation to find answers to questions about how to set up specific functionality.

Accessibility review:

Documentation provided by vendor	**Yes**/No
AXDD usabilty review	Yes/**No**
UW-IT Accessible Technologies review	Yes/**No**

Vendor responsiveness: Low/**Medium**/High

Vendor responsiveness declined over the course of the pilot and with turnover in sales management and support staff.

Outstanding issues:

Instructors and students both reported bugs with the tool, particularly with image and video annotation, video playback, and with its use on mobile devices where some functions appeared not to work. Instructors also noted many, different things that they wanted to do with the tool but were unable to do, suggesting the following improvements:

- An ability to view all posts created by students for both ungraded and graded discussions
- Improved navigation to move forward/backward from every destination
- Ability to search for content across discussions and components (discussion, chat, Q&A)
- Better integration with Canvas grading (one instructor wanted the first milestone in Harmonize to appear as the due date in Canvas, rather than the final milestone)
- For Q&A, an ability to endorse posts with "good question" and "good answer" as in Piazza
- Ability to take a screenshot and paste the image to a textbox (currently have to save file locally, then upload)
- Ability to disable Harmonize during exams
- Ability to organize group "channels" (as in Slack)
- Ability to direct a post to a particular student group

Recommendation:

Central adoption is not recommended at this time.