

# Synchronous Collaboration Tool *Evaluation*

# Synchronous Evaluation: Purpose

- OIT/ITC was asked to review synchronous collaboration tools in Fall 2008 to provide the Facilities Fee Synchronous Learning Task Force with a recommendation
- Effort to provide data and input for project initiatives

# Synchronous Evaluation: Purpose

- Evaluation was particularly relevant given that the ITC's April 2008 faculty survey which revealed faculty were interested in tools which
  - Enable student groups to work together and
  - Bring guests/experts who are geographically elsewhere into class

# Products Selected

## ➤ Leaders in the field

- Elluminate Live (included in previous evaluations)
- Wimba Classroom (included in previous evaluations)
- Adobe Acrobat Connect Pro (formerly Macromedia Breeze)
- Saba Centra (existing tool)

# Invitations for Participation

- 28 faculty members invited to participate
- Representative from Center on Deafness
- Administrative team members

# Evaluation Process

- Participants were asked to make a 10-hour commitment to the project
  - Include participating in 1-hour, ITC-led demonstrations of each tool
  - Conduct identical teaching sessions using each tool
  - Compare features & functionality

# Categories

- Teaching and Learning features
- Accessibility
- Administration (including Blackboard integration)



# Teaching and Learning Features:

- The committee selected to evaluate teaching and learning features that are standard components of synchronous collaboration
- Most often used among distance education faculty who teach with the Saba Centra product

# Teaching and Learning Features:

- Two-way audio
- Text chat
- Presentation slides (ex: PowerPoint)
- Shared whiteboard
- Feedback/Polling
- Presence indicators
- Synchronous Web browsing
- Application sharing
- Presentation media (ex: video, audio)
- Break out rooms
- Web cam video
- Testing/quizzing
- Recording/playback of sessions

# Accessibility – Common Features

➤ The evaluated synchronous collaboration tools have several common accessibility features, including:

- Some form of support for closed captioning (or plug-in)
- Audio alerts
- Keyboard shortcuts
- Each product also allows for the sessions to be recorded, stored, and accessed at a later date

# Accessibility - Differences

- Video Support (multiple videos onscreen)
- Support for phone bridge
- Captioner may be promoted from within the classroom
- Text Chat included in classroom recordings
- Adjustable screen/window/background color

# Reviewing Accessibility Features for Deaf & Hard of Hearing Participants

- Video Component
  - Single or multiple videos onscreen?
  - Adjustable sizing for viewing?
  - Clarity of video for signing?
- Captioning component
  - Ability to utilize multiple programs (such as CART and Typewell/C-Print)
  - Does the user has ability to control color/font/size?
- Audio switching – automatic or controlled?

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# Reviewing Accessibility Features for Deaf & Hard of Hearing Participants

**Online Software Programs**

**Evaluation Analysis by Michelle Swaney**

**Updated 12-10-08**

**Accommodations, Access and Needs for Deaf & Hard of Hearing  
(D/HH) Participants**

**(Pro & Con Ratings = 1 – Excellent, 2 – Above Average, 3 –  
Average, 4 – Below Average, 5 – Poor)**

# Wimba Review – Fall, 2008 for UTK

Program Name	Pro's	Con's
<p><b>Wimba</b>  <b>RATING = LAST</b>            (*Do not recommend – captioning component and one video are not above the current product UT has)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 - Opening additional ports did not seem to be needed to view the video (most participants were able to clearly view the video). Participants connecting from firewalled connections didn't have problems receiving video.</li> <li>• 1 - Participants have the ability to change the quality of the video they are receiving (ie, if they have a lower bandwidth connection they can reduce the quality).</li> <li>• 1 - Ability for users/participants to connect via a long distance call (especially beneficial when working with individuals in rural areas – most only have dial-up connections at best).</li> <li>• 1 - Recording capability of full program (audio, video, and application sharing) – creates a fully accessible environment when D/HH participants attend recorded session.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 - Captioning component – size, font, and color (background and foreground) cannot be changed/increased – too small to be read, difficult on eyes.</li> <li>• 5 - Captioning component is not intuitive and very difficult for the captioner/writer (requires hitting the enter key to send captions for each set), requires additional work and is taxing. Real-time (verbatim) writers utilize steno machines and do not keep their hands on a regular keyboard.</li> <li>• 5 - Video component does not allow for multiple simultaneous videos (only one at a time).</li> <li>• 5 - Video is based on auto-switching or audio (who has the mic) if multiple individuals are allowed to share video. This creates a problem when needing to show video of both the interpreter and instructor/presenter.</li> <li>• 4 - Participants had multiple problems with audio and mics (Interpreters</li> </ul>

# Illuminate Live Review – Fall '08 for UTK

## Illuminate Live

**RATING = 1<sup>ST</sup>/2<sup>ND</sup> (TIED W/CENTRA)**

- 1 - Captioning component was easily accessed once Captionist/Writer was promoted to co-presenter status.
- 1 - Captioning component – font could be resized.
- 2 - Up to 6 multiple simultaneous video capability.
- 1 - Video quality is good especially for sign language.
- 1 - Ability for users/participants to connect via a long distance call (especially beneficial when working with individuals in rural areas – most only have dial-up connections at best).
- 1 - Recording capability of full program (audio, video, and application sharing) – creates a fully accessible environment when D/HH participants attend recorded session.
- 1 – Ability to have multiple captionists/writers in a session (this would be extremely helpful in a class that lasts more than one hour where a team is needed, the host nor the captionists would have to re-assign the ability to caption to another writer).
- 3 - Multiple video inputs/signals – one video is quality size and signing would be understandable. Additional video pictures are thumbnail size and not comprehensible for sign language (presenter takes largest quadrant – this could be worked around with some thought).
- 5 - Captioning background and font color cannot be changed for blind/low-vision users/participants.

# Saba Centra Review – Fall '08 for UTK

**Centra**  
**RATING = 1<sup>ST</sup>/2<sup>ND</sup> (TIED WITH**  
**ELLUMINATE LIVE!)**

- 1 - Captioning component – font size can be changed by participants.
- 1 - Captioning component – screen can be enlarged by participants.
- 1 - Captioning component – font and background color can be changed by participants (especially beneficial for low-vision users).
- 1- Up to 4 good size video inputs available - especially helpful for the interpreter and student allowing the student to have full participation and access in class (ie, the interpreter could voice for the student when the student participants instead of them being limited to text chat when other students can utilize their mic). Also good for D/HH participants to see both the presenters and interpreter, and instructor/interpreter.
- 5 - Participants typically have to open ports on their systems (firewalls) in order to receive good/high quality video (especially those participating from a firewalled connection). Some institutions may not allow the ports to be opened (one student's did not recently, they had to change their schedule and connect from home).
- 4 - Recording of full program (audio, video, application sharing) while available is not yet ready for the UTK server.
- 3 - Video was not as clear in Centra as in other products.
- 3- Captioning box quits scrolling when in session.

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# Adobe Connect Pro Review – Fall '08 for UTK

**Adobe Connect Pro**  
**Rating = difficult to rate fairly**  
**without the evaluation of the**  
**captioning component, most**  
**likely 3<sup>rd</sup>**

- 1 - Multiple video input capability – good video quality
- 1 – Ease of use

- 5 – Captioning component not integrated into the product, a separate purchase of the component

# Administration

## ➤ Topics include:

- Pricing
- Type of licensing
- Blackboard integration (LMS)
- Availability of training and technical support

# Results

- Available at: <http://itc.utk.edu/syncollab/>
- Participants were asked to rank each of the four products from 1-4, (with 1 being their most preferred tool and 4 being their least preferred tool)
- Rankings revealed:
  - 1 Saba Centra – 1.7 average ranking
  - 2 Elluminate Live – 2.3 average ranking
  - 3 Adobe Acrobat Connect Pro – 2.7 average ranking
  - 4 Horizon Wimba Live Classroom – 3 average ranking