

## Using the Virtual Classroom in Blackboard 6.1

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## Overview<sup>1</sup>

The Collaboration Tools allow the Instructor and Students to participate in real time lessons and discussions and view archives of previous Collaboration sessions. The Collaboration Tools can be used to hold real-time, online classroom discussions, TA sessions, and office hour type question/answer forums. Guest speakers and subject matter experts can also communicate with the class using the Collaboration Tools. The Collaboration tools can be particularly useful for teaching in an all-online (distance) course, or a course that makes frequent use of “virtual discussions” or “online office hours.”

The following Collaboration Tools are available:

- **Virtual Classroom** - Allows users to enter a real-time discussion with Instructors, Students, and colleagues; access the Web; and engage in question and answer sessions.
- **Lightweight Chat** - The Lightweight Chat is part of the Virtual Classroom but can also be accessed separately. It allows users to open just the Chat function of the Virtual Classroom Managing Collaboration Sessions

The Collaboration tool lets you create and participate in real time lessons and discussions with your students. You can filter or search your collaboration sessions that meet your criteria. There are two versions of the collaboration tool: the Virtual Classroom and the Lightweight Chat. Both collaboration tools give you the ability to record archives that you can make available to students.

The Virtual Classroom tool lets you and your students browse the web, participate in question and answer sessions, and take part in chat sessions.

The Lightweight Chat tool only lets you and your students participate in chat sessions.

## Creating Collaboration Sessions

From the Control Panel:

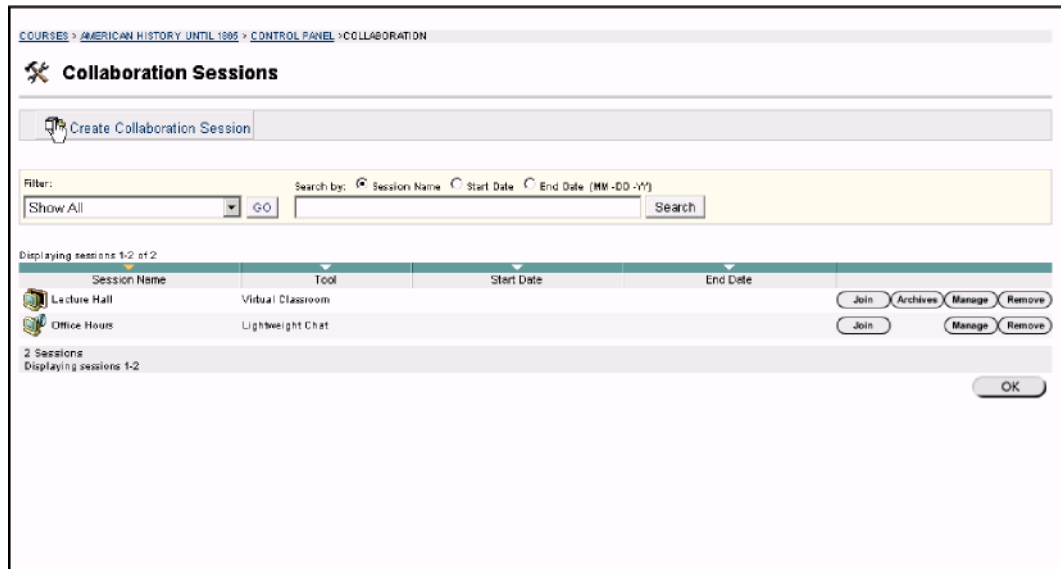
- Click on the **Collaboration** link in the Course Tools section.

**Note:** Blackboard contains two default sessions: Lecture Hall and Office Hours. You may use these if you wish.

- Click on the **Create Collaboration Session** button.
- Type a **name** for your session in the Session Name field.
- Choose **Lightweight Chat** or **Virtual Classroom**.
- Scroll down to the bottom of the screen and click on the **Submit** button.

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<sup>1</sup> Training materials adapted from documentation provided courtesy of the California State Universities



## Filtering Collaboration Sessions

From the Control Panel:

- Click on the **Collaboration** link in the Course Tools section.
- Choose a **Filter** option from the drop-down menu.
- Click on the **Go** button.

**Note:** *The filter option you selected remains in place until you change them or exit the Collaboration area*

Filter Options:

- **Show All** – Use this option to display all collaboration sessions.
- **Open Rooms** – Use this option to display collaboration sessions that you can currently join. This option only checks the availability dates and not the available option. Therefore, the filter can return rooms that your students cannot access because they have the available option disabled.
- **Rooms With Archives** – Use this option to display all collaboration sessions that have a recorded archive. This option only checks the availability dates and not the available option. Therefore, the filter can return rooms that your students cannot access because they have the available option disabled.
- **Rooms Available in the Future** – Use this option to display all collaboration sessions that have an availability date in the future.

## Searching Collaboration Sessions

From the Control Panel:

- Click on the **Collaboration** link in the Course Tools section.
- Type your **search** in the text field.
  - **Note:** The session name search is a substring search, so a search for “fice” will return “Office Hours.” The search is also case sensitive, so a search for “office” will not return “Office Hours” but will return “office hours.”
- Click on the **Search** button.

**Note:** If you turned on a filter option, the search will only find sessions that match your search and filter criteria.

## Sorting Collaboration Sessions

From the Control Panel:

- Click on the **Collaboration** link in the Course Tools section.
- Click on the **triangle** icon above Session Name, Tool, Start Date, or End Date.

Sort Options:

**Session Name** – Use this option to display your sessions in alphabetical order. Blackboard sorts sessions with the same name by date.

**Tool** – Use this option to display all of your Lightweight Chat sessions followed by all of your Virtual Classroom sessions.

**Start Date** – Use this option to display your sessions by start date. Sessions with no start dates appear first. Blackboard sorts sessions with the same start date by date of creation.

**End Date** – Use this option to display your sessions by end date. Sessions with no end dates appear first. Blackboard sorts sessions with the same end date by date of creation.

**Note:** Your current sorting option will be indicated by an orange triangle icon.

## More Information

**Q:** Why can't my students access a session that shows up under the list of “Open Rooms?”

**A:** The session is set to unavailable. Check the session availability from the Manage Session area.

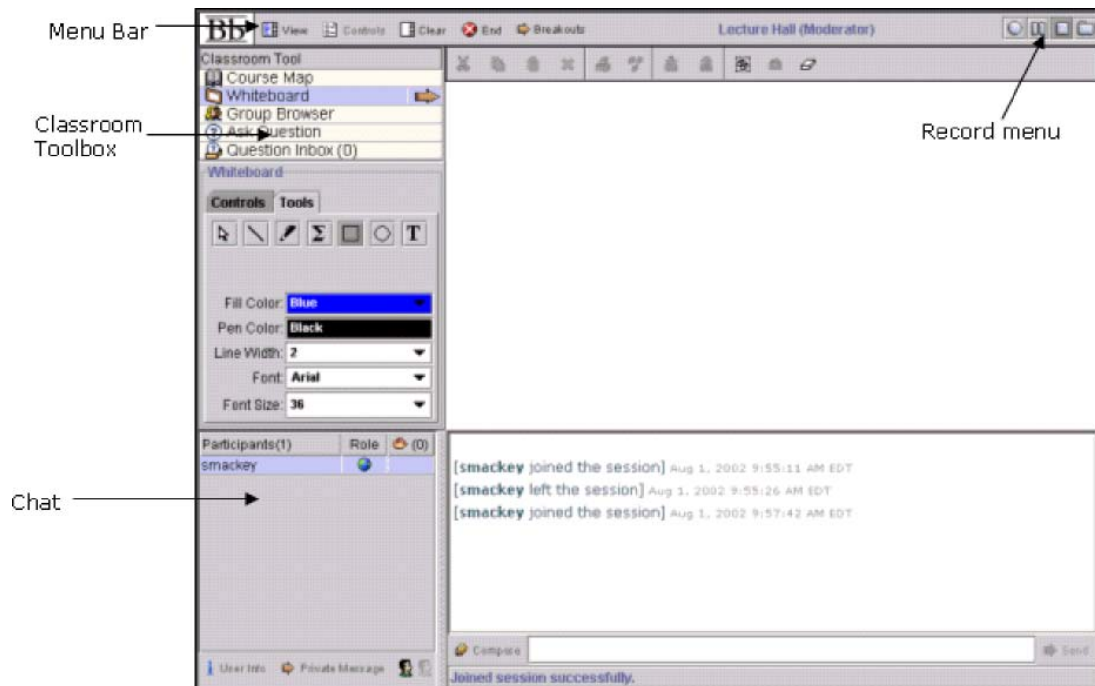
## Virtual Classroom

The Virtual Classroom tool lets you communicate in real time with your class. It gives you more tools than a Lightweight Chat session. The big difference between the Virtual Classroom tool and the Lightweight Chat tool are the Classroom tools. There are five Classroom tools: Course Map, Whiteboard, Group Browser, Ask Question, and Question Inbox. You can draw on a whiteboard, create slides, browse the web with your class, and field questions and answers.

### Entering a Virtual Classroom

From the Course area:

- Click on the **Content Area** link where you keep the Collaboration sessions. (This varies from course to course, but it is usually the Communication area.)
- Click on the **Collaboration** link.
- Click on the **Join** button to the right of the collaboration session you wish to join.



**Note:** You will see a screen that says “Virtual Classroom Loading.” Depending on your connection speed, it may take a few minutes for the chat to download. Note also that you must have the Blackboard Java plug-in installed on your computer for the Virtual Classroom to work. If you do not have the plug-in installed Blackboard will automatically direct you to a link to install the Java plug-in. Make sure as well that you have any pop-up window blocking software or browser components disabled.

Instructors control user access and functionality during a Collaboration Session by assigning roles. There are two roles available for users, **Passive and Active**. All participants have a passive role as a default at the beginning of a session. To make a user Active the Instructor selects a User Name in the Participant List, then clicks the Student icon. The Student icon will appear in the Role column next to those Students who are Active.

Instructors can change a Student’s role at any time during a Collaboration Session. Users who are Passive, but would like Active rights, can “raise their hand” by clicking the hand icon, visible on their screen. When the Instructor clicks the hand icon next to a participant name or clicks the Student icon the user is granted an Active role.

The Instructor uses the **Controls** to determine the access rights for Passive and Active Users. Access rights include the ability to chat during a session, as well as access to the Course Map, Whiteboard, and Group Browser. Users do not have rights to archive sessions, end the session, clear other users display panels, or manage the Session Controls.

*Hit the student head icon to change that user from “passive” to “active”*

**Session Controls** allow the Instructor to select the level of access Passive and Active users have during a Collaboration Session. Access to session areas that is granted to Passive users is automatically also granted to Active users. All Access Rights are available to Instructors, even if they are turned off for users.

## About Access Controls

The level of access user control that you select in a Virtual Classroom session defines what your students can and cannot do during a session. The instructor may change these settings at any time during a virtual classroom session.

	Passive User	Active User
Chat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Private Messaging	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Course Map	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Whiteboard	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Group Browser	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Ask Question	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Question Inbox	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**End Session**  
 End session and expel all users

Cancel OK

Java Applet Window

## Default Settings

The Default User Access control settings are set up so that only Active users may use the Virtual Classroom tools, except for the Question Tool.

Possible Uses:

- When the Instructor wants to “lecture” online to an audience that can only listen.
- For guest lecturers

**Session Controls** [X]

**Access Rights**  
Select the features each user type may access

	Passive User	Active User
Chat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Private Messaging	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Course Map	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Whiteboard	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Group Browser	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Ask Question	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Question Inbox	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

**End Session**  
 End session and expel all users

Cancel OK

Java Applet Window

**Active Users only.** Nobody can do anything unless they raise their hand and you give that person permission to chat, browse, ask a question, etc.

**Session Controls** [X]

**Access Rights**  
Select the features each user type may access

	Passive User	Active User
Chat	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Private Messaging	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Course Map	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Whiteboard	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Group Browser	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Ask Question	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Question Inbox	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

**End Session**  
 End session and expel all users

Cancel OK

Java Applet Window

**Mix of Settings.**

These settings allow all users to

- Chat
- Send private messages
- Ask a Question
- Look at the question Inbox.

without the instructor's permission. But no one can use the Coursemap, Whiteboard or Browser without the instructor/session leader's express permission. This allows students to ask questions as needed, and chat with the instructor or each other (especially via private messages).

**View** allows the Instructor and participants to select options for how they would like to view private messages.

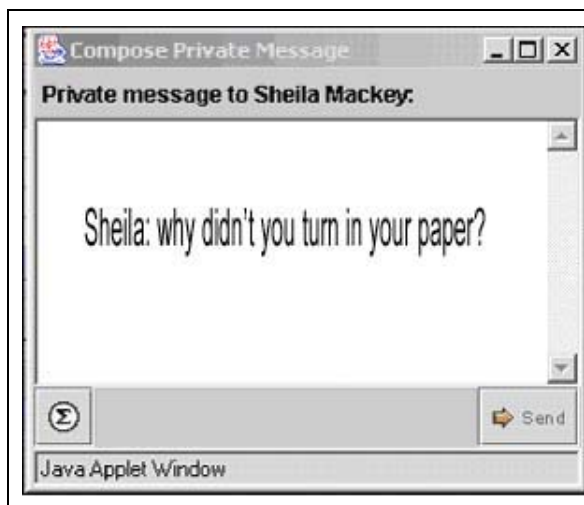


Select **Show in-line** to view private messages within the chat area. Select **Show in separate frame** to view private messages in a separate window.

## Sending a Private Message

From the Virtual Classroom:

- Click on a **name** in the Participants list.
  - **Note:** Blackboard highlights the user's name, role, and status in purple. If you would like to send a private message to two or more users, hold down the **Control** key on your keyboard and click on the **names** of the users.
- Click on the **Private Message** button.
- Type your **message** in the Compose Private Message window.
- Click on the **Send** button.



**Note:** Private messages will not show up in the archives. Private Messaging and chatting work essentially the same way in both Virtual Classroom and Lightweight Chat.

## Viewing User Information

From the Virtual Classroom:

- Click on a **name** in the Participants list.

**Note:** Blackboard highlights the user's name, role, and status in purple.

- Click on the **User Info** button.

## Displaying Content from Your Course to Users

**From the Virtual Classroom:**

- Click on the **Course Map** list item in the Classroom Tool section.
- Highlight the **item** you want to display in the Course Map tree.
- Choose **Display to Class** in the drop-down menu below the Course Map.
- Click on the **Go** button.

**Note:** *The Course Map tool will not directly display files that have been added as attachments, tests, or assignments. You can use the tool to display the folder or area these things are in, but you must ask students to click on the link from that folder.*

## Previewing Content from Your Course in a New Window

From the Virtual Classroom:

- Click on the **Course Map** list item under the Classroom Tool section.
- Highlight the **item** you want to preview in the Course Map tree.
- Choose **Preview in New Window** in the drop-down menu below the Course Map.
- Click on the **Go** button.

## Refreshing the Tree in the Course Map Area

From the Virtual Classroom:

- Click on the **Course Map** list item under the Classroom Tool section.
- Highlight the **item** you want to preview in the Course Map tree.
- Choose **Refresh Tree** in the drop-down menu below the Course Map.

- Click on the **Go** button.

## Using the Whiteboard Drawing Tools

From the Virtual Classroom:

- Click on the **Whiteboard** list item under the Classroom Tool section.
  - **Note:** If the Whiteboard does not appear, and the list item does not have the arrow to the right of it, click on the **Display** button to display it on the screen.
- Click on the **Tools** tab under the Whiteboard section.
- Click on the **drawing tool** you wish to use.

If you clicked on the Equation Editor tool:

- Click inside the **Whiteboard** where you want the equation to begin.
- Type the **equation** in the equation field using the provided tools.
- Click on the **Insert Equation** button.

If you clicked on the Text tool:

- Click inside the **Whiteboard** where you want the equation or text to begin.
- Type **text** in the text field.
- Click on the **Insert** button.

If you clicked on the Line, Marker, Rectangle, or Circle Tool:

- Click and hold inside the **Whiteboard** where you want the drawing to begin.
- Move the **crosshair** to where you want the drawing to end and release the mouse button.

### Tools:

**Select Tool** – Use this tool to select a portion of the drawing on the whiteboard. Hold the Shift key while clicking to select multiple items

**Line Tool** – Use this tool to draw straight lines on the Whiteboard.

**Marker Tool** – Use this tool to draw freehand lines on the Whiteboard.

**Equation Editor Tool** – Use this tool to enter equations and display them on the Whiteboard.

**Rectangle Tool** – Use this tool to draw rectangles on the Whiteboard.

**Circle Tool** – Use this tool to draw circles or ovals on the Whiteboard.

**Text Tool** – Use this tool to type text and display it on the Whiteboard.

**Fill Color** – Use this option to choose the fill color of your shapes.

**Pen Color** – Use this option to choose the outline color of your shapes and lines.

**Line Width** – Use this option to choose the line width of your shapes and lines.

**Font** – Use this option to choose the font of your text.

**Font Size** – Use this option to choose the font size of your text.

## Using the Whiteboard Editing Tools

From the Virtual Classroom:

- Click on the **Whiteboard** list item under the Classroom Tool section.
  - **Note:** If the Whiteboard list item does not have the arrow to the right of it, click on the **Display** button to display it on the screen.
- Choose a **portion** of the Whiteboard using the select tool.
- Click on the **editing tool** you wish to use.

Editing Tools:

**Cut Tool** – Use this tool to cut the selected portion of the Whiteboard.

**Copy Tool** – Use this tool to copy the selected portion of the Whiteboard.

**Paste Tool** – Use this tool to paste the most recent copied or cut portion of the Whiteboard.

**Delete Tool** – Use this tool to delete the selected portion of the Whiteboard.

**Group Tool** – Use this tool to group two or more selected portions of the Whiteboard so they act as one object.

**Ungroup Tool** – Use this tool to ungroup a previously grouped object.

**Send to Back Tool** – Use this tool to send an object to the back of the Whiteboard.

**Send to Front Tool** – Use this tool to send an object to the front of the Whiteboard.

**Select All Figures Tool** – Use this tool to select all the objects on the Whiteboard.

**Take a Snapshot Tool** – Use this tool to take a snapshot of the Whiteboard. This tool is only available when you are recording an archive.

**Eraser Tool** – Use this tool to erase the entire Whiteboard.

## Moving a Figure

From the Whiteboard tool:

- Select the **figure** you would like to move with the Select tool.
- Click and drag inside the **figure** to move it.

## Resizing a Figure

From the Whiteboard tool:

- Choose the **figure** you would like to resize with the Select tool.
- Click and drag on one of the **eight boxes** that surround the object.
- Move your **cursor** to the point where you want the resizing to end.

*Note: You cannot resize objects (or grouped objects) that contain text, freehand drawings, or equations. You must recreate these objects using a different font size or redraw them.*

## Adding a Whiteboard Page

From the Virtual Classroom:

- Click on the **Whiteboard** button under the Classroom Tool section.
- Click on the **Controls** tab under the Whiteboard section.
- Click on the **Add Whiteboard Page** button (the plus sign).

*Note: When you create a new page, the Whiteboard does not automatically display it. Follow the directions for Displaying a Whiteboard Page below to move to the new page to edit it. These pages remain in the Virtual Classroom even if you leave it, so you can create a series of Whiteboard pages ahead of time and navigate through them as your collaboration session progresses.*

## Displaying a Whiteboard Page

From the Virtual Classroom:

- Click on the **Whiteboard** button under the Classroom Tool section
- Click on the **Controls** tab in the Whiteboard pane that appears.
- Click on the **page** you would like to display in the **Controls** tab.
- Click on the **Display** button in the Controls tab.

## Deleting a Whiteboard Page

From the Virtual Classroom:

- Click on the **Whiteboard** button under the Classroom Tool section.
- Click on the **Controls** tab under the Whiteboard section.
- Click on the **page** you would like to delete.
- Click on the **Delete Whiteboard Page** button (the X).
- Click on the **OK** button in the message window that appears.

## Displaying a Website with the Group Browser

From the Virtual Classroom:

- Click on the **Group Browser** button under the Classroom Tool section.

- Type the **URL** you wish to display in the Address field.
- Choose a **display** option from the drop-down menu.
- Click the on **Go!** button.

Display Options:

**Display To Class** – Use this option to display the website to everyone participating in the Virtual Classroom.

**Preview In Browser** – Use this option to preview the website in a separate browser before showing it to everyone participating in the Virtual Classroom.

## Questions and Breakouts

### Asking a Question

From the Virtual Classroom:

- Type your **question** in the Enter Question field.
- Click on the **Send** button.
- Click on the **Ask Question** button under the Classroom Tool section.

### Asking a Long Question

From the Virtual Classroom:

- Click on the **Ask Question** button under the Classroom Tool section.
- Click on the **Compose** button.
- Type the **question** in the Compose Your Question field.
- Click on the **Send** button.

### Starting a Breakout Session

From the Virtual Classroom:

- Click on the **Breakouts** button at the top of the screen.
- Click on the **check boxes** next to the users you want in the breakout session.
- Click on the **OK** button.

### Ending a Collaboration Session

From the Virtual Classroom:

- Click on the **End** button on top of the screen.
- Click on the **OK** button in the message window that appears.

## More Information

**Q:** I recently put content in my course and I would like to display it to my class using the Course Map tool. However, the items I've added do not appear in the Course Map. What's going on?

**A:** Refreshing the Course Map tree will show recently added items that you have just added to your course. See the Refreshing the Course Map Tree procedure for more information.

**Q:** What are the system requirements for using the Virtual Classroom tool?

**A:** The Virtual Classroom, for full functionality, requires a Java-enabled version of Internet Explorer. Netscape users can access the Virtual Classroom, however, you must use the accessible version of the Virtual Classroom tool, and you will not be able to access some features.

**Q:** How can I permanently block a student from entering a Lightweight Chat session?

**A:** There is no way to block a student in your course from entering a collaboration session. You will have to remove the student from your course.

**Q:** Why should I send private messages?

**A:** Private messaging lets you send messages that only the recipient can see. Students can receive private messages even if they cannot send them.

**Q:** What are those icons to the right of the names in the participant list?

**A:** The icons represent each user's role. Moderators of the chat have a globe icon. Active users have a face icon. Passive users have the same face icon, but it is grayed out.

**Q:** Why does my full name appear during the chat session?

**A:** Your name is publicly available in your privacy settings. If you disable this option, the chat session will only display your username.

**Q:** Why does that raised-hand icon appear next to some of my students' names?

**A:** The raised-hand icon appears when passive users have a question to ask. To let them speak, you must call on them. See the Calling on Passive Users procedure for more information.

## Additional Considerations

- Blackboard's Virtual Classroom has an abundance of different tools that may be useful for different learning goals and objectives. However, Virtual Classroom sessions should be planned as carefully as you would any other classroom activity:
  - Have a specific and attainable goal for the session

- Consider the number of students that you are likely to feel comfortable with in a given session. Many instructors find that it difficult to interact productively with more than 6-10 students at any given time in a synchronous discussion. Others are able to moderate sessions with twenty or more.
- Plan ahead and consider which tools will be most useful for any given session: Course Navigation for showing course content, Whiteboard for illustration, etc. Practice with the tools you plan to use before trying them out in a “live” teaching situation.
- Consider carefully the level of control over the tools, navigation, and text messaging/chat functions you wish to exert, and the level of control you wish to grant to the students. (See the section on **Access Controls** users above).
- If you only plan to use the textual chat feature, then the “Lightweight Chat” tool may be a better choice (see the “Lightweight Chat” documentation included with these materials).

- **Macintosh Users**

Macintosh users running OS X and Netscape should run Netscape 7. When opening the Collaboration Tool, Netscape may put the tool in the background. If this happens, check under the **Window** menu for the Collaboration Tool. Netscape 6.2 does not work well with the Collaboration Tool and should be replaced with Netscape 7. For those users that wish to use Safari, be aware that the Safari browser is not yet supported by Blackboard, however, the Collaboration Tool should function normally in Safari so long as Pop-Up Window Blocking is disabled. When Safari is supported by Blackboard, it will be listed in the Client/Browser Configuration Guide available at <http://behind.blackboard.com>.

- **Archiving Sessions**

- It is important to remember that Collaboration Sessions are not recorded and archived by default. The leader of the session must start the recorder to create an archive. For more information, please see Recording an Archive, below, in the section on the “Lightweight Chat.”

