

Unified Communications

Historically on campus, a number of electronic communications tools have been available. These include chat or instant messaging (WiscChat), web and video conferencing (Blackboard Collaborate or Adobe Connect, and email among others. Many staff and students use consumer products such as Skype, Google Hangouts, Facetime, Slack and Hipchat as well. With the implementation of the Cisco VOIP telephone system coming on the heels of the Skype for Business pilot, campus awareness of, and interest in, a more consistent suite of voice and other electronic communications tools has been increasing.

Unified communications or UC refers to a set of managed and coordinated voice, video, and written communications methods. These commonly known applications like web conferencing or instant messaging work with voice telephony as a standard set of tools that allow internal and external campus communications in the most efficient and effective manner.

UC allows employees to use multiple communication modes like instant messaging, video conferencing and screen sharing to collaborate concurrently. A common UC environment allows employees to work the same way regardless of their computer preference or location, be it home or office, as long as they have a broadband or Internet connection. Their phone can ring in multiple locations undenounced to the caller.

“Presence” is a key integrated feature of UC that is just what it sounds like, knowing whether someone is online and available or busy. If the user so chooses they can hide their presence or provide more information and identify their location. This feature allows employees to see the status of co-workers in real time. Knowing which modes and team members are available cuts down on time tracking people down and allows employees to choose the best form of communication be it chat, phone or conference call for the current task. Since UC tools are always available it is easier to start an ad hoc meeting as compared to conventional conferencing systems that are reservation based and not ideal for less formal collaboration. Quick and efficient collaboration allows both employees and teams to be more agile.