

# UW-IT Campus Technology Research

## Edi Discussion Pilot Summary (FY 2021-2022: Discussion Tools)

**Date:** 4/22/22

**Tool name:** Ed Discussion (<http://edstem.org>)

**Description:** Ed Discussion is a discussion board that supports threaded discussion and question and answer, with peer or instructor endorsement of answers. Posts are formatted with a rich text editor that offers a full featured equation editor, and also supports code snippets, web snippets, and annotated images. Code snippets can be executed directly in the discussion board. Ed Discussion offers categories and labels for organizing and filtering posts, search, and instructor created templating to scaffold student questions. Ed Discussion is the communications module in Ed' digital learning platform; there is already adoption of the workspace module by CSE and interest in other modules from the Information School.

**Pilot dates:** Spring 2021, Summer 2021, Autumn 2021

**Recruitment method(s):** Canvas banner; targeted email outreach to instructors who had previously used Piazza, the Canvas admins mailing list, Tri-Campus Digital Learning Alliance, and TLTO mailing list; collaboration with CSE and their communication channels with instructors; word of mouth.

**Pilot participants:** 189 discussion boards, 102 instructor survey respondents, 729 students survey respondents (more instructors and students used Ed Discussion than responded to the survey.)

**Data collection method(s):** Quarterly surveys of students and instructors; usage data.

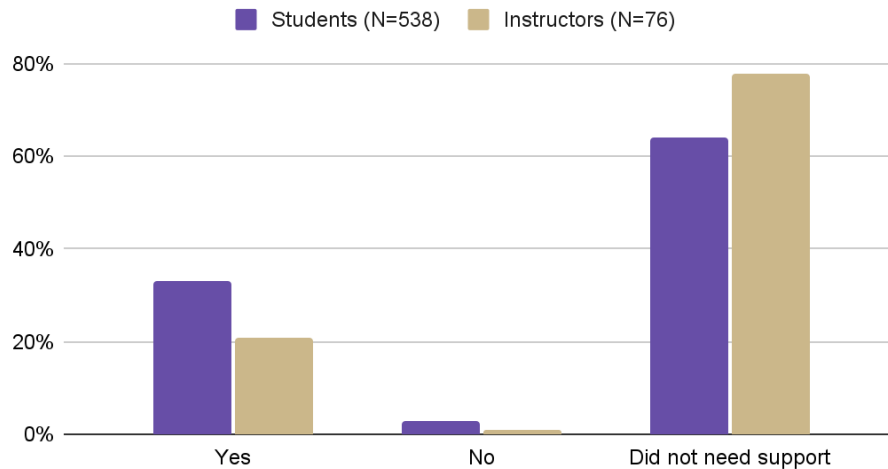
**User feedback (summary):** The tool was rated highly by both instructors and students, especially in regard to its effectiveness in meeting learning goals. Students viewed the tool as primarily social, to be used in a class setting, though it is also available for individual use. (See quarterly survey reports for more information.)

|                                                                                                                                                        | Instructors (N=83) | Students (N=1764) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Overall assessment<br><i>(scale 1-4: poor, fair, good, great)</i>                                                                                      | 3.4/4              | 2.9/4             |
| Comparison to other discussion tools<br><i>(scale 1-3: less than, about the same, more than other tools; ratings aggregated across six statements)</i> | 2.3/3              | 2.4/3             |
| Ease of use<br><i>(scale 1-5: very difficult - very easy)</i>                                                                                          | 4.3/5              | 3.9/5             |
| Endorsement (would use again)<br><i>(scale 1-5: very unlikely - very likely)</i>                                                                       | 4.5/5              | NA                |

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

Need for support was low during all three quarters of the pilot, and those who did need support received it from either the instructor or the vendor.

**Were you able to get support?**



In addition, 92% of instructors indicated that students required little (23%) to no (69%) support, while 8% indicated that students required some support, but it was manageable.

Anecdotally, the Ed Discussion support team is very responsive, and encourages instructors and students to reach out to them directly. The vendor is willing to conduct webinars and workshops for instructors.

It is worth noting that documentation and online guides for Ed Discussion are minimal, and usability and organization of the documentation could be improved.

**Accessibility review:**

|                                      |        |
|--------------------------------------|--------|
| Documentation provided by vendor     | Yes/No |
| AXDD usability review                | Yes/No |
| UW-IT Accessible Technologies review | Yes/No |

The vendor provided a VPAT for internal review, and accessibility information is posted publicly online at <https://edstem.org/help/accessibility>. The posted information states that Ed Discussion meets WCAG 2.1 AA standards, as well as U.S. federal government Section 508 requirements.

The VPAT provided is version 2.4 Revised Section 508, and is filled out correctly and completely, with extensive comments and explanation. Of the success criteria listed, all but four have a conformance level of "Supports;" these four are specified as not applicable to Ed Discussion. Internal verification by AXDD confirmed that the VPAT accurately describes the accessibility of the product, though keyboard navigation of specific features of the content editor, such as code snippets, requires the user to learn specific key combinations.

Ed conducts internal accessibility reviews, and also collaborates with experts from customer institutions to identify and remedy issues.

### **Feature requests:**

Instructors requested the following improvements:

- Improve findability of new replies to instructor comments
- Make inline superscript and subscript easier to insert from content editor (not require use of the equation editor tool)
- Save draft posts
- Schedule post for later date

Students requested the following improvements:

- Reply to a post anonymously
- Improve timeliness of notifications of new posts and comments
- Better navigation with Canvas course

### **Service design recommendations**

Ed Discussion integrates with Canvas as an external tool, as well as with other Ed Stem modules. The integration with Canvas enables instructors to create their own boards and sync the course roster for access. The access list is controlled by the Canvas course enrollment, which reflects official course registration.

In our experience, Ed Discussion lacks a customer-facing administrative dashboard, which would enable UW-IT admins to view usage, access boards, modify board configuration, and so on. The lack of such a dashboard would be a significant hindrance if UW-IT were to offer Ed Discussion as a standalone teaching and learning service.

One outstanding configuration issue is configuring SSO, so that users can go directly to edstem.org and sign in with UW NetID. Being able to authenticate via SSO would also likely address the complaints from students, reported in the survey, about too frequent prompts to re-authenticate.

Another concern is interest in additional modules from Ed's platform, which compete with Canvas as the core LMS. CSE already is moving forward with adoption of the Ed Workspace module, and the iSchool has indicated interest in the Ed Lessons module.

### **Data lifecycle**

Support for data retention or account lifecycles in Ed Discussion is unknown, and should be explored.

### **Quantifying a purchase**

Significant use during the three quarter pilot came from STEM disciplines in the College of Arts & Sciences, as well as CSE. In addition, most introductory large lecture-based courses could benefit from use of Ed Discussion to support Q & A, such as the introductory psychology courses. A jointly funded purchase between the CSE and CAS would be appropriate.

Maturity of vendor: Young and growing company, with rapid release of new features, but little administrative support for IT management. Very responsive support service.

**Recommendation:** It is our recommendation that Ed Discussion adopted and be offered as an integration through Canvas.