

Asynchronous Communication Tools

Asynchronous communication is used to facilitate collaboration between individuals and among groups in distance learning environments. There are many tools available today for asynchronous communication. This paper will provide an overview of Edmodo, an asynchronous communication tool.

Edmodo is a social learning network and discussion platform where teachers and students can interact and collaborate online. The web-based application is available for teachers, students, parents and administrators. The application is free and easy to use, and there is no installation setup involved. Figure 1 lists some of the main features which Edmodo offers (“Edmodo Training PowerPoint”, n.d.).

Edmodo Features

- Discussion forum
- Learning material management
- Asynchronous document sharing
- Content Library allows teachers to store unlimited content for easy sharing and re-use
- Secure platforms which ensures safety and privacy for users
- No private information is required from students
- Students join classes by invitation only from teacher/instructor (i.e. via a group code)
- Teacher/instructor has full management control
- Teacher/instructor can track student progress
- Mobile learning - anytime, anyplace
- Mobile apps for iOS and Android platforms
- Accessible via mobile browser (m.edmodo.com)
- Updates and notifications on the go
- Ability to create polls, quizzes, assignments, notes, blogs, and award badges online

Figure 1: Edmodo Features

Edmodo is geared more towards educators. More specifically, teachers, students (mainly K-12) and parents would benefit from using this tool because of its collaborative nature. It allows students to practice communication skills in a controlled environment which is so important to student development. Edmodo also provides a secure environment for students to use and

develop positive social networking skills. Students can post content, collaborate with each other, and connect with their teacher(s) in meaningful ways. Using Edmodo is a great way to promote and teach online safety, digital citizenship, and online netiquette in younger students. The use of online badges is also a great motivator for student learning. I believe that creating blog entries in Edmodo can allow students to express their creativity and themselves through writing. Blog entries can challenge students to utilize higher order thinking skills, and therefore increase student engagement with the lesson.

Table 1 below provides a list of advantages and disadvantages of Edmodo (“Edmodo in the Classroom”, n.d.).

Advantages	Disadvantages
Easy to use	Text messaging is not an available feature
Cost = Free	The interface (i.e. the look and feel) is more geared towards students and educators versus business. Therefore, it may not boost a universal appeal.
It is a very secure, closed network	If a student does not have access to a computer and the internet, or a mobile device they would not be able to use the tool.
Teachers can create connections with other students from different schools, states, or cultures	There is no face-to-face interaction which can lead to feelings of isolation.
Provides a multitude of community resources and connections teachers can make with other teachers	Lag time in feedback response from peers and/or teachers.
Teachers can differentiate instruction by creating subgroups of students	
Students can upload homework assignments, take quizzes, polls and receive grades and feedback and suggestions from teachers	
Parents can be involved by viewing their child's work and grades, and keep in touch with teachers	
Provides a method for sharing documents and digital media online	
Great tool for use with mobile devices and for mobile learning.	
The tool works with all browser types	

Table 1: Advantages and Disadvantages of Edmodo

From a technical perspective, Edmodo fits three very important criteria:

- **Usability** – ease of use. Students/teachers/parents/administrators can learn to use the tool in a short period of time and therefore will be more inclined to use it for classroom discussion, content and learning management.

- **Accessibility** – accessible to all users. Students/ teachers/parents/administrators are able to access the tool using various devices, with all browser types, and from anywhere, anytime, and anyplace.
- **Compatibility** – compatible with multiple devices and equipment. Since users will not all have the same devices or equipment, it is important that the tool is flexible enough to be used with a variety of devices or equipment.

I used Edmodo in the spring 2013 semester for a Mobile Learning course. One of the requirements of the course was to use a mobile device (e.g. cell phone, iPad, Tablet, laptop) to post discussions, get content and collaborate on programming code for apps. It was very easy to install the app on my iPad and iPhone, and I also created a custom alert/notification so that I would receive emails and text alerts when any updates or posts were made in our group. I think that Edmodo can be used in my Distance Education class as a supplement and/or complement to Blackboard. For instance, students could post links to articles, video or other resources on interesting topics/tidbits that they have found on distance education and learning while doing research. I envision it working similar to Pinterest (i.e. "...a tool for collecting and organizing things you love or that inspire you"), but from a higher education/research perspective ("Pinterest", n.d.).

What I liked about the tool was being connected all the time, especially on-the-go, getting my assignments from there without having to login to Blackboard all the time, and the cost (i.e. free). What I disliked was that the interface was too plain and boring, and had an associated lag time in response. For example, when I used the tool for class in the spring, we were learning how to program apps using Livecode software. If you were working on code, say in the morning, and had an issue which you posted online, sometimes you would not get any response or feedback until late at night or the next day. I think it would be a better tool if a synchronous component could be added to it where students could connect in real-time to solve problems or collaborate.

Unfortunately, I did not have the pleasure of working with my assigned partner. After sending multiple emails and an instant message via Lync, my assigned partner never responded. I worked on this module by researching what has been written about the tool and prior personal experience from using the tool in the spring 2013 semester course. I still have an active Edmodo student account; therefore I was able to go back and review posts, features, and content in the tool. The following screenshots display some of Edmodo's iPad features:

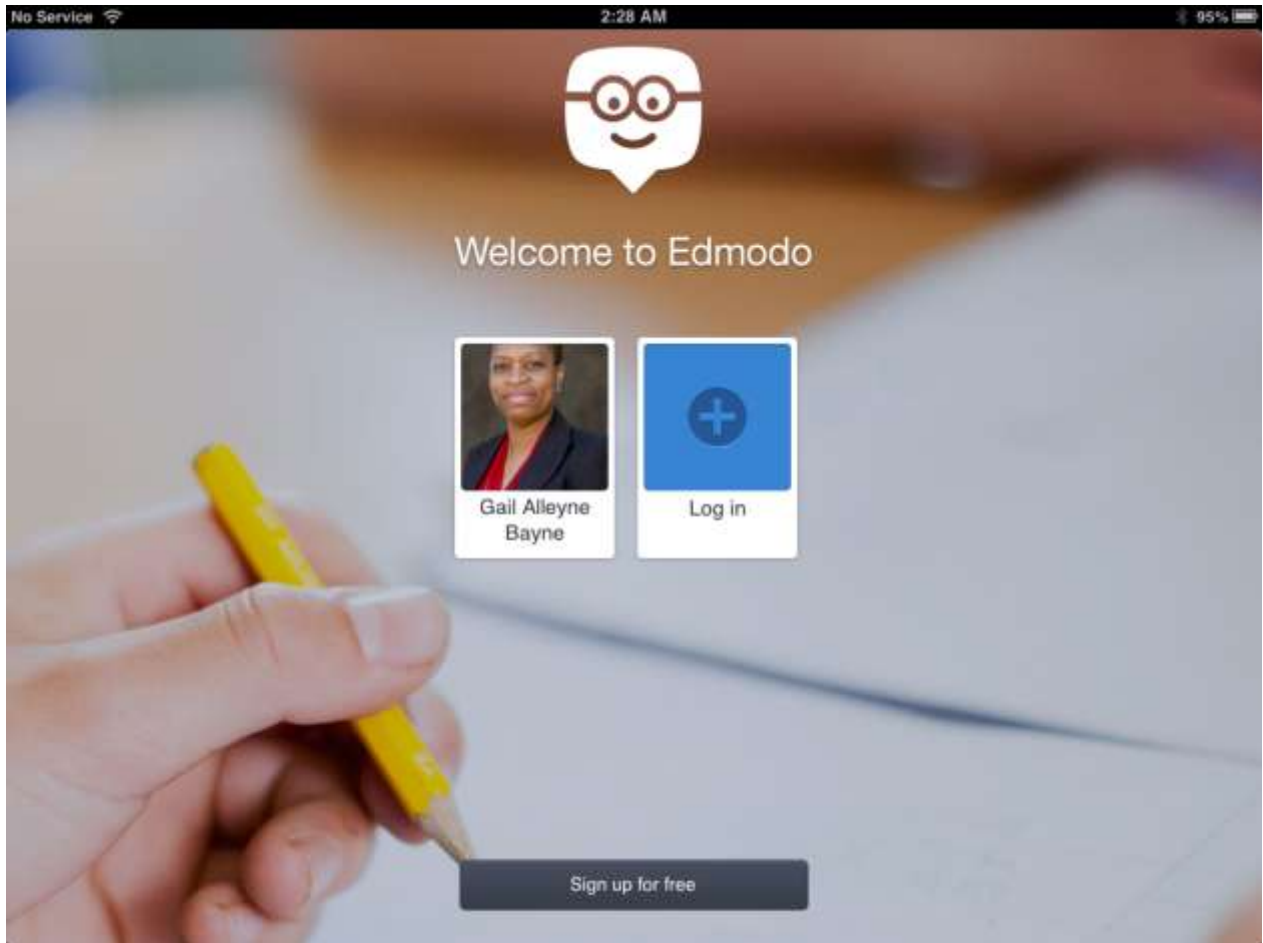


Image 1: Edmodo iPad Login Interface

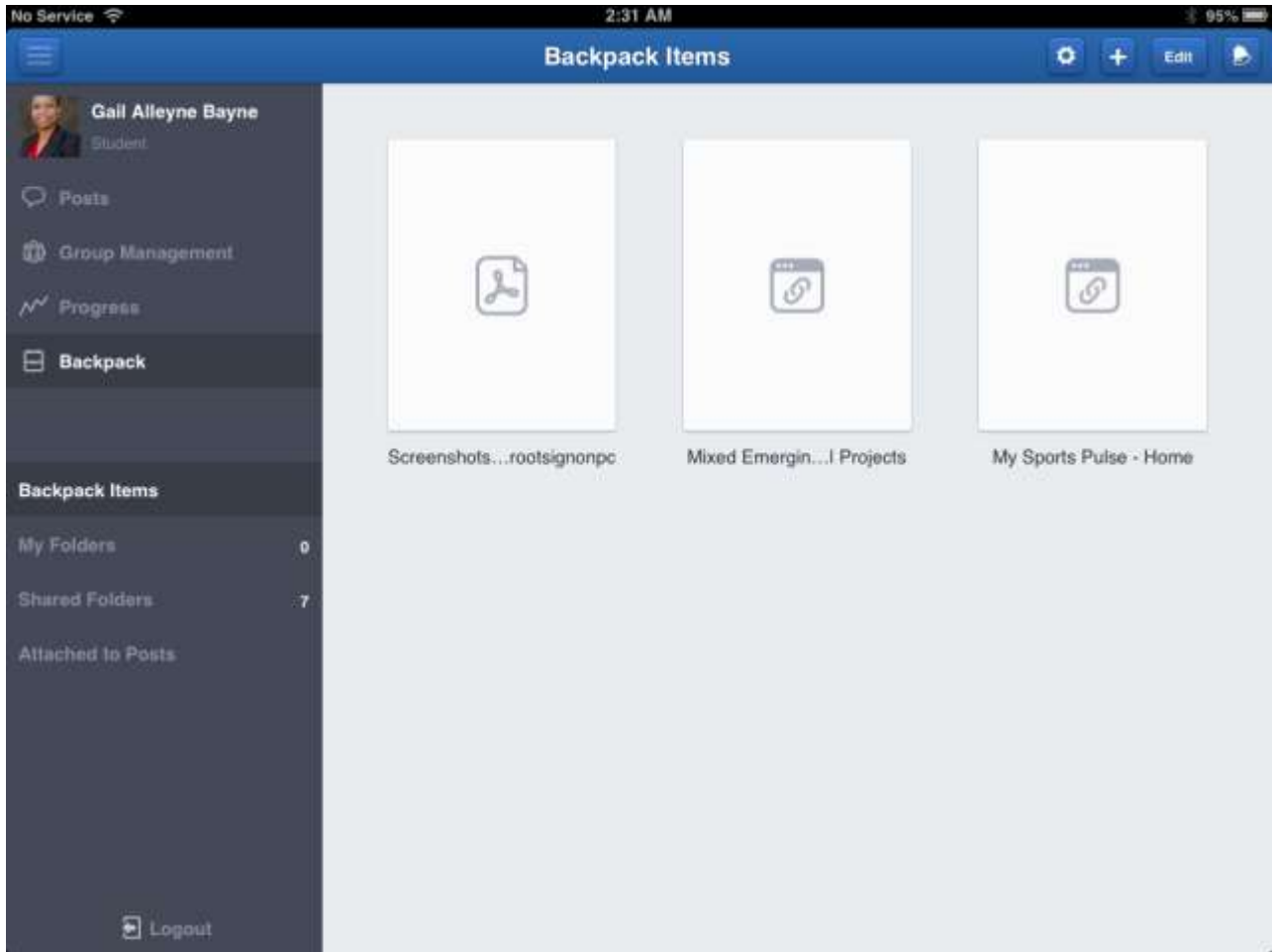


Image 2: My backpack with items/documents that I collected for reference

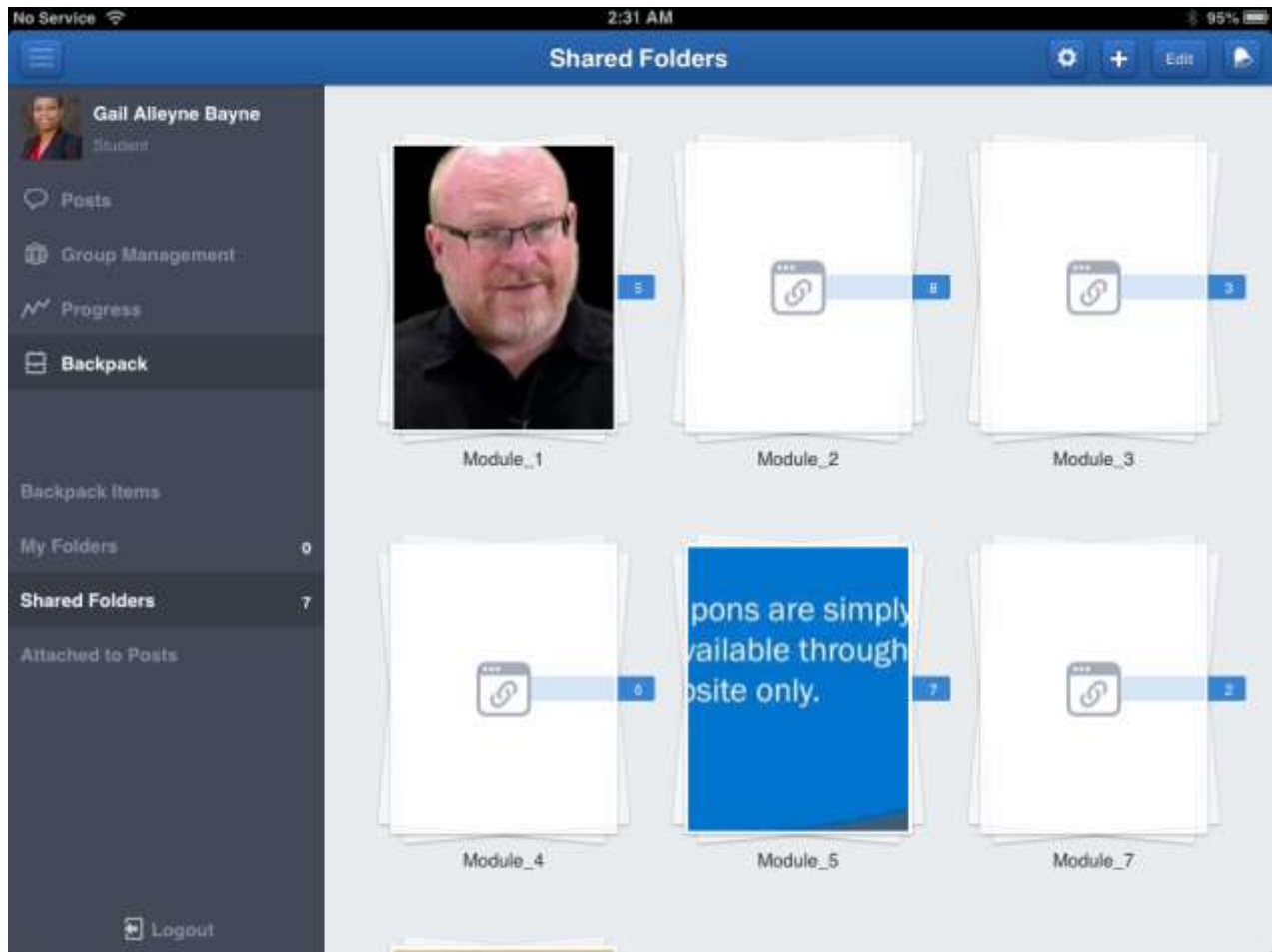


Image 3: Shared folders with course content

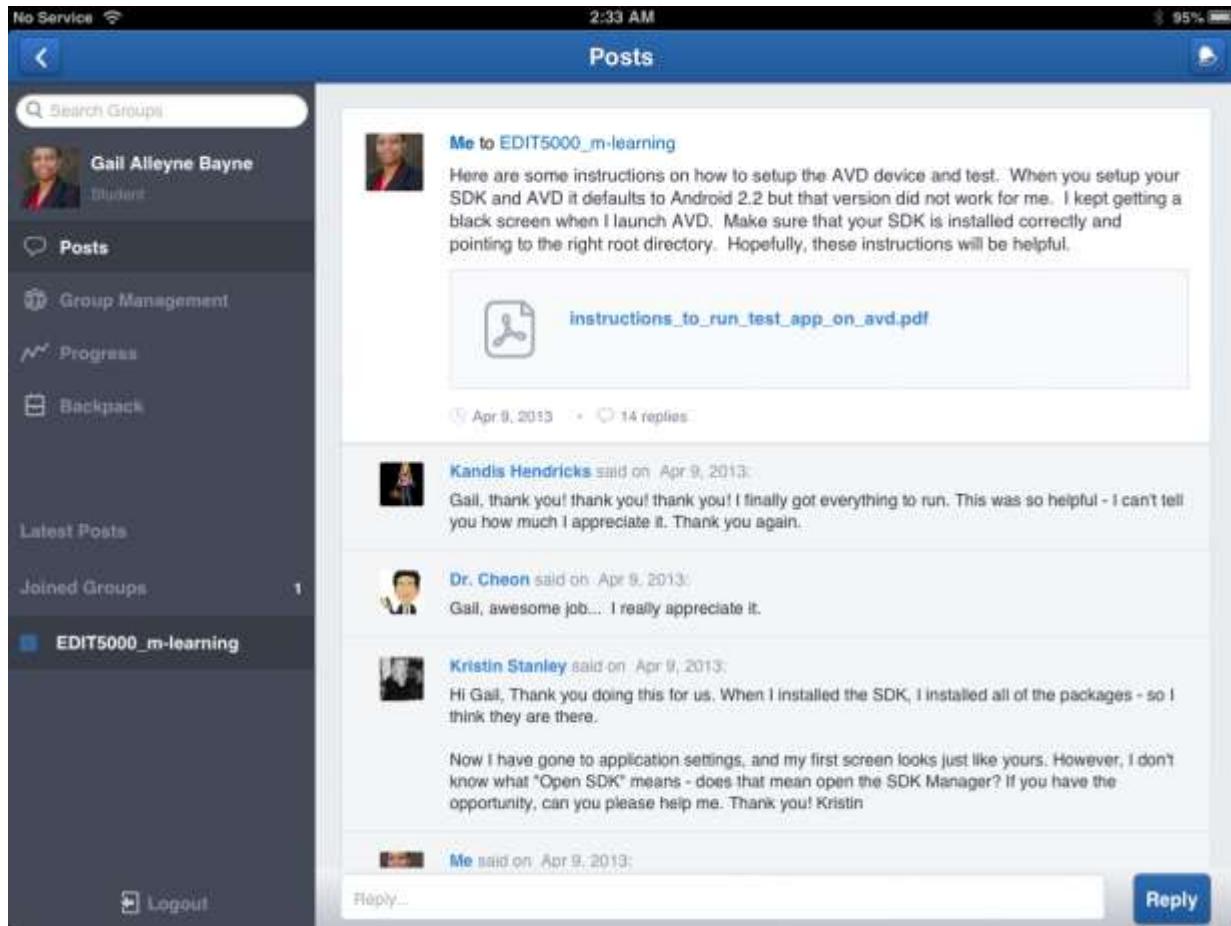


Image 4: Participants in a collaborative post discussion

As with synchronous communications (Module 5), my suggestion for online group work is the same. I think that it is imperative for students to understand the importance of collaboration in online environments. I believe the perception is mainly that students work on their own and at their own pace in distance education classes. Group work is generally not included in most online courses, and therefore students do not fully understand the mechanics of working collaboratively online. I suggest creating an outline that will guide students in working on group projects with their online peers.

References

Edmodo in the Classroom. (n.d.). In *Wikispaces*. Retrieved October 3, 2013 from <http://edmodo-in-the-classroom.wikispaces.com/Benefits>

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