

**Using project management software for team-based projects**

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### Introduction/Need for Innovation or Idea

Team projects not only allow students to actively participate in their own learning, but also provide team members with interpersonal skills desired by employers (McCubbins et al., 2016). Project management is an essential component of successful team projects (Scott & Samson, 2008).

AGCM 4403: Planning Campaigns in Agriculture and Natural Resources at Oklahoma State University focuses on integrated marketing communications campaign development in the context of agricultural sciences and natural resources ([university academic catalog], 2020). The course is both project- and team-based: throughout the entire course, students work in 4- to 6- person teams with external clients to research, write, and plan an integrated marketing communications campaign.

Lubbers (2011) found students in a capstone campaigns course who “offered ideas and suggestions, did quality work, w[ere] dependable, and w[ere] willing to cooperate” (p. 497) were rated higher on peer evaluations. These actions are important aspects of project management (Smith & Imbrie, 2004). Simon et al. (2005) found that project management is an important part of agricultural communication curriculum. Project sites have been found to increase student participation and comprehension, as well as perceived student satisfaction (Shayan & Iscioglu, 2017). We were interested in implementing project management practices into the AGCM 4403 to improve student collaboration and improve the instructor’s ability to monitor real-time progress. Our innovative idea was to adopt Basecamp, an app-based project management software tool, beginning in the spring 2019 semester.

### How it Works

A Basecamp subscription provides access to unlimited projects, teams and contributors, so class enrollment, size, or number of teams does not matter. Basecamp can be accessed through a web browser, or users can download a desktop app for Mac or PC or a phone app for iOS or Android.

Early in the course, students receive instruction related to project management and its role in the success of their campaign. They also participate in a hands-on tutorial to learn about Basecamp and how to use it. Students are invited as a contributor to a project within Basecamp, where they have a dedicated workspace that is accessible to all members of their team. Each Basecamp project includes six tools: (1) Campfire, a real-time group chat, (2) Message Board, a thread-based discussion space, (3) To-dos, an organizable set of checklists that can be given specific due dates and assigned to specific team members, (4) Schedule, a calendar automatically populated with assigned due dates and other appointments, (5) Automatic Check-ins, a tool that automatically emails team members to ask daily or weekly update questions, and (6) Docs and Files, a 500 GB storage space, which makes storing and sharing large file manageable without using external storage systems. However, Docs and Files also integrates with external storage tools like Google Drive or Dropbox. Basecamp has a robust email and push notification system that students can customize according to their preferences. Basecamp also includes an Activity Timeline, which is a reverse chronological list of every

action taken in a project, the time it was completed, and who took the action.

Each team has the freedom to customize how they use Basecamp. For the purpose of [course name], students and instructors find the Activity Timeline, To-dos, Docs and Files and Automatic Check-ins most relevant and valuable. In particular, the Activity Timeline feature is essential for the instructor to be able to observe real-time progress and assess individual student contributions.

### **Results to Date**

Feedback from undergraduate students enrolled in the course during the second semester of Basecamp implementation was positive. One student said, “From communication to organization, we used Basecamp for nearly everything related to our project. It really helped ease any worry about project deadlines and any tension between team members.”

From the instructor’s perspective, team disputes regarding individual contributions have decreased since adopting Basecamp. Team members and the instructor use the Activity Timeline in Basecamp as an audit trail of contributions. Reduced conflict resolution activities mean both the instructor and students spend less time addressing problems and more time contributing to meaningful integrated marketing communications plans and deliverables. Additionally, because project management tools are used in many professional organizations, using the tool for class gives students skills and experience they can transfer to a job.

### **Future Plans/Advice to Others**

We advise others who want to implement Basecamp to manage team projects to also designate a dedicated project manager who is not the instructor. The project manager could be a paid teaching assistant or an upper-division or graduate-level student who assumes the role for academic credit to deepen their knowledge, experience, and skills in integrated marketing communications campaigns. The project manager, in our case, becomes like another member of the team, overseeing weekly status updates, providing feedback or encouragement, and modeling desired student behavior, including frequent use of the tool.

While a dedicated project manager is not mandatory, students seem to adopt Basecamp at a higher rate when a dedicated project manager is in place, and peer evaluations reflect higher satisfaction among team members when they have higher rates of activity in Basecamp. It should be noted using Basecamp as a tool for project management is meant only to supplement the course. Course content and assessment is still facilitated through the university’s learning management system. However, we do tie Basecamp activity and peer evaluations to a participation grade, which assists in incentivizing adoption of the tool.

We plan to continue use of Basecamp indefinitely and designate a dedicated project manager as often as budgets and circumstances allow.

### **Costs/Resources Needed**

Teachers and students at K-12 schools and universities who agree to use Basecamp for educational purposes only can request and receive a free subscription that provides access to unlimited projects, unlimited users, and no per user fees (normally \$99 per month). Internet access is required to use Basecamp.

## References

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