Tech Snacks: Microsoft365 Tips & Tricks

As a part of MSUN's Microsoft365 license, all students, faculty, and staff have access to the Microsoft Suite, which includes a wide variety of apps that you can use both on and off campus. Some of these tools can be used to enhance your teaching and streamline your interactions with students, while others can simply make your life a little easier, especially when it comes to collaboration.

The easiest way to access the different apps is to go into your Outlook email account, (https://outlook.office365.com/) and click the 3x3 grid of squares in the top left.

Exploring classroom activities on Microsoft Whiteboard

Similar to Google Jamboards, Microsoft's Whiteboard app is an interactive alternative to traditional lecture slides that can help facilitate collaborative classroom activities.

How can I use the Whiteboard for classroom activities?
Once students are placed in groups, each group can be given access to a whiteboard (either the same whiteboard in different locations or separate whiteboards with different prompts), and after discussion and collaboration, the whiteboard can then be shared with the whole class for presentation. Some example activities include:

- Facilitate class brainstorming, virtual "field trips", and concept mapping
- Create a diagnostic flow chart to demonstrate understanding of a process
- Play "This or That" – a decision tree followed by critical analysis
- Create a "Question of the Day" to start the class & have students answer
- Play "Two Truths & a Lie" with content concepts based on an assigned reading
- Play "Start, Stop, Continue" to analyze practices, for example, in a business

How can I use the Whiteboard for student assignments?
Whiteboard works for individual activities and group projects. It has shareable links (similar to OneDrive or Google Drive) for group work, and you can download the board as a .PNG file that can be uploaded to Brightspace for reference.

Making the Outlook Calendar work for you

We all use Outlook as our official university email account, but the Outlook Calendar and its associated apps have many features that you might not know about.

Microsoft Bookings
Bookings is its own 365 app but it integrates with the Outlook Calendar. With it, you can create a page that allows others to directly schedule meetings with you based on your calendar availability and any additional parameters you set up. You can create separate Bookings pages for different categories of meetings, with different day/time boundaries, time increments, and public/private settings. For example, you could have a Bookings page for **Advising Appointments** (30 min), another one for **Office Hours By Appointment** (15 min), and **General Meetings** (1 hour). If you have a situation where you need to coordinate a meeting time with someone, you can just send them the appropriate Bookings page and have them choose a slot instead of going back and forth in email. This also works well for scheduling things like search candidate interviews.

Once the page is created, you can provide the link to your students directly (example here), or you can add a Bookings page link to your email signature in Outlook.
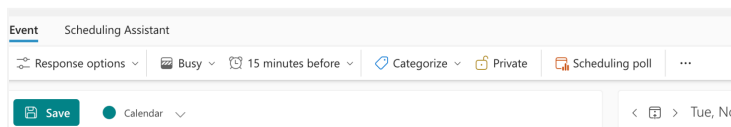
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Book time to meet with me

Microsoft Scheduling Poll
The "Scheduling Poll" feature inside Outlook calendar invitations operates a lot like Doodle polls but even better. With this tool, you can easily compare invitees' calendars to locate potential meeting times that are open on everyone's calendars. You can then select those times and put them into a poll to allow your group to vote on their preference.

To start, open up a calendar invitation and add a title, location, and your invitees. The date and time don't matter at this point. Click "Scheduling poll".

Once you go through the steps to set up the poll, Outlook puts the poll into an email to all of your invitees and asks them to vote on the meeting times. Invitees can vote "Prefer", "Yes", or "No". The organizer can enable settings that will: notify you of poll responses; hold all of the proposed time options on your own calendar; automatically schedule the meeting when consensus is reached.

Miscellaneous Microsoft tricks & tips

Outlook: Whitelisting Domains
If you're concerned about emails going to your junk folder, you can "whitelist" specific email domains, including Gmail, Yahoo, or northern.desire2learn.com (Brightspace).

Outlook: Contact Groups
If you don't want to repeatedly type out individual email addresses of a specific group every time you send them an email, you can create a group in Outlook that will allow you to just email the group instead. This can be helpful if you're running a committee or if you are the faculty advisor for a student club.

Outlook: Multiple Email Signatures
Outlook allows you to create multiple different signatures for your emails. You can have a default signature that you use for the majority of emails, or you can have different signatures based on different emails you might be sending. For example, you can have an email signature for emails coming from you as a faculty member and a different signature coming from you as a coach or a club advisor.

Teams: Chat
More and more campus staff are using Teams chat to ask and answer quick questions. Committees can create a "team" to host a group chat and store committee-related files.

PowerAutomate (Advanced)
PowerAutomate lets you link a "trigger" (e.g., a Microsoft Form submission; a time of day) with a "flow" action (e.g., sending an email; populating a row in an Excel document). For example, at a specific time each morning you can have PowerAutomate send you an email with your entire day's Outlook calendar events. Or, if you have a survey/registration form in Forms, you can have PowerAutomate send a confirmation email to the participant when the form is submitted.