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CU I&E Submission: Slack and Trello [1]

Description

Our working environments are becoming more and more collaborative, yet the tools we use to manage this collaboration (usually email) haven't changed much in the past three decades. Our day-to-day jobs involve tracking deadlines, project updates, file revisions, and all the while we also need to have substantive conversations with our colleagues to make good decisions.

Slack and Trello work together to help us collaborate more effectively, with designs and a feature set ready for 21st century team collaboration. Slack transforms team conversations by breaking them out of the silo of email and into conversational channels, while Trello helps teams manage all their business processes and tasks with its flexible "card" interface. Both tools are free...and both tools are easy to scale to larger teams, departments, and organizations.

These tools are more than just the sum of their feature lists, they are part of a change in culture around how teams collaborate and the tools we use to get our work done.

How does this impact the University?

Anything that slows down or complicates communications in the University has an impact on achieving our mission. Sometimes waiting even just an extra hour for a response from a colleague, or an extra day for feedback on an important report, paper, or presentation can have a significant impact.

Slack and Trello help us minimize these collaborative delays by streamlining our conversations and organizing our tasks in some powerful ways.

Slack is a team chat tool that brings a coherence and immediacy to communications by taking us out of our email and instant message silos and into communication channels that are open to the team. This dramatically reduces "re-explaining" context when new team members are brought into a conversation. Slack also has powerful notification settings, so that colleagues can tune it to alert them of topics they care about and focus their work, unlike email's undifferentiated stream of messages that vary widely in importance, or instant message platforms that often lack a meaningful archive or ability to message someone when they aren't signed in.

Trello, with its unique and visual "card" interface, makes it easier to organize and track completion of tasks. These tasks can be easily moved, re-ordered, assigned to another team member, and marked as completed. Completed tasks can be archived with all of their history

(including conversations), which aids in the “institutional memory”, answering questions like “How did we solve that problem last time?”

By embracing modern, mobile-friendly tools like Slack and Trello, we’ve been able to dramatically reduce the “cost” of communicating with and managing a team, and spend more of our time getting actual work done.

Implementation Status

FPBS, a unit within the Office of University Controller, adopted Slack and Trello in Summer of 2015. Since then we’ve exchanged over 20,000 Slack messages and managed over 500 Trello cards.

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