

What is CircleIn and when will students have access?

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For the last couple of semesters, most UAF classes have had to morph into an online delivery mode in a rushed manner. Combined with other factors, this has contributed to many students being isolated. People are social learners, and when deprived of meaningful interactions with peers, academic success can be jeopardized.

Even before the COVID pandemic, UAF had a chance to participate in an NSF-funded study to provide an online tool meant to facilitate the formation of and participation in peer-based study groups. The online tool in the study is called CircleIn and it will be available to all UAF students starting in fall 2021.

CircleIn attempts to make peer learning more accessible to online students by letting them organize with classmates to create digital flashcards, share and highlight notes, ask questions about content and assignments, and interact with teaching assistants. Students are rewarded with points to encourage peer interactions and engagement with course material. During the semester, they accumulate points that can be traded for small donation gift cards. Of course, CircleIn is available to all students no matter the mode of delivery of their class.



Many of the activities that CircleIn facilitates and encourages students to partake in have been shown in research studies to raise success. A study conducted at Goucher College tracked 463 students and their peer interactions. The authors found that

GPA was positively correlated with the frequency of using several empirically supported strategies during group study, including those reflecting elaboration (mnemonics), generation (create outlines or study guides, make flashcards), and spacing (study material in at least two sessions).¹

These happen to be among the same features that CircleIn provides users. Students can access CircleIn via a mobile app, a website or from embedded links within the course.

So what is required of faculty to make this available to their students? In short, not much. Just as face-to-face students regularly form and participate in study groups without significant, if any, faculty effort, the same would be true of online study groups enabled by this tool. However, CircleIn does provide instructors the ability to see metrics of student engagement in their class, such as times using the app and questions answered, etc. If a faculty member wished, they could use the tool to interact with students directly, but this is optional.

REFERENCES

¹McCabe, J. A., & Lummis, S. N. (2018). Why and how do undergraduates study in groups?. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*, 4(1), 27.