

# Domain of One's Own

## Scenario

Over the past five years, faculty and students at Chesterburg College have embraced a practice around Domain of One's Own (DoOO). Communications Professor Monica Allbright has been instrumental in helping her colleagues understand the pedagogical value of DoOO, which she summarizes as “helping learners shape meaning about the digital world and better understand their unique place in the digital ecosystem.” Apart from her work in teaching and learning, Allbright has been a linchpin in helping Chesterburg develop the IT capacity necessary to support these domains.

Allbright leads an annual seminar for faculty interested in learning more about DoOO. Participants study the underpinnings of the practice and develop their own domains to fit their particular academic disciplines and interests. They also learn how to integrate DoOO practices into their teaching. One faculty member, for example, populated her domain with a wide range of personal writing, research articles, and course syllabi related to her professional work in design. A geography professor created a domain where students post and share reflections for a course on map-making. Another professor created a site that collects his thinking and research about sustainability.

After much experimentation, Professor Jacob Barlow-Sipes now uses such domains exclusively as sites for courses he teaches in Chinese and Japanese history and culture; he no longer uses the college's LMS. In part, he says, using a domain in this way provides a channel that helps a course syllabus stay fluid and enables him to encourage students to step up to be teachers. As they develop a digital identity, students internalize the notion that the work they do in the course is theirs to own and share. In this way, DoOO helps students take control over their scholarship, data, and online identity—free from the constraints and expectations that LMSs, colleges and universities, or even faculty can sometimes impose.

Student domains are proliferating at Chesterburg. A theater major uses her site to explore the history and meaning of her discipline and to document her theatrical and academic accomplishments in a rich online portfolio. Another student posts writing that reflects an in-depth study of pop culture. A third student's domain collects musings on his international travel. Reflecting on this work, Allbright hopes that the practice of DoOO will help students exercise both creativity and agency as they build a deeper understanding of digital literacies and control their digital identities.

## 1 What is it?

A way of thinking as well as an application of technology, Domain of One's Own refers to the practice of giving students, faculty, and staff the opportunity to obtain a domain with hosted web space of their own. The technology lets users build online spaces use open-source tools like WordPress, Scalar, Omeka, MediaWiki, and Drupal. By enabling users to build environments for learning and sharing, such domains make possible a liberating array of practices that encourage users to explore how they interact with and present themselves in the online world. While giving users [more control over their scholarship, data, and digital identity](#), these domains encourage an ethos of openness, freedom, and exploration and nurture a practice for shaping and thinking about one's presence on the web. DoOO also draws users into a community of practice focused on collaboration and sharing.

## 2 How does it work?

In practice, DoOO works in different ways on different campuses. It requires coordination among academic departments and information technology; it might be administered principally by one of those campus units with support from the others. Under that umbrella, users get technical support for developing their domains. Learners get guidance in how they can think about, frame, and publish their digital identities in the DoOO space. Faculty members get support for using domains to develop a unique learning space, perhaps outside an institution's LMS. DoOO users learn to take ownership of the content they put on the web—versus, for example, ceding such control to third-party publishers. This guidance helps users understand how to use the potential that individual domains create as a space for experimentation and inquiry and as a means to share scholarship and knowledge with the wider public.

## 3 Who's doing it?

A [site on YouTube](#) captures the richness of DoOO at Brigham Young University, which has provided over 10,000 students and faculty with their own domain and hosting space. Offering domain space for all its graduate students and faculty, the College of Arts and Letters at Michigan State University posits this work in part as “[an extension of the land-grant mission to make knowledge accessible](#).” Muhlenberg College, where some faculty are choosing to build their [courses on domains](#) rather than

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in the LMS, posts [a wide variety of DoOO projects](#) from faculty, students, and staff. [Middlebury College](#) maintains a site where it posts examples of domains. [Award-winning student work](#) at the University of Oklahoma in 2019 included student portfolios of designs in structural and landscape architecture and research on the science of lightning. Davidson College sponsors "[Davidson Domains](#)," a community portal focused on individual domains. A [site](#) at the University of Mary Washington, where DoOO originated, highlights a project aimed at helping students consider domains beyond curricular contexts. Under the motto "guides for using tech to teach," the Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship at Georgetown University [encourages faculty and students to use their domains](#) as part of courses but also outside coursework.

## 4 Why is it significant?

DoOO encourages users to explore critical questions about digital literacy—questions that are increasingly important for life and work in the digital age. It also provides an important space for scholarship and the development and sharing of new knowledge. In part because it shifts focus from technology and tools to processes and practices, work with DoOO creates opportunities for college and university communities to broaden how they think about and use technology for teaching and learning in local contexts. Further, because DoOO serves to connect a community of people and projects to share new ideas for working with and creating on the web, it also has innate potential to create new learning experiences. In some respects, work in DoOO pushes back against conventional practices for using technology in teaching and learning, such as centrally controlled access to technology or reliance on vendor-designed commercial products; this sometimes leads institutions to rethink and improve routine practices in information technology. DoOO can also be seen as superseding the ethos of consumerism and commercialism that sometimes dominates ed-tech, putting users rather than vendors in control of how technology is used and applied.

## 5 What are the downsides?

Explaining the nuances and value of DoOO to key campus constituencies—including administrators, learners, and faculty—

can be challenging. Adopting DoOO requires something of a cultural shift at most universities—for example, in getting buy-in to the principle of ceding control of technological tools for students to manage and learn for themselves. As a result, ensuring adoption can require deft navigation of university politics and governance. As with many new technologies, it can be challenging to create and sustain an appropriate institutional infrastructure to support such domains, including the necessary technology, funding, processes, and related supports. We do not currently have adequate research or data on the extent to which DoOO is being used and, more importantly, about its impacts on teaching and learning.

## 6 Where is it going?

Since its inception, DoOO has been slowly but steadily gaining traction in academe. Going forward, DoOO is likely to gain wider adoption at more institutions. We may see the development of more apps for open-web building at colleges and universities. As communities of domains continue to grow, we may see more inter-institutional collaboration around DoOO. And as more faculty members experiment with DoOO, it might supplement or even take the place of learning management systems in significant ways.

## 7 What are the implications for teaching and learning?

DoOO has shown that it has deep capacity for engaging learners in larger, vital conversations about the way in which the web is shaping our world—politically, culturally, and creatively. Having a domain of one's own encourages students to think critically about their own place in the digital world and to envision themselves as active, empowered creators of the web. For faculty interested in emergent pedagogy, this model can stimulate creativity and encourage instructors to challenge themselves as they chart the path of a course. By providing a space that supports the practice and development of literacies that help educators and students be thoughtful digital citizens, DoOO creates a robust ecosystem in which learners and faculty can productively explore the creation of knowledge, the sharing of ideas, and participation in larger, interdisciplinary conversations.