

Piazza and MS Teams

A Functional Comparison

Introduction

Piazza announced that its discussion board will include contribution prompts to students if faculty use the basic features for free. Faculty will need to pay a fee for premium features - [polling](#), class [lock out](#), and [statistics](#) - or to remove the contribution prompts. For faculty looking for an alternative discussion tool, this document lists the functional characteristics that are common between Piazza and [Microsoft Teams](#), a communication platform freely available to all Johns Hopkins faculty and staff. Faculty can also explore the discussion board native to Blackboard.

List of Functionality

Legend for table:

✓ = Available ⚠ = Possibly Available ✗ = Not Available

Feature	Piazza	Teams	Notes on Teams functionality
LMS Integration	✓	⚠	Synced roster No grade or assignment integration
Q&A Student → Student	✓	✓	Openly through Channels Privately via Chat
Q&A Student → Instructor	✓	✓	Openly through Channels Privately via Chat or Private Channels
Q&A Anonymous → Any	✓	✗	Teams does not support students posting a question or response anonymously in context to a question thread.
Discussions	✓	⚠	Teams is good for discussions but there are limitations (see below).
Discussion Reactions	✓	⚠	Teams doesn't have specific Q&A related reactions such as Piazza's "Good Question", "Marked Correct", etc. Instructors could consider mapping the standard emojis with Q&A meaning.
Discussion Threads	✓	✗	Teams does not allow more than one level of reply to a post. You can organize things differently to work around it. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Channels by topic • Big Headers in a channel • Limit Channel posts to Instructor, students reply-only • Copy/paste a discussion to Word, then delete posts to keep things clean.
Share files	✓	✓	Teams offers a wider array of shareable media than Piazza
Polls	✓	✓	Single question polls can be created as posts using MS Forms app. Student replies can be set anonymously or not (see Analytics below), either reveals responses or not.

Feature	Piazza	Teams	Notes on Teams functionality
Polls multiple questions	✓	⚠	Longer polls asking more than one question can use Quiz feature/MS Forms. If anonymity is desired, a poll can be created in MS Forms that is not connected to the Roster/Member list. A link to the form can then be posted in Teams.
Announcements	✓	✓	Must use the @mention functionality to announce to the class
Analytics	✓	✓	Uses Insights app (activated by instructor). This is a granular feature that will show you the student's interaction with all content in Teams, even when (but not what) a student submitted to an anonymous poll. Statistics tool in Piazza is a premium, fee-based feature.
Mobile	✓	✓	Teams has a full featured mobile app for both Android and iOS as well as a desktop and web app. Much like Piazza, the mobile app allows for the same level of features.
LaTeX Rendering	✓	⚠	There is a "Math (Preview)" app you can connect with a Team site, but it is in Beta, and not robust. Limitation with how it displays the equations. Another way to approach it is to use MS Word's Equation editor, which allows for LaTeX, then copy/paste the rendered equation (results in an image that can flow with text).
Search/Finding Q&A	✓	✓	Very similar for both tools: a basic search across posts and threads. Teams advantage is it will search across all channels. Piazza search is specific to a course.

The case for Piazza

Piazza offers a streamlined interface for managing question and answer posts. For large courses, Piazza may be the most efficient for managing many types of questions and may further offer students more flexibility of interaction with the instructor through anonymous questions. The ease of the LaTeX implementation continues to set it apart from Teams, which is a sought-after feature for engineering and the sciences. There may be fees for using Piazza if faculty use premium features: [polling](#), class [lock out](#), and [statistics](#).

The case for Teams

On the other hand, Teams offers a more modern interface for communicating via posts and chat. It has the flexibility to share media of any type and for students to work collaboratively on files. It has a larger array of features than Piazza, allowing it to function as an online workspace, an alternative to our LMS, and supplemental meeting space for virtual breakout groups, which can lead to greater engagement. It has the added benefit of being tied to JHU's directory so students don't need to manage accounts and it is free for JHU through existing licensing. Teams can meet the basic need for asynchronous classroom communication, but if question anonymity, ease LaTeX rendering, and scalability are important, the workarounds listed above may be too cumbersome.