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Using Discord to Improve Student Communication, Engagement, and Performance

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Using Discord to Improve Student Communication, Engagement, and Performance

Best Teaching Practices Expo 2020

Teaching Practice and the needs it addresses

Discord is a proprietary freeware VoIP application and digital distribution platform designed for video gaming communities, that specializes in text, image, video and audio communication between users in a chat channel. Discord runs on Windows, macOS, Android, iOS, Linux, and in web browsers.

Using Discord, Instructors and Teaching Assistants (TAs) can interact and help a student at any time including outside of regular business hours with a student's homework assignment (Assignments were typically due at night). It also allows students to help each other while under the supervision of an instructor. Because the messages are kept in a public archive, other students can review them at their convenience to see if any information discussed may help them as well. This helps to prevent the same questions from being asked by multiple students to the instructor. While the Instructor and TAs receive alerts of interactions, or questions directed at them (using @mentions) they can choose to respond immediately or whenever they are available.

While UNLV Canvas and other discussion boards already allow public student interaction, the technology of message boards and threads is outdated and a very slow way to exchange information. Discord is essentially a public instant messaging system that allows a live discussion and exchange to happen with multiple messages exchanged per minute between potentially a large number of individuals. Finally, it also increases engagement and fraternizing between everyone involved due to it being very similar to currently popular social media systems and the gaming culture of Discord.

A: *Approximately how many times did you request help on discord (next question will ask how many of these times you actually received help)*

B: *Approximately how many times did you actually receive help on discord. (whether it was another student, TA, course instructor, or anyone else.*



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Evidence it benefits students

An experimental discord channel was created for four sections of the same class taught by the same instructor. After several months of usage a survey was conducted to measure the student's response to using Discord as an optional component to the class. Among the preliminary findings we found that 80.9% of the surveyed believed that their grade improved as a result of the discord. Furthermore, 98.5% of all surveyed responded yes to the question, "Do you think discord allowed you to receive help at times where you otherwise would not have been able to get help? (For example late at night before a deadline or in the early AM hours)." All in all, a total of 23 questions were asked and the among the responses, 98.5% of all students found that they enjoyed discord and would like to see it implemented in future classes as well.

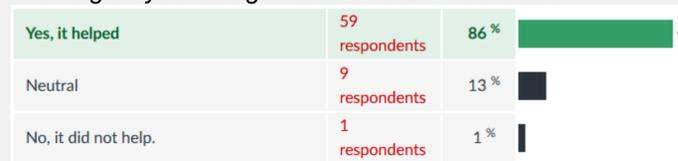
On a scale of 1-5 where 1 is very negative and 5 is very positive. How has the discord chat affected your engagement with the instructor? Compare it to classes that only offer office hours such as the CS135 class, did you feel friendlier or more engaged with the instructor through discord or not?



How other instructors might adopt this practice

While the class where the experiment was run was a programming class and the help provided in the discord channel was primarily programming related help, the same idea of engagement and help available around the clock can be applied to any doctrine where there is either required student interaction (to replace messaging boards) or where the student would otherwise have to wait to visit office hours or the tutoring center to receive help or clarification on a specific subject. Whether it's in the English department and student needs help writing a paper, or the math department where the student needs help understanding a formula or the Art department where the student can share his creation, receive critique and comment to improve the piece, or even the hard or soft sciences where a student may need help on a concept. Discord can be applied to all of them.

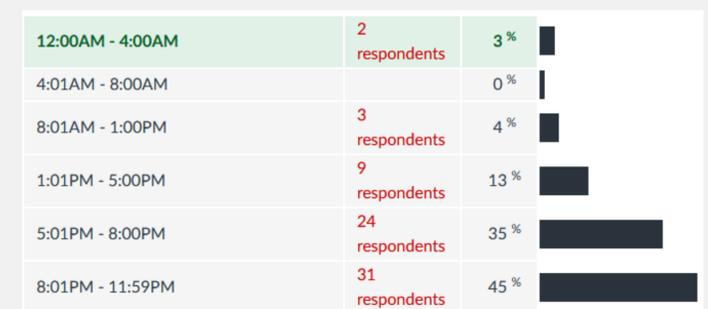
Do you feel the Discord allowed you to have access to help working on your assignments on a 24/7 schedule?



What times were you actively seeking help on discord? (select all the times that you were active on the discord channel at least once receiving some form of help or reading other student's messages that helped you. Even if once.)



What times were you MOST active on discord seeking help?



Feasibility, Resources and where to find them

- Discord (<https://discordapp.com>) is available for free and can be run directly on an internet browser, or downloaded to any computer or phone.
- To create a server one can follow many non-technical tutorials available on their official website. Once a server is created, multiple text or voice channels can be created for different sections or topics as desired. Feel free to contact me for assistance.
- Servers are free to create and maintain. They will not incur any cost aside from any compensation TAs or Instructors may receive for their time responding to messages. Because most TAs have office hours they can simply have discord open and respond to questions there just like they usually do with e-mail and log time spent towards their weekly working limits.
- Slack (<https://slack.com>) is another similar system that is less popular with students, but achieves similar interactions. There are more options out there, but Discord was chosen due to its high popularity and ease of use.
- Contact Author for a copy of the full survey results.

References

Guthrie, John T. "Teaching for literacy engagement." Journal of literacy research 36.1 (2004): 1-30.

Purvis, Alison, Helen Rodger, and Sue Beckingham. "Engagement or distraction: The use of social media for learning in higher education." Student Engagement and Experience Journal 5.1 (2016).