

Hunter College - CSCI 77800: Ethics and Computer Science - Professor Topher Mykolyk
Weekly Assignment – Day 2 – Thursday, September 10, 2020 – Kenneth Chung

Topic: Education Apps & Privacy

App / Website: **Discord**

Motivation:

Our school is considering a platform to facilitate a student forum / discussion board to improve communication and community. Discord offers teachers the ability to set up “servers” for each of their classes and different channels in each server to facilitate different types of conversations (i.e. – classwork, homework-help, group-work, etc.). There are text channels and voice channels. The text channels support text, images, emojis, and file attachments. The voice channels use VoIP and also allow video and screen sharing. Participants in your server are added by invite only and there are tools in place that allow you to moderate content and language on your server. Discord was originally created to support communication for online gaming groups so it also has a friendly UX. It easy to navigate between different servers (classes) and the channels on those servers.

Research:

I created an account on Discord.com to see what information and agreements were transparent while signing up. They only asked for a birthday to confirm age (at least 13 years old) and an email to confirm your account with. You have to find the rest of the fine print under: <https://discord.com/terms> and <https://discord.com/privacy>.

Review:

Discord is a popular communication platform that emphasizes community. To sign up students, parents, and teaching staff should understand that information is collected and used by the company. At the moment, the company claims that they only use the data to improve services. The company initially made money through fund raising and now has premium “Nitro” features that users can pay for to customize their Discord experience. They also sell company merchandise to make a profit.

Data the company collects and stores on its databases includes:

- Your date of birth to confirm you are at least 13 years old
 - But I don't think it is unethical to put in a different birthday with the same year for some privacy.
- An email to connect to your account
 - But we will only be using our school email; not our personal accounts.
- IP Addresses and Device IDs
- Texts, images, "transient" VoIP – This is where things get dicey.
 - This is good because:
 - We don't have to maintain our own servers and we have access to all the information on their database in the cloud from anywhere.
 - We have no out-of-pocket cost.
 - It shouldn't be a problem because we will only be using the platform for education purposes. Students should not be posting any personal information.
- Discord can also be connected to Facebook and Twitter, in which case information from those accounts may be obtained, such as friends and contacts - but we will not be doing that at our school.
- *Collected data is retained indefinitely. You may request to see the personal data that Discord has on you.

Who else might have access to this data besides the company?

When you interact with us through the Services, we receive and store certain information such as an IP address, device ID, and your activities within the Services. We may store such information or such information may be included in databases owned and maintained by affiliates, agents or service providers. The Services may use such information and pool it with other information to track, for example, the total number of visitors to our Site, the number of messages users have sent, as well as the sites which refer visitors to Discord.

Source: <https://discord.com/privacy>

- The company works with other affiliates – some whose services they use and others who are trying to integrate the Discord platform into their own services. Our data may be visible to those affiliates.
- "Advertising platforms ... may collect information for optimizing advertising campaigns outside the Service."
 - Note that there are no ads on the Discord platform.
- Information may also be shared if a legal issue arises.

Conclusion:

Discord's terms and privacy policy are relatively short and clear to understand. As a parent, I would be comfortable if my child used the platform to communicate with their teachers and peers. As a student, I may be reluctant to use the app because it is yet another thing I have to check during the day on top of email, Google Classroom, etc., but I would not be concerned about privacy. Discord actually has some good Community Guidelines and have been known to issue warnings to violators and delete content and accounts when abused. They seem to be doing their best to make the platform as safe as possible. The only users on our class server will be the teachers and students in our class. This is a good way to help foster good online practices and community for our students. The data the company collects is no different from any other app or online service we all use and they will only be getting school related data.

I actually think I'm going to give it a try this semester (even though you can't reply directly to a message like in Slack).