

Alexis D. Torres
Prof. Christopher Mykolyk
Ethics and Computer Science
Hunter College, CUNY

10 September 2020

<https://slack.com/trust/privacy/privacy-policy>

Given the extreme communication needs in this new dynamic, yet restricted learning environment, I have decided to use the Slack productivity application. While this application is not yet approved for use by the NYCDOE, I am comfortable using it with my students for the numerous capabilities it offers, its ease of use both within a browser and as a standalone application, and because it has a very low learning curve. After reviewing the privacy policy for this application, I am more confident that I made a good choice. This is not to say that Slack represents a perfect platform that fulfills all my wishlist items for safe and private student use, but it checks off enough proverbial boxes to allow me to deem it “satisfactory”.

STUDENT DATA: COLLECTION

Slack collects all data a student provides when they initially sign up. This includes name, email, organization, etc. It also collects services metadata to understand how a student is using the services offered by the company (i.e. when, how often, to do what). The company can collect data from third parties affiliated with a student’s use of the product. Finally, it collects information on the browser, location, IP address, and device that the student is using. They collect information using cookies.

STUDENT DATA: ACCESS & DURATION

Slack intimates that it is the sole holder of and manager of student data (in addition to the user themselves). However, a close read of the policy reveals that they do indeed share student data with third parties for various reasons. They use the data to customize the user's experience, to update security settings, and to maintain its services (including using data for profitable purposes). According to the company's policy, the data is held for as long as the user permits, laws permit, and under certain circumstances, "Slack may retain other information pertaining to you for as long as necessary for" purposes in the policy. Therefore, they can technically keep some student data for as long as they wish.

STUDENT DATA: READABILITY & COMFORT WITH USE

The EULA for this application is quite accessible. It is largely free of superfluous "big words" or labyrinth-like intra-document links. The document is also divided into sections and uses bolding of letters as necessary. The policy itself is not extraneous in length. This is a policy I think all my students can engage with and mostly understand. As a parent, I would be comfortable if my child used this application for school. I would have them use a particular computer with specific privacy settings to blunt some of the data collection the application does, but for the most part I am not overly concerned about their data collection and data use. I have similar views on the application in the capacity of a student.

Slack is a for-profit company. It exists to provide a marketable service and procure earnings from its use. Their privacy policy, regardless of how comfortable I am with it, is designed to collect as much data as legally permissible. They will use this data to make Slack

profitable. They are not concerned about protecting the user's privacy to the extent where they are only collecting basic bio data. Rather, like most web-based services, Slack is collecting everything and anything it can and will continue to do so. However, it is refreshing to see that unlike most companies, Slack does give its users relatively more control over its data than others.