

Using Discord to Facilitate Student Engagement

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Why Discord?

With the move to remote instruction, many students feel disconnected if there is no synchronous component, while others feel self-conscious about using WebEx as a group discussion platform, particularly if they have to turn on their camera.

Additionally, streaming platforms like WebEx do not yield a permanent record of the chat discussion. Instructors must rely on students taking notes or email them pertinent material afterwards.

Discord is a platform that originally came to prominence in video game communities for its adaptability and ease of use. Many students already have accounts and are adept users.

Incorporating a synchronous Discord element into your remote course will allow you to chat with students in real time and asynchronously, as they can leave messages that you can respond to.

Student Feedback

- "Easier to use."
- "I like being able to share links and images with the class."
- "Makes discussion fun."
- "Highlight of my semester—made me feel much more involved than my other online questions."
- "I look forward to our class discussions."

What Is Discord?

Discord (<https://discord.com>) is a free chat app incorporating text chat, voice, and video with a reported 250 million users that is accessible via a dedicated PC app, a mobile app, and a web app. (Hornshaw), enabling students (and faculty) to connect via multiple platforms.

Users set up "servers" to which they can invite users to participate, either for a limited period or indefinitely. Each server has multiple text and voice "channels," or chat rooms.

Discord provides a range of [safety features](#) that can enable a controlled chat environment that provides a space for respectful interactions between all participants.

Tips for Using Discord

- Create a **dedicated server** for each class
- Create **separate channels** for each week's discussion to facilitate students referring back to chat logs
- Create a dedicated "**Ask Me Anything**" server where students can post questions
- Install **Discord app** on your mobile device(s) to receive notifications of new comments/questions
- During chat sessions, **stream** camera and screen (lecture slides or other visuals)
- Choose either **text chat** or **voice** for class discussions
- Have students set their **screen names** to their real names
- Have a plan to assist students with **accessibility issues**

How It Benefits Students

The practice benefits students by letting them use a platform that many of them already use and which is to learn for those who haven't already used it. It is a way to help students feel involved while not putting too many technical demands on them. There is a small learning curve, and student feedback has been very positive.

One extant study indicates that the app's interface is "easy to grasp," and looking like a social media platform rather than a traditional learning management system is a plus (Alonso et al.). The platform's less-formal interface encourages student engagement by removing intimidating and off-putting elements. Indeed, it was believed to encourage synchronous discussion better than the "official" learning management software (Alonso et al.).

References

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