

Building a Learner Community: Interaction and Ethics

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Introduction

- The social aspect of the online learning environment can provide a sense of belonging that aids in learning and satisfaction. Careful evaluation and improvement of this needs to be persistent, as technologies and people's views change.
- "It is a lack of social interaction in online classes that is the biggest barrier to student success" (Glazier, 2021, p. 69).
- West et al. (2023) found that 53.4% of online students did not feel they were part of a learning community.
- Informality in some spaces bind students with common interests, for example, but there are concerns about the appropriate sharing of information, respect for others, and the need to feel safe.
- This session will investigate several aspects to consider in enhancing the social experience of online education.

Part 1

Building an Online Community

- Asynchronous Discussion Boards
- Communication in Community/Document Sharing Environments
- Live Seminars / Webinars
- Social Media Groups



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Asynchronous Discussion Boards

- Asynchronous discussion boards, because they are graded, ensure participation from almost all students compared to in-class, live discussions. The broader range of participation supports community building (Cooper, 2022).
- Use the asynchronous discussions as the foundation for synchronous seminars. This brings all student perspectives into the synchronous session. The discussion started in the discussion board continues in the synchronous session where students and faculty can speak or chat (Cooper, 2022).
- In the discussion board, students performed research and cited sources. They are well-prepared to discuss in a live session from an informed perspective (Cooper, 2022) increasing live participation from those who previously were uncomfortable speaking in the live session (Ackerman & Gross, 2021).

Asynchronous Discussion Boards

- Discussion topics must be engaging – relevant, timely topics (Barkley, 2018) – topics that include ethical issues or problems to be solved.
- Some examples:
 - Do you think remote work is here to stay, or do you think we'll see a return to more traditional office-based work arrangements in the future? Why or why not?
 - How does remote work affect the broader social and economic landscape? What ethical questions should we consider as we navigate this shift in the way we work and live?
 - **Answer in the Chat:** Write your idea for an engaging, relevant, and timely discussion question! Comment on those posted by others.

Asynchronous Discussion Boards

- Best Practices
 - Questions should be creative, engaging, and evaluative (e.g., evaluate a product, service, or process discussed in the readings).
 - Debate a topic (civil, respectful language only)
 - Create Discussion Board teams on weeks where team projects are in progress – constructive, collaborative discussion about the project)
 - Professors should add content links and ask probing questions to generate further discussion.
 - Link out from discussion board to a free tool like Padlet for creative entry of responses (Smith, 2019).

Asynchronous Discussion Boards

-Podlet

Susan Shepherd Ferebee + 21 + 6yr

Introduce Yourself

Click anywhere in the podlet to create a new entry. If you were an animated character, what would you be and why? Tell everyone your name and anything about yourself that you want to share.

Liam C

If I was an animated character, I would most likely be Usagi Tsukino: I've basically been given a power that I can't relate to because I'm basically the foil of what I should be with that power. And in case you were wondering, that power is actually making my ideas happen.

Justin K

If I were an animated character, I would be Kirito from the anime Sword Art Online. He is an overpowered character which aspires to have lots of fun.

Joshua S.

If I was an animated character, I would want to be Batman. This is because he is a superhero, but he has no powers, which separates him from most other heroes, because he can still save people without them.

Jacob S

If I was an animated character I would be Bill Cypher from Gravity Falls because he has god-like powers with a unique charm for everything he does.

Ijay N.

If I were an animated character, I would be Loki (he is also in animated Marvel shows), cause I think it is cool how he has multiple plans within a plan and is only deadly because of how tricky he is and not his powers.

Nicholas K.

If I were an animated character I would be a guardian from the video game destiny. Just how much detail and design that was put in the characters intrigue me a lot.

Cole L.

If I were an animated character, I would be Lightning McQueen from Cars, Because I am very competitive and good at getting in trouble.

Ally H.

If I were an animated character, I would be Alphys from Undertale, because I'm shy, a good friend, and I love things like cartoons, comics and movies.

Daniel N.

If I was an animated character, I would be Hiro from Big Hero Six. He has many fun adventures with Baymax and his friends and is very eccentric as well.

Leo Z.

If I was an animated character, I would be a lion because I want to be in the movie "The Lion King" (I really liked the movie).

Devin B

If I were an animated character, I would be Ethan from Pokemon Silver, because who wouldn't want to catch them all?

Camden W

If I were an animated character, I would be Vash from Trigun because he's funny and very out there at times quite like me. He also just wants everyone to be happy.

p.s. I also agree with Justin K's answer

Kalista C

If I were an animated character I would have to be a dragon. They are strong, brave, and can protect their selves through any harm that's thrown at them.

Jacob W

If I were an animated character, I would be the flash because I could explore anything I wanted and never get bored. Plus, I could be rich because I could easily be the best racer in the world.

If I were an animated character, I would be

Alex R.

If I were an animated character, I would be most definitely be Wall-e. Like Wall-e I am very curious and eager to learn new things, and crafts.

Anthony M

If I were an animated character, I'd be Totoro, because I enjoyed the Movie "My Neighbor Totoro." The adventures and actions he did in the movie seem really fun, and I'd like to be an indirect explorer/ adventurer like him

Asynchronous Discussion Boards

- Try Padlet for yourself: Click anywhere on the Padlet and tell us your name, where you are from, and what you are loving about the TCC2023 Conference.
- Click the link that I just put in the Chat.
- <https://padlet.com/ferebees/tcc2023-introduce-yourself-i5evx6vmm6c1w30z>

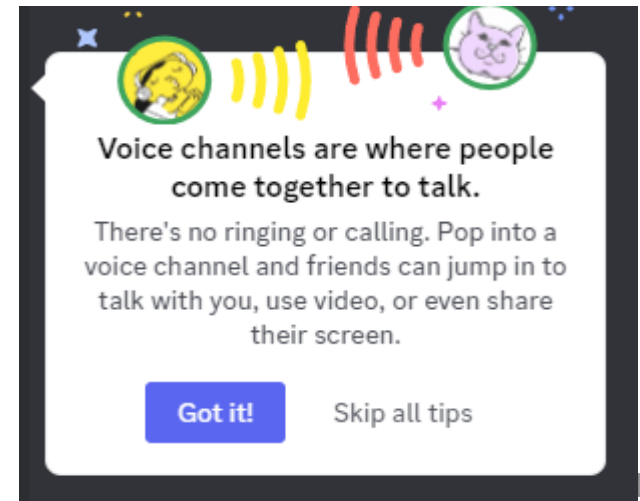
Communication in Community Environments (Discord/Slack)

- Bills (2021) found that online learning platforms lacked a sense of community, but Discord emerged as a tool that built informal social community.
 - Teams, Google Meet are more formal tools.
 - Students already use Discord as a social communication tool with friends
 - Outside of formal university system so avatars and preferred nicknames are used.
 - Instant voice/video/text

Dr. Susan's Discord Server

<https://discord.gg/2vHNMaF2>

Click the link I just put in the Chat



Communication in Community Environments (Discord/Slack)

- Discord, according to Bills (2021) required ongoing up-front work to build in social elements and introduce students to the platform. “However, after the initial effort, it didn’t take long until the community became self-sustaining, with a growth in peer support, informal discussions, and a true community vibe” (Final Thoughts).
- Benefits of Discord
 - Students are familiar with it and often already use it
 - Supports synchronous and asynchronous social communication and file sharing to suit all personal preferences.
 - A student meeting place that persists after a class ends – and after degree completion - fosters ongoing student friendship and connection (Barnad, 2020).

Communication in Community Environments (Discord/Slack)

- What do students like about Discord?
 - Discord can be used on all devices (smartphones, laptops, and PCs)
 - Status of other users is known so can choose a video or voice channel to communicate with those online in real-time
 - Variety of communication methods quickly available in a single environment (text chat, voice, video, screenshare, and file share).
 - Communicate one-to-one or one-to-many.
 - Social and school-related communication occurs in a single platform.
 - Students can create their own channels, monitored by professor (Barnad, 2020).

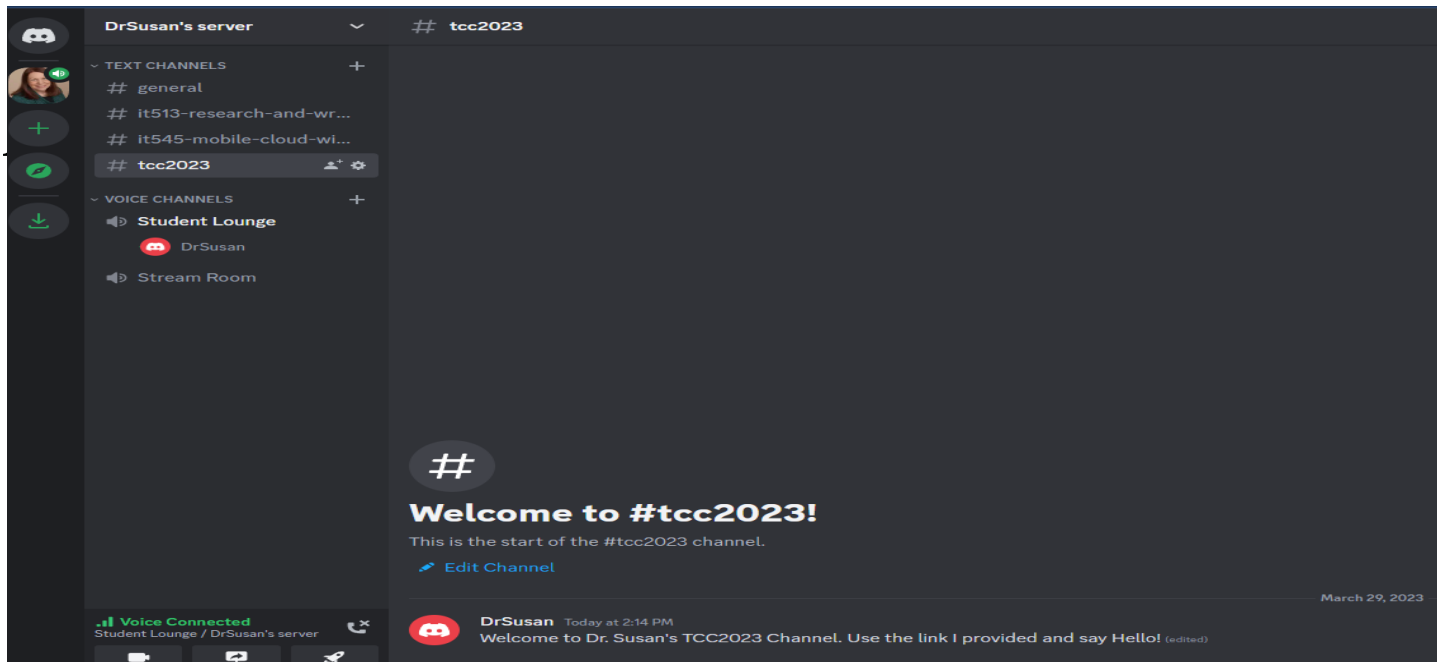
Communication in Community Environments (Discord/Slack)

- **Issues** with using Community Environments like Slack and Discord
 - The system is completely outside of the school's system
 - Students often create their own Discord channels and share prior assignment papers and exam questions.
 - Communication in an unsanctioned Discord channel might allow inappropriate behavior and conflict between students (McNamara & Zachmeier, 2021).
- If a professor creates a Discord channel for a class, the likelihood of student-driven channels might decrease.

Communication in Community Environments (Discord/Slack)

[TCC2023 Discord Channel](#)

Click the link I just posted in Chat. Add a “Hello” or “Welcome” message!



Discord Poll

- I am displaying a poll here in our meeting room.
- Please enter your response as to your comfort level in using a tool like Discord or Slack in your online class.

Live Seminars / Webinars

- **Synchronous**; not all students might be able to attend.
- Cunningham et al. (2021) affirm:
 - It is an opportunity for questions and immediate response.
 - All participants must be familiar with the technology.
- Importantly, it is a learning environment first and social environment second: "focused on the speed of understanding the concept optimally in a short time" (Ashar et al., 2021, p. 203).

[In contrast, webcasts are recorded videos. The value is in *showing* processes (Cunningham et al., 2021).]

Live Seminars / Webinars

- **Question:** Do you include "field trips" to short videos or interesting websites during your online seminars? Please answer in the chat about your experiences.
- **Field trip!** This link will be in the chat shortly.
<https://www.cmbell.com/blog/2017/4/26/internal-communication-infographic>
- Potential questions in a student seminar:
 - Which of these communication channels are missing at your workplace but could be valuable? (Content)
 - What comments can you share about how this page is laid out? (Design)

Live Seminars / Webinars

- **Screenshots** can help student visualize where to go or what to do. Below, it is combined with a "field trip" to the classroom.

The image shows a screenshot of a 'Resources' menu with four items: 'Course Calendar', 'QuickGuide: Using the Online Library', 'Academic Success Center', and 'Website with writing, APA info, formatting, more'. A yellow callout box points to the 'Course Calendar' icon, and a blue callout box points to the 'Website with writing, APA info, formatting, more' icon.

In the classroom, click "Click here for Unit 1 Information." Retrieve the course calendar and type "ok" in the chat

We are using **APA 7th edition** rules.

Live Seminars: Web cams or not?

- **Control:**

- In situations such as this conference, there may be a moderator as well as speaker, plus there is often a rehearsal (Cunningham et al., 2021). In the online classroom, only one person is in control and rehearsal may or may not be possible.

- **Fear, intrusion, and distraction:**

- Some people – including teachers – may have "Zoom dysmorphia," anxiety brought about by distraction about how we appear on camera (Schumer, 2022).
- While the occasional pet might be a welcome distraction, other life activities are not.
- Fears of being deepfaked are legitimate (Fudge & Williams, 2020).

Live Seminars / Webinars

- **Recommendations** from Topor and Budson (2020):
 - Determine session objectives first;
 - Make slides easy to read and understand;
 - Find ways to include interactivity;
 - Make sure you are comfortable with the technology and its features.
- **Additional ideas** and comments:
 - Consider the aforementioned webcam issues.
 - "Walk" students through a process.
 - Check links the day of the live session.
 - Do not read your slides.
 - Something didn't work well? Update for next time.

Social Media Groups

- **Benefits:**

- Sharing of creative ideas, source links, and images within a more conversational, comfortable atmosphere and with potentially instant and robust feedback from both professors and fellow students (Castello, 2021).
- Huston (2022) states that social media can enhance "moral education, empathy, and civil deliberation" (p. 122) with guidance on respecting others' views – plus a stronger connection to course content.
- Language learners benefit from reading and responding in social media (Anwas et al. 2020).
- Controlled social media may engage students more in course content (Rohr et al., 2022).
- Castello (2021) reported that a law school experiment using social media encouraged early assignment starts.

Social Media Groups

- **Potential Problems:**
 - Privacy of student personal data is a major concern (Castello, 2021).
 - Students may be resistant to use some social media (Rohr et al., 2022) – which may include not wanting to create new accounts.
 - Anything posted online without privacy protections adds to the user's digital footprint.

Social Media Groups

- **Question:** What social media accounts do you use, and would you interact with students using those current accounts? Why or why not?
- **Other observations:**
 - Private Facebook groups can be searchable.
 - Twitter feeds change quickly; it may be hard to find posts.
 - YouTube can be set to private access, but is really just a discussion board relating to uploaded videos.
 - LinkedIn is considered professional-level; profiles are often viewed by potential employers. Posts, however, are mostly like Facebook.
 - WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Pinterest, and Reddit may have limited value due to content types.

Social Media Groups

- **Recommendations:**
 - Choose social media carefully and consider what to do if students refuse to use it.
 - Be proactive in your own engagement there, both to keep contact with students and to stop any bad behaviors.
 - Castello (2021) suggests writing a policy for any use of social media required or promoted in courses.

Part 2:

Ethics and Inclusiveness

- Academic Integrity
- Comfort Level with Video and Images
- Respectful Communication Guidelines



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Academic Integrity

- **Some of the potential issues:**
 - Poor paraphrasing or patchwork copying
 - Copying from sources without citation
 - Misattribution
 - Contract cheating
 - Collusion
 - New: use of AI-generated content
- **Question(s):** What reactions have you gotten from students when they are told their work did not meet academic integrity standards? How can faculty response affect the learner community?

Academic Integrity

- "Academic dishonesty is not specific to online learning" (Casey et al., 2019, p. 269).
- Additional thoughts:
 - Learning environments must prioritize socially accepted principles over self-interest (Toprak et al. 2010).
 - Social media encourages sharing of content (Giroux & Moreau, 2022).
 - However, discussion and social media postings provide the instructor with writing samples of each student's style, which can be compared to other graded work (Casey et al., 2019).

Other Integrity Concerns

- Being online also has other potential social/ethical pitfalls that can affect a student's desire to participate:
 - Discomfort of video and images being shared – these can result in abuse of others through unwanted sharing, deepfakes, doxing, cyberbullying, and cyber-swatting (Williams & Fudge, 2020)
 - Zoombombing and data tracking (Fudge & Williams, 2020).
 - The need for monitoring netiquette due to the "psychological distance" of being online (Toprak et al., 2010).

Respectful Communication Guidelines

- Page and Vincent (2018) discuss the need to maintain a cognitive presence and a social presence in the online learning community.
 - Cognitive presence means the students continually engage in critical thinking and support assertions with research.
 - Social presence refers to expressing ideas online based on the belief that other students and faculty will respect your ideas and be supportive.
 - Every student and professor has the responsibility to create an environment where all students feel safe expressing themselves (Page & Vincent, 2018).

Respectful Communication Guidelines

- When communicating in an online forum or through email, the following best practices should be observed:
 - Create an informative title or message heading.
 - Use a formal, professional tone.
 - Ensure no spelling and grammatical errors exist.
 - The message should be concise and to the point but with sufficient detail, so the reader understands the content.
 - Respond to others with a positive and supportive tone. Use of formal language will help you avoid emotional or opinionated language (Page & Vincent, 2018).

Conclusion

Consider the tools available to you; experiment first so you can guide students appropriately, and make sure all choices are comfortable for everyone involved. Change can be good!

Thank you!

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