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Subject: Proposal for Determining Optimal Class Organization Practices on the Messaging and Communication App 'Discord'

Introduction

Discord is a popular messaging and communication platform commonly used in college courses to coordinate study sessions, get clarification from other students on homework problems, and otherwise provide a place where students can help each other excel in university classes. However, the Discord servers of many classes are poorly run and lead to frustrating (and academically risky) interactions between students who don't understand the platform or how it is intended to be used. What could be an extremely helpful tool for classroom organization and student organization is often mismanaged and creates less than optimal student outcomes.

Statement of Problem

Discord servers are typically created for an individual class, and exist as student-only spaces without the presence of professors or TAs. Because of this, Discord servers are sometimes venues for academic misconduct such as the sharing of test questions and other actions that can have severe consequences on students' academic careers. However, because useful and aboveboard class communication happens on the same platform, the level of risk is much higher — sharing test questions, for example, can put everyone in a class Discord server at risk, and Discord servers often hold most if not all of the students taking the class. This means that even if only one or two people are performing academic misconduct, an entire class could be affected negatively.

Proposed Solution

Removing the option for students to create Discord servers is both impossible and undesirable. Discord is a public platform unaffiliated with UBC, and beyond that it is good for students to have a place to connect without the pressure of a classroom setting. One possible solution is to create a standard list of rules and guidelines that get posted to all class Discord servers as a matter of course. Often, academic misconduct occurs not out of genuine malice or deceit, but from misunderstanding what is and is not appropriate conduct. Discord offers ways to create servers that require an agreement to rules before users can participate a space. Even a screenshot of UBC's academic misconduct policy (typically found in all syllabi) would suffice.

Scope

To assess potential avenues for creating a safer Discord atmosphere for student servers, I intend to pursue X areas of inquiry:

1. How do Discord servers with higher-stakes subject matter (political campaigns, workplace communications, etc) handle the potential release of sensitive material?

2. How closely do students read syllabi?

3. How well do students understand the borders of friendly assistance vs academic misconduct?

Methods

My primary sources will be interview-based. I am in contact with several moderators and leaders who run Discord servers focused on a variety of subject matter, including the manager for a Los Angeles city political campaign. I will also interview other UBC students who have created, run, and participated in class discords to gain a richer understanding of how students approach academic interactions on Discord.

Qualifications

I have led several Discord servers over my college career. Before I transferred to UBC, I was president of the GSA (Gender-Sexuality Alliance) Club at my previous institution, which had dozens of members and, due to the nature of the club, necessitated handling information with care. I also am an active participant in the Los Angeles Democratic Socialists Alliance Discord server, which coordinates group action on a large scale.

Conclusion

Discord servers are a fact of life for students in university classes, especially at UBC. Ensuring they are safe and supportive spaces where rules and policies are well-understood and students can gain assistance without jeopardizing their academic careers is extremely crucial. Once approved, I will begin research at once.