

Using *Discord* to Build Community Online

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Although my courses often involve individual assignments and projects, I have found that it helps when take steps to foster a sense of community among the students. It encourages them to help each other and inspire each other through a sense of common experience and purpose.

In addition to scheduling open labs one afternoon a week and using Blackboard Collaborate for live demo sessions and online office hours, I recently launched a class server on Discord, a voice and chat application that is hugely popular with online gamers. Originally started as a platform for communication among my online students, it quickly became a community that spreads across all of my courses.

It allows almost instant access to the instructor when students are having problems, with a real-time immediacy that email does not allow, and encourages students to communicate with each other, as well. Since the majority of my students already use Discord for playing multiplayer online games with friends, using it for class communication was a natural move.

There are several chat channels on the Discord server, catering to every course I teach. Each of these channels is accessible only by students who are in that course, and it allows them to post questions to the class about problems they are having. This means that **if I am not immediately available, someone else in the class might be able to answer that question instead**. It also allows us to discuss lessons as a group; students have a chance to share ideas and encourage creativity.

Besides the class-specific channels, there is also a channel for general discussion. This channel is open to students from all of my courses and serves as an online community. In it, we discuss games we've played, features that people have found fun or interesting, software we use for development, and chat about the game industry in general.

We establish a set of ground rules for the server, ensuring that all discussions are polite, upbeat, and appropriate, and students have respected them. This creates camaraderie and a sense of engagement that is otherwise difficult to achieve in class.



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