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SVIC Spotlight Film: Discord: A Modern Voice Service for a Modern Problem

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SVIC Project Summary
By: Hannah McCoy

The idea for our SVIC project stems from the good health and wellbeing United Nations Sustainable Development goals. Me and my partner wanted to focus our project on the mental health and wellbeing of students at UNH during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Our solution is to help UNH organizations reach out to more students and have easily accessible information about different clubs both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Discord is a messaging and video platform that allows anyone to make a server which allows the owner to invite certain people to be a part of a specific server. It also allows for leaders to make different video chat and messaging rooms for specific topics or people, so they are easy to access and keep all content organized. Lastly, Discord has a unique voice channel feature that let's server leaders create voice and video channels that have a specific purpose that members can go in and out of easily. Discord can also support a large number of people on the server and in voice chat, some people report having a voice chat with 500 people. Discord would be the suitable solution for students and student organizations at UNH because it offers more flexibility and customization for students using it and students running servers. Discord has a more centralized and customizable interface, as well as a larger server capacity than apps like Facebook and Messenger. For some background, the Discord app was originally created as a community messaging app for people who liked to play video games together. As time went on, and with the pandemic lockdowns in place, more people with all kinds of interests flocked to Discord as a way to communicate and meet new people. One concern brought to our attention was the meaning of the name of the app. People who have never heard of the app assumed the Discord name meant that it was a place for debate or discourse. That's an understandable assumption, but from my experience most people on Discord want to meet new people with similar interests. Sure some debate might take place, but Discord isn't formatted for or intended to be a place for debate, it's intended for people to build communities around shared interests.

Also, Discord would be more useful for the UNH community because, first of all, it's only one app versus Facebook and Messenger which are two separate apps that users have to have. Likewise, Discord offers more customization options with the voice channels, and different chat rooms all contained within a server. Whereas with Facebook, users can't create voice channels or different chat rooms, it only offers one place to post messages and information. Part of our idea is to have all student organizations on campus create their own Discord server, and for there to be a general UNH organization server, with different voice and messaging rooms dedicated to each club. A UNH club server would help new and existing students better connect with clubs at any point in the semester, and would allow students to talk to student leaders safely during the pandemic. In terms of post-pandemic life, Discord servers would continue to act as a central hub for organizations meeting information and updates. Interested students could also join a club's server to get a feel for what a club is about before going to a meeting. It also helps clubs be more accessible to commuting or online students, because they could use video or voice chat to be a part of the meeting even if they are not on campus.

In our interview process Lauren, the student leader of the Fia-Chait Irish Dance club voiced concern about syncing dance music up with video on Discord, if the mode of operation at UNH changed. I think this is a valid concern, Discord might not work as well for clubs that need to meet in person, but it does offer a way for members to communicate with each other about club happenings and post videos of a dance that people could learn on their own. Also, Discord

can act as a sort of archive for organizations, and Fia-Chait could post videos of stretches or dances as a reference for members that missed a meeting and don't want to fall behind. Part of our implementation plan is to teach organization leaders how to set up a Discord server through a how-to video. Discord is an accessible free app that anyone can download and set up a server, chat rooms, and voice channels. Me and my partner will walk through the steps of setting up a server for a reference point for club leaders if they have questions or concerns about the app. In terms of getting the word out about Discord, each student organization already has a WildcatLink page with leaders' emails and contact information, so it would be easy to implement a link to each club's server on the page. We would also talk to student clubs about spreading the word about their server to club members and encourage them to start sharing the link on flyers and notices so the word gets around.

This is a necessary solution for the UNH community because, as it stands right now UNH has a lot of club advertisements in the beginning of the semester, but after U-day it's mostly up to the clubs to advertise events and meetings themselves. This makes it harder for all students who want to engage in clubs towards the middle or end of the semester. Also, joining a new club can be intimidating for some people, so joining a club Discord server before attending a meeting can help alleviate some anxiety about joining a club later in the semester. Lastly, the general UNH club server will help the student body find out information about clubs a lot easier. If every club had its own voice channel in the general UNH Discord server, students would be able to find information about all clubs in a central place, instead of every club using their own different form of communication. Overall, our project aims to help students better connect with one another both during the pandemic and after.

During our SVIC class presentation, the three judges brought up some ideas about how we could improve and expand upon our project idea. One of the main concerns they had about our project is that they wished we did a little more with it and proposed an idea for our own app or found a way to put more of our original ideas/creations into the project. I understand where they were coming from and I also had my doubts about our proposed solution throughout this project. So with that in mind, in order to use their critique to better our idea, we would have to do some research into app development and coding because I know nothing about that. We would also have to think about what types of features that our app would have and why the features were better than any other app already out there. This new solution is possible, it would just take a lot of reworking in terms of researching app development and desirable features. The judges gave helpful and interesting critiques that me and my partner will take into account if we decide to submit our project to the real SVIC contest in the fall.