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Slack Course Workspace Recommendations, Tips & Tricks

Timberley Barber - 2023-08-31 - Comments (0) - Slack Course Workspaces

Brown supports several digital discussion platforms (Canvas Discussions, Ed Discussion, Harmonize, and Slack); why choose Slack over another option? Slack excels at enabling informal, synchronous and asynchronous conversations that are not assigned or graded. It serves as an open communication arena for you and your students.

Interested in learning more about how to use Slack in your course? Consider the following tips to help you get started. For those brand new to Slack, you may also want to review Slack's getting started guide.

Canvas and Slack Course Workspaces

- **What is the relationship between academic course Canvas Sites and Slack Course Workspaces?**
  - Each academic course taught at Brown can get a Canvas site; each Canvas site can have one associated Slack Course Workspace.
  - Users with the role of teacher or TA in a Canvas site can enable and create the associated Slack Course Workspace. (See How to create a Slack Course Workspace.)
  - Slack Course Workspaces are linked to the Canvas site's course roster to control membership. (See the articles on Canvas / Slack Course Workspace Role Mapping and Slack Course Workspace Permissions.)
  - All users must access the Slack Course Workspace the first time by going through Canvas. (See How to join a Slack Course Workspace.)
  - Once a user has initially joined the Slack Course Workspace (via Canvas), future communications can be accessed directly through Slack without having go to Canvas. (Users can still use the Slack button in Canvas, but it is not required.)
- **What is the difference between Workspaces, Channels, Threads, and DMs?**
  - **Workspace** - A Workspace is a hub where participants (instructors, TAs, and students) can communicate and work together. A Workspace can contain one or more channels. Users with the role of teacher or TA in the Canvas site will have administrative access over the Slack Course Workspace to modify settings and create channels.
  - **Channel** - Channels are where collaborative communication takes place. Channels can contain one or more message threads. Channels can be created

as *public* (all participants in the workspace can join/view) or *private* (only participants of the workspace who are invited to that channel can join/view). NOTE: By default, all Workspaces begin with 2 public channels: #general and #random.

- **Threads** - Threads are posts within a channel. Threads typically will have the initial message along with replies that are "threaded" together.
- **DMs** - DMs (or Direct Messages) are messages sent to a specific user (or selected individual users up to 8 people).

Slack Course Workspace - Recommendations, Tips & Tricks

Workspace Setup

- Give your Slack Course Workspace a custom icon to help distinguish it from other Workspaces you and your students may be members of.
- Review the settings for you Workspace. You may want to consider limiting some permissions for members (students) in your Workspace. Some settings you may want to consider:
    - Consider changing channel permissions on some channels if you do not want anyone other than Workspace Admins (teachers/TAs) to post/comment
    - Determine whether or not you want allow users to edit/delete their own posts, and if so, how long they have to do so. The default allows users to edit/delete any of their posts at any time.
- Rename existing channels and/or create new custom channels that meet your course communication needs. Use pre-fixes on channel to help organize and distinguish your channels In the context of academic courses, an instructor might create:
    - **Public Channels:**
        - #course-announcements (for announcements from instructors down to students)
        - #course-logistics (for information about how the course will run, how Slack will be used, etc...)
        - #course-faqs (for students to ask - and answer! - questions about the course and course content)
        - ***TIP:*** When creating public channels, you can set them to be a default public channel - which means all new users that join your workspace will automatically be added to the public channel. If it is not set to a default, you users will need to manually join each public channel.
    - **Private Channels:**
        - #staff-communication (for communicating between instructors and TAs)
        - #group-*groupname* (for groups doing team/group work to communicate with each other)
        - ***TIP:*** When creating private channels, you can send invitations to

people to join your private channel by @mentioning them.

- For each channel you create, set the topic/description of the channel to describe the intention for that space.
- Posting (and pin) an initial message in each channel with welcome information.
  - *Advanced Options:*
    - Consider using workflows to make sure that newly joining members get custom welcome messages to your channels!
    - Consider using Slackbot for announcements, reminders, or quick responses to common questions.

Personal Settings

- Consider adding a picture to your profile.
- Create Sections to help organize the channels in your Workspace. Your sections are only visible to you - and will not be visible to other participants in the Workspace.
- Set your personal notification settings:
  - **Recommendations:**
    - Set up your Notification Triggers to notify you about only **Direct messages, mentions & keywords**.
    - Set up a Notification schedule - this will quiet your notifications during your "off hours." Notifications received during your "off hours" will be collected, saved, and will be visible when you next log into Slack.
    - Set your Slack status - let your students know when you are available to chat or when you are on vacation and should not be disturbed. You can also create additional custom status as desired!
  - *Note about Slack notifications:* Profile notification settings are set and applied as the default notification preferences for all of your workspaces and channels on all devices (you can opt to allow different default preferences for mobile devices). You can set additional, more granular notification preferences on a channel by channel basis as needed.

Preparing Your Students For Slack

- Notify your students about your intentions and expectations for Slack. What will you share in Slack? How often/when will you respond to messages? Will Slack replace other modes of communication? What will happen if a participant writes something inappropriate?
- Create and share an etiquette guide for your Slack Course Workspace. You may want to include comments about professionalism when responding to each other.
- Draft a legend for your students about common icon/emoji use in your workspace. Identify what emojis should be used to agree/disagree with a post, which indicate that you (as the instructor/TA) approve or endorse a post, etc.

Other Recommendations

- If a channel is getting too noisy and you are receiving too many notifications, you can temporarily "mute" the channel.
- Host your office hours through Slack + Zoom integration.
- Slack does not integration with the Canvas Grades area and therefore should not be used for graded activities. Continue to use Canvas or other third-party tools that are integrated with Canvas Assignments/Grades.
- Slack Course Workspaces will be archived after 5 years to match University retention policies. For this reason, do not try to reuse Slack Course Workspaces for collaboration beyond the semester in which it was created.
- Create User Groups in your Slack Course Workspace to create groups of users that you can @ mention all at once. An example might be for courses with a lot of TAs - create a TA user group so you can just use "@tas" to send notifications to all of your TAs at once.   If your Canvas site has multiple sections in one site, consider making user groups for your sections so you can use "@s01" or "@s02" to send targeted notifications to each section.

   TIP: If you plan on using User Groups, wait until the end of Shopping Period to create them so that you only have to manage the members of the group once.

Resources
- Slack Course Workspaces (via Canvas)
- How to create a Slack Course Workspace
- How to join a Slack Course Workspace
- Canvas / Slack Course Workspace Role Mapping
- Slack Course Workspace Permissions
- Adding Other Members to a Slack Course Workspace
- Slack Course Workspaces and FERPA
- Slack Course Workspace Recommendations, Tips & Tricks
- Slack Help Center

Need Additional Help?

- For help with Canvas, please contact dld@brown.edu.
- For help with using Slack, please contact Brown's OIT Service Center.

Related Content

- Request or Create a Slack Workspace