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Discourse Community Project, Final Draft

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Discourse Community Project

Abstract:

At the University of California, Davis, abundant communities are available to students for different academic interests, entertainment, sports, identities, and many other aspects, where students can easily network with those who share similarities with themselves. In this project, the Pre-Pharmacy Club at UC Davis, a typical academic and pre-professional community, is analyzed as a discourse community by observing the club's public website and official social media. This community is composed of UC Davis students and alumni who intend to apply to a Pharm.D. (Doctor of Pharmacy) program and are interested in a pharmacist career. The project is focused on analyzing the common goals and mechanisms of communication among the community members. By researching on published academic articles about similar communities and observing the club's Discord server and public media, it is found that the club is composed of members who want to be more competitive Pharm.D. applicants and uses the official Discord server and club events like office hours and social activities as communication mechanisms. Discord messages, webpages, and event posters are common genres of this community.

Background:

As defined by Melzer (2020), a discourse community is usually referred to as a group of people with identical goals, communication mechanisms, genres, and lexis. In this paper, the

discussed discourse community is the Pre-Pharmacy Club at UC Davis. This community is composed of pre-pharmacy students from UC Davis current students and alumni. They are students who plan to apply to Pharm. D. programs to become pharmacists, which is also their common goal. Previous research found that living-learning communities might help pre-pharmacy students succeed with improved persistence, retention, and progression (Vincent et al., 2021). Though this club is not a living-learning community because those students do not live together, this discourse community may similarly help improve their success through idea exchanging and resource sharing. The club's basic communication mechanisms are chatting on the Discord server and other club events, such as office hours, R&E seminars, and social activities, which are analyzed in this project.

Methods – Analyzing the Club Website and the Social Media:

To analyze the common goal, communication mechanisms, and genres of the Pre-Pharmacy Club at UC Davis, the club's official website, Instagram posts, and Discord channel were observed. The observed web pages included the homepage, the club introduction page, and the event list page. The homepage showed the common features and the common goal of the members; the introduction page showed more details about the common goal, activities, and available resources of the club; and the event list page showed more specific types of club events and what would happen during those events. Some posts of the club's official Instagram account also showed the details of the events, reflecting the members' activities and common goals. The Discord channel showed daily communication in the club via online messages.

Results and Discussion:

The common goal of the community members

The common goal of the members in the Pre-Pharmacy Club at UC Davis was analyzed by observing the club website – including the homepage and the introduction webpage – and information of a specific event. The members’ general common goal is consistent with the expectation for pre-pharmacy students, which is getting larger chances to be admitted to a pharmacy school.

The homepage states “Find out about our upcoming events, how you can be better prepared for pharmacy school, and what it means to be a pharmacist” (Pre-Pharmacy Club at UC Davis, n.d.c). This source directly reveals the common goal of the very most members – they are preparing for studying in pharmacy schools to become a pharmacist, which is the goal upon which pre-pharmacy students are defined. This evidence is also consistent with the information from the club introduction page. The introduction page includes phrases like “tools and knowledge necessary to be admitted to a pharmacy school” and welcoming sentences like “we welcome students from all backgrounds who are interested in learning about a health profession that is rewarding and challenging” (Pre-Pharmacy Club at UC Davis, n.d.a). Both two sources mention that the club members generally want to be admitted to a pharmacy school and get into a health profession. Therefore, these two sources agree on this topic.

Additionally, an Instagram post from the club’s official account also supports this common goal. The Pre-Pharmacy Club at UC Davis (2022) posted a poster of the event *UCSF*: “Pre-Pharmacy Student Q&A Panel,” where the club members could virtually meet with UCSF's current pharmacy students and ask questions about Pharm.D. studies. The members could know more about the life and characteristics of those Pharm.D. students to better know whether this career would be suitable for them and what students those pharmacy schools want. In this way, the discourse community members would better know how to prepare for this application to be

stronger applicants. Thus, this source also implies that the members hope to be more competitive in Pharm.D. applications, which is consistent with the website information analyzed before.

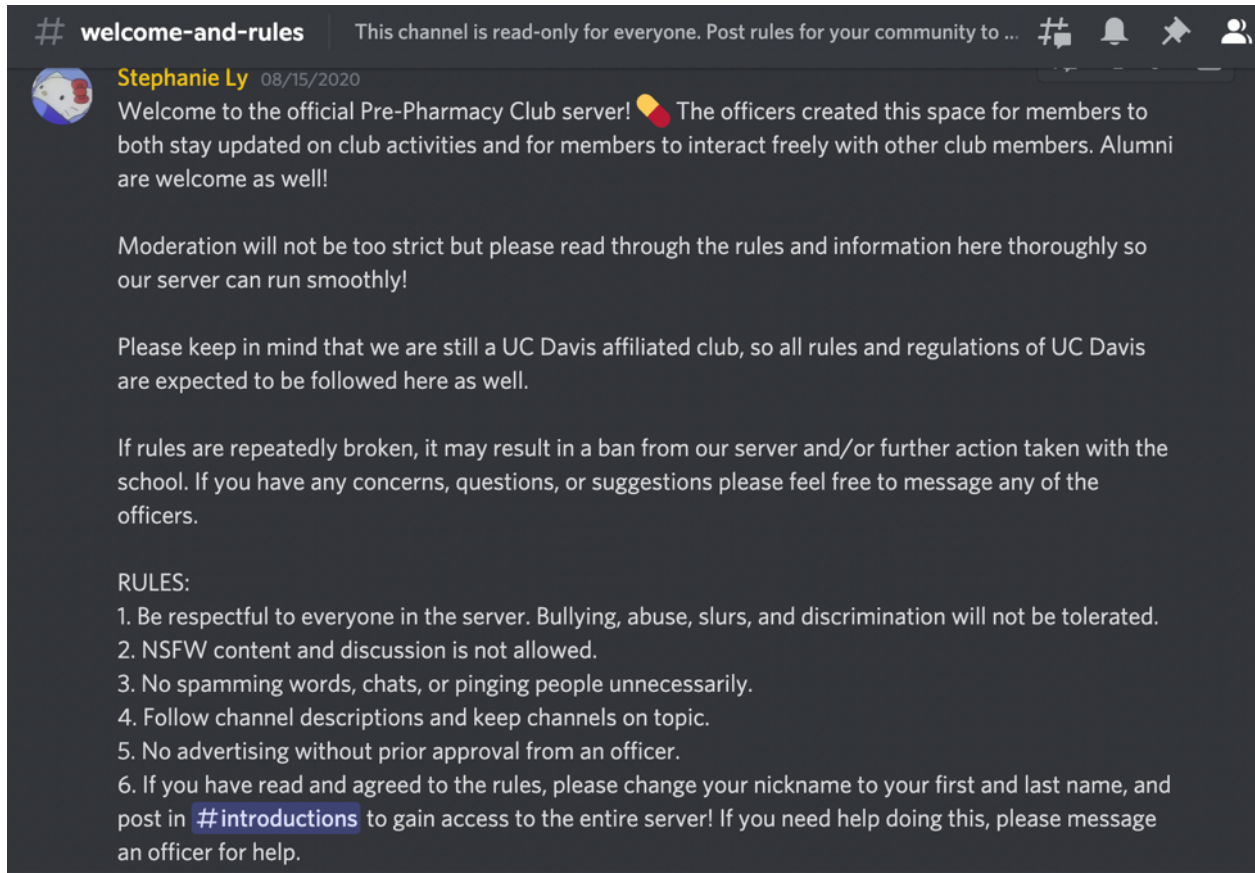
Mechanisms of intercommunication

Text messages on the club's Discord server, office hours, and "Duo with Friends Virtual Social" activities are common mechanisms of communication in the community.

Chatting on the club's Discord server is the primary communication mechanism among members and officers. On the club website's homepage by Pre-Pharmacy Club at UC Davis (n.d.c), a link to the club's Discord server is provided to the public, and students who want to join the club can join the Discord server via this link to receive the club's announcements and chat with other members. On the server, club officers can easily reach out to all members and send announcements. For example, as shown in **Figure 1**, the welcoming message for new members included welcoming words and a list of club rules (Ly, 2020). The welcoming words were used to engage the new members so that they could start their club experience, and the rule statement informed the new members what they should and should not do, which helped the officers manage the club. Also, the message could create a sense of belonging when it really engaged those new members and made them aware of what they can and cannot do, so this welcoming message is significant in the running of this club. Also, Musat (2022) also sent a message in the "off-topic channel" to ask for information about a bread club, which was an example of communication among the community members using this Discord server. Therefore, this mechanism helps maintain the daily casual conversations among members and the communication between members and officers and thus strengthens the bonding in the community.

Figure 1

The welcoming message was sent by Ly to new members on the Discord server.



Note. The image was a screenshot taken from the Discord server of the Pre-Pharmacy Club at UC Davis. The message was the club administrator's welcoming message (Ly, 2020).

Besides chatting via social media, club events are also common communication mechanisms. According to the event list page by the Pre-Pharmacy Club at UC Davis (n.d.b), During office hours, participating members can ask their questions, and officers would get their confusion clarified to help them perform better in the preparation for Pharm.D. applications. In activities like "Duo with Friends," members can virtually meet each other and play games like Uno for social purposes (Pre-Pharmacy Club at UC Davis, n.d.c). The relaxing interaction could strengthen the bonding in the community. These mechanisms help members benefit from the

club activities, making them know more about how to become stronger Pharm.D. candidates and maintaining networking among members by encouraging them to meet each other in person.

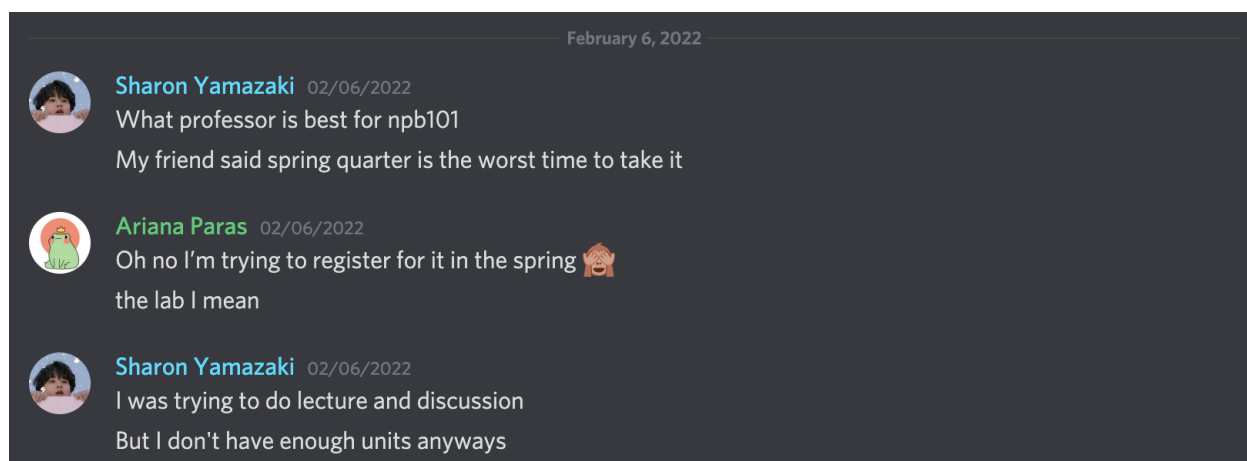
Common genres of this discourse community

Common genres of the Pre-Pharmacy Club at UC Davis include Discord messages, the club website, and event posters.

Discord messages are a common genre in the club, which is characterized by short sentences and casual tones. Since daily communication is usually based on social media, Discord messages are a frequently used genre. In **Figure 2**, as illustrated by the Discord conversation about NPB 101 professors at UC Davis, the messages are brief, and the uncapitalized course number “npb 101,” the abbreviation “I’m,” and the emotional expression “Oh no” showed the informal writing style because these grammar mistakes and emotional features would not occur in formal paper writing (Paras, 2022, February 6; Yamazaki, 2022, February 6a, 2022, February 6b, 2022, February 6c). Many chatting conversations that occur every day in the Discord channel are similar to these messages. Therefore, the informal and short Discord messages are a common genre in this community. Also, text messages are familiar to almost everyone and do not need specific study before use. Therefore, everyone in the club can be involved in online discussions via this genre, which enhances the bonding among members and thus strengthens the cohesion of the discourse community.

Figure 1

A conversation between club members about NPB 101 professors.



Note. This image was a screenshot taken from the club Discord server. The conversation was between the member Yamazaki and Paras (Paras, 2022, February 6; Yamazaki, 2022, February 6a, 2022, February 6b, 2022, February 6c).

The club website is also a common genre that is characterized by a more formal language and the use of visuals. For example, the club introduction page by the Pre-Pharmacy Club at UC Davis (n.d.a) includes the phrases like “tools and knowledge,” “lasting relationships,” and “mutually uplifting experience” in the first paragraph. These words are more intellectual, formal, and advanced than the words in the Discord messages. Since this club is a pre-professional club, it needs a professional, academic public image to make pre-pharmacy students trust and join this club, which explains the purpose of being formal on the website. In contrast, texting messages are used in daily communication among members, so texting can be less formal to relax each other. Also, there are four images of the club’s events, which correspond to the four main sections on the website (Pre-Pharmacy Club at UC Davis, n.d.a). The images help beautify the webpage and illustrate the discussed contents with visuals to attract readers. The website is usually viewed by the non-member students who may consider joining the club, so this is also a typical genre of this community. By presenting detailed information about club activities, formal

and knowledgeable writing styles, and other engaging elements, the website could better attract non-member students to join the club.

Event posters are a genre that often occurs on social media like the Discord server and the official Instagram account, which are used to propagandize the club events and attract more members to participate. This genre often includes the club logo, design elements like colors and patterns, emotional language expression, activity information like time and location, and some other possible engaging elements. For instance, the poster for the event “UCSF: Pharmacy Student Q&A Panel” includes all these elements (Pre-Pharmacy Club at UC Davis, 2022, February 6). In this case, the exclamation mark in the text in the poster is an emotional element, and almost all of the typical poster elements mentioned above occur on this poster. The same pattern is also followed by many other event posters of this club, which makes this genre general in this community. By making the poster more engaging with activity details, more club members would be attracted by the posters, informed of the coming events, and engaged to participate in the events organized by the club officers.

Conclusion:

In this project, the Pre-Pharmacy Club at UC Davis is chosen as the discourse community for analysis. By observing the chatting in the club’s Discord server, the club’s website, and official social media, this discourse community is found to consist of members with a common goal of becoming more competitive in their Pharm.D. applications. Community members usually communicate via messages on the Discord server and club events such as office hours and “Duo with Friends Virtual Social” activities, and common genres include Discord messages, webpages, and event posters.

This project is mainly focused on analyzing the communication among members of this discourse community. However, the effects of this communication on the members are not fully examined. As mentioned by Vincent et al. (2021), living-learning communities can enhance the performance of undergraduate first-year pre-pharmacy students in terms of their retention, persistence, and progression. The Pre-Pharmacy Club at UC Davis is not a living-learning because members do not live close, but this club may have similar effects on those pre-pharmacy students by enhancing their interaction. The existence and strength of these effects of this club may be examined more scientifically in future research to conclude about the help of this community on its members.

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