Using Slack for Communication & Collaboration in the Classroom

Albert Y. Kim
@rudeboybert
Symposium on Data Science & Statistics
Bellevue WA
Thursday May 30, 2019
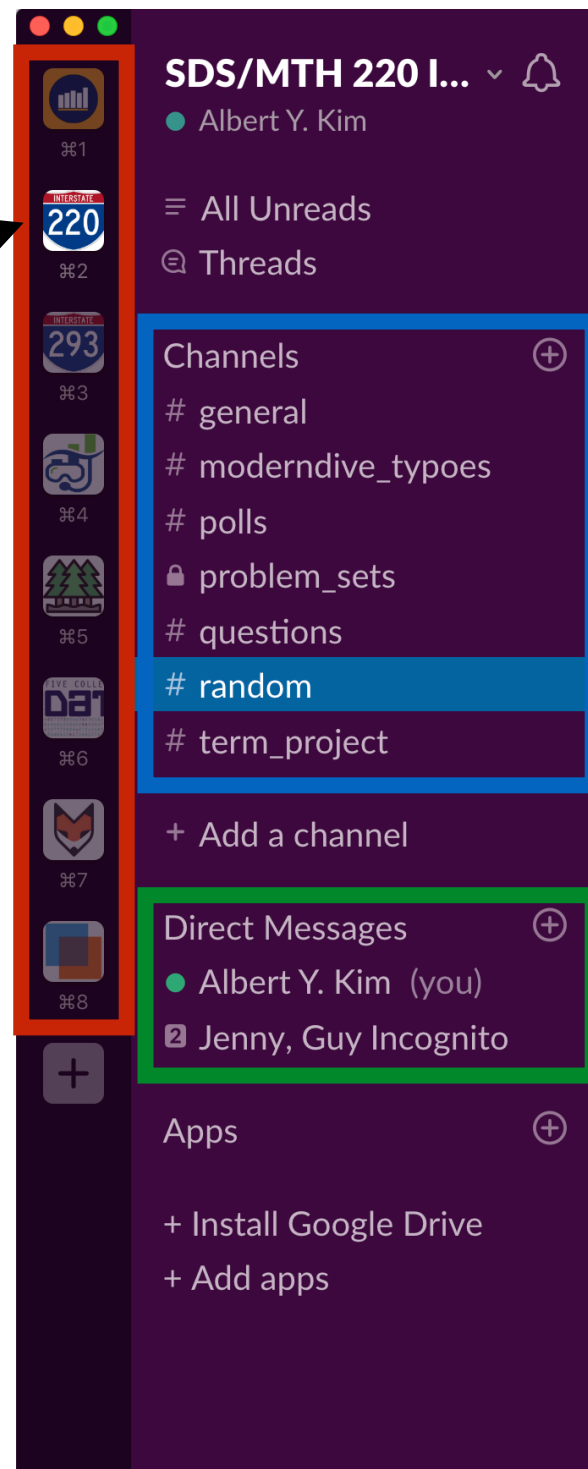
What is Slack? Answer via HBO

Components of Slack

Workspace:
Think *projects*

Within 220 Workspace:

1. Channels:
Think *forums* (public & private)

2. Direct Messages:
Think *group texts*
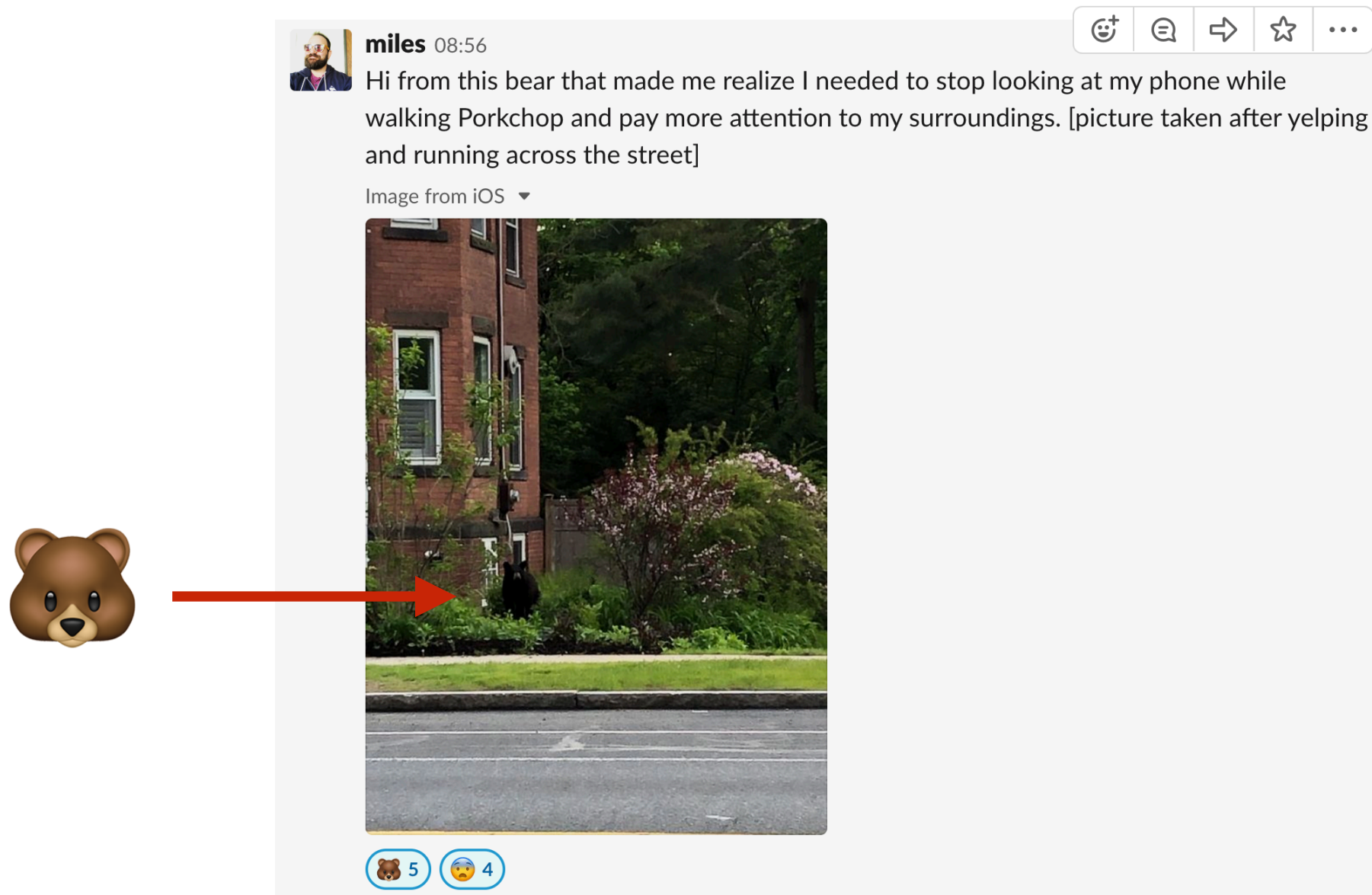

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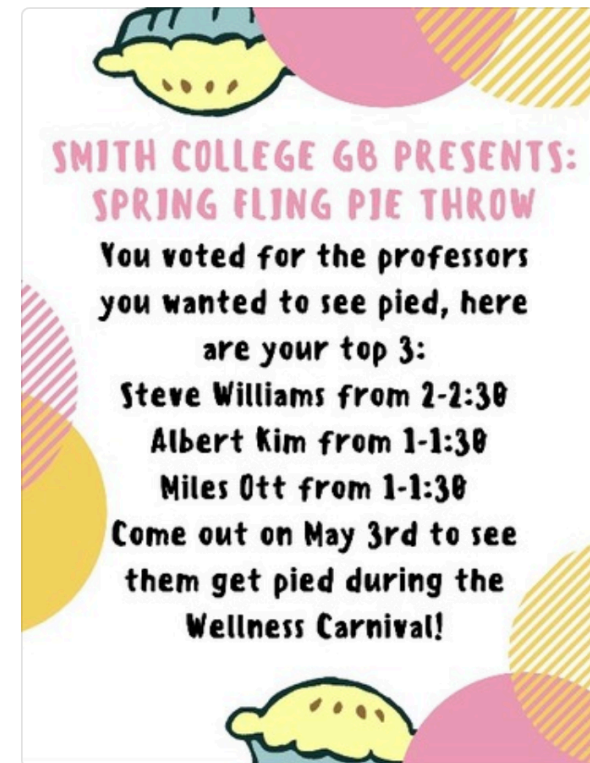
Context to keep in mind in this talk

- Baseline for comparison in this talk is email & Moodle-like course management systems
- I have heard of other platforms like Piazza, but haven't use it. I'm open to comments!
- At Smith College Statistical & Data Sciences (SDS) program we're *very* pro-Slack…

Context to keep in mind in this talk

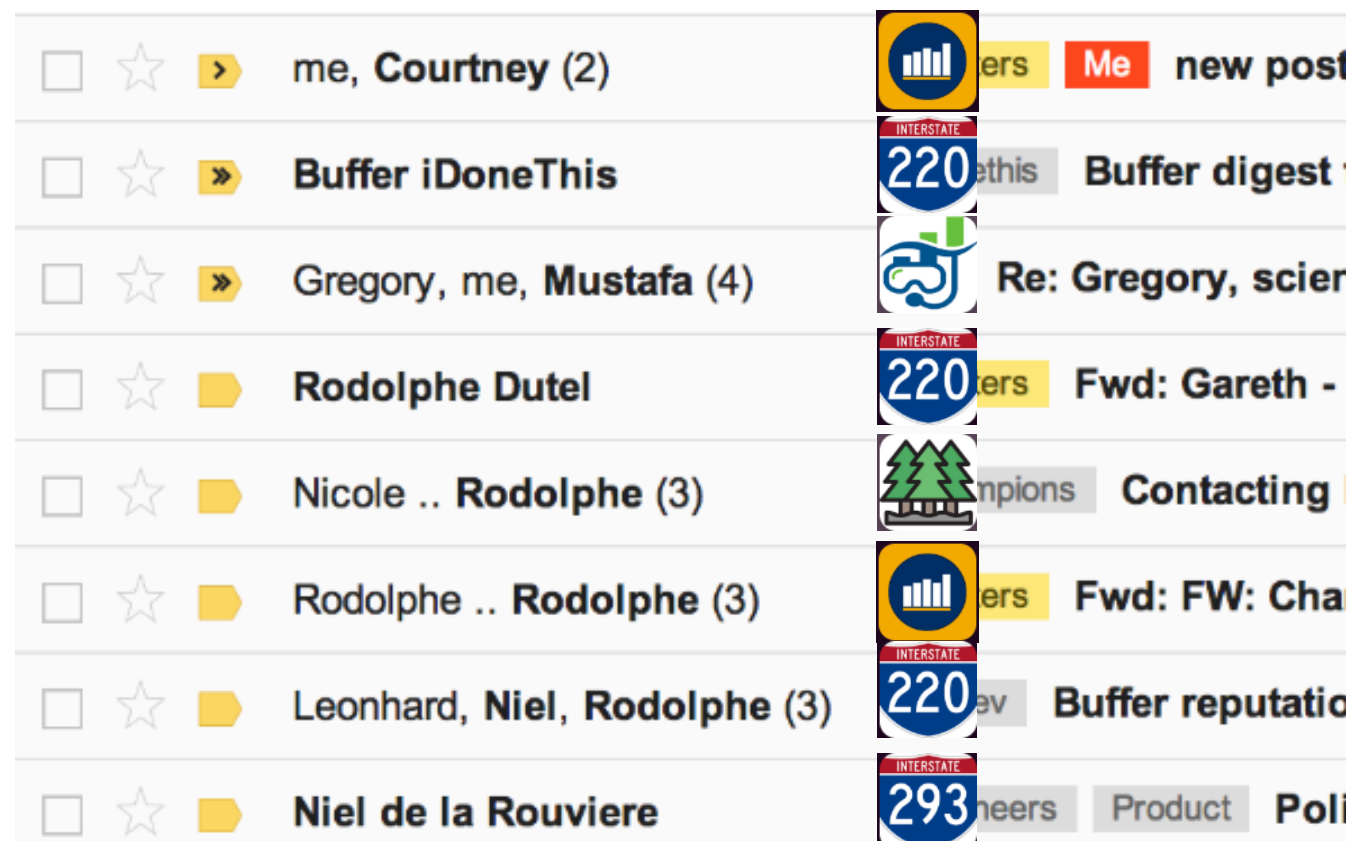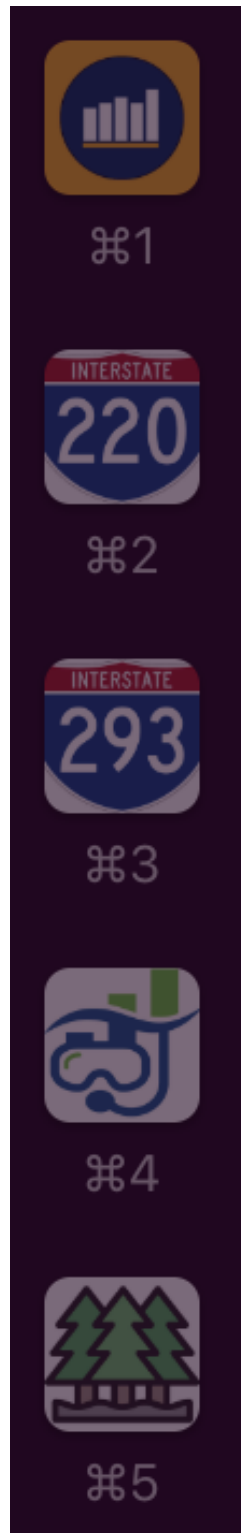This Slack post speaks to:
- Large existing buy-in of Slack in our program
- Casual nature of interactions

Why Slack?

Above all else

Forced compartmentalization & centralization into Slack Workspaces

As opposed to 😵 context switching in email

Why Slack?

- Seamless transition between *slick* interfaces: browser to 🖥 & 💻 to 📱
- Vast array of apps
- For instructors in particular:
  - Coordinate between people with many roles: instructors & TA's & graders & students
  - Getting us one step closer to promised land 🙌 …

From Machine Learning 293 Slack Workspace

Promised land! Students answering questions!

Mini-Project 5 Channel

SDS/CSC 293 ...
● Albert Y. Kim

≡ All Unreads
◎ Threads

Channels   ⊕
ethics_discussion
general
mp1
mp2
mp3
mp4
mp5
polls
questions
random

+ Add a channel

Direct Messages   ⊕
Apps   ⊕

+ Install Google Drive
+ Add apps

#mp5
☆ | 👤 49 | ⚡ 0 | ✎ Add a topic

🔍 Search   @ ☆ ⋮

Wednesday, May 1st

    write_csv("submission.csv")

(edited)

5 replies Last reply 28 days ago

5:44 PM
On your Kaggle submission? Ours was also really high. I think it's illustrating how poor the model is? Which kind of makes sense since we just threw all the variables at it

6 replies Last reply 28 days ago

6:44 PM
For our lasso model all of the coefficients are coming out as zero, regardless of what we set our lambda to. Is anyone else having this issue?

1 reply 28 days ago

Thursday, May 2nd

Albert Y. Kim 3:18 AM
Here is what I got. Note, I may have still made a mistake and your answers may vary depending on the data wrangling you did and what lambda you chose. but the story is consistent with the themes of yesterday's lecture

Screen Shot 2019-05-02 at 6.15.54 AM.png ▾

Method	RMLSE on training	RMLSE on test (via Kaggle)
Unregularized lm	0.04755788	0.17096
LASSO	0.08869404	0.16130

👍 3

1 reply 28 days ago

10:18 AM
to remove N/A's from a variable

```
test <- test %>%
    mutate(GarageYrBlt = ifelse(is.na(GarageYrBlt), mean(GarageYrBlt, na.rm=TRUE), GarageYrBlt))
```

🤩 1

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Why Slack for Students?

Above all else

Reducing instructor/student barriers:
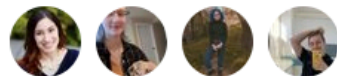

francesca
@franch787

Following

i love slack because its the only acceptable way to communicate via profs in a less formal way than email

1:19 PM - 30 Mar 2019

6 Likes

💬 1   🔁   ❤️ 6   ✉️

Tweet your reply

Student Feedback
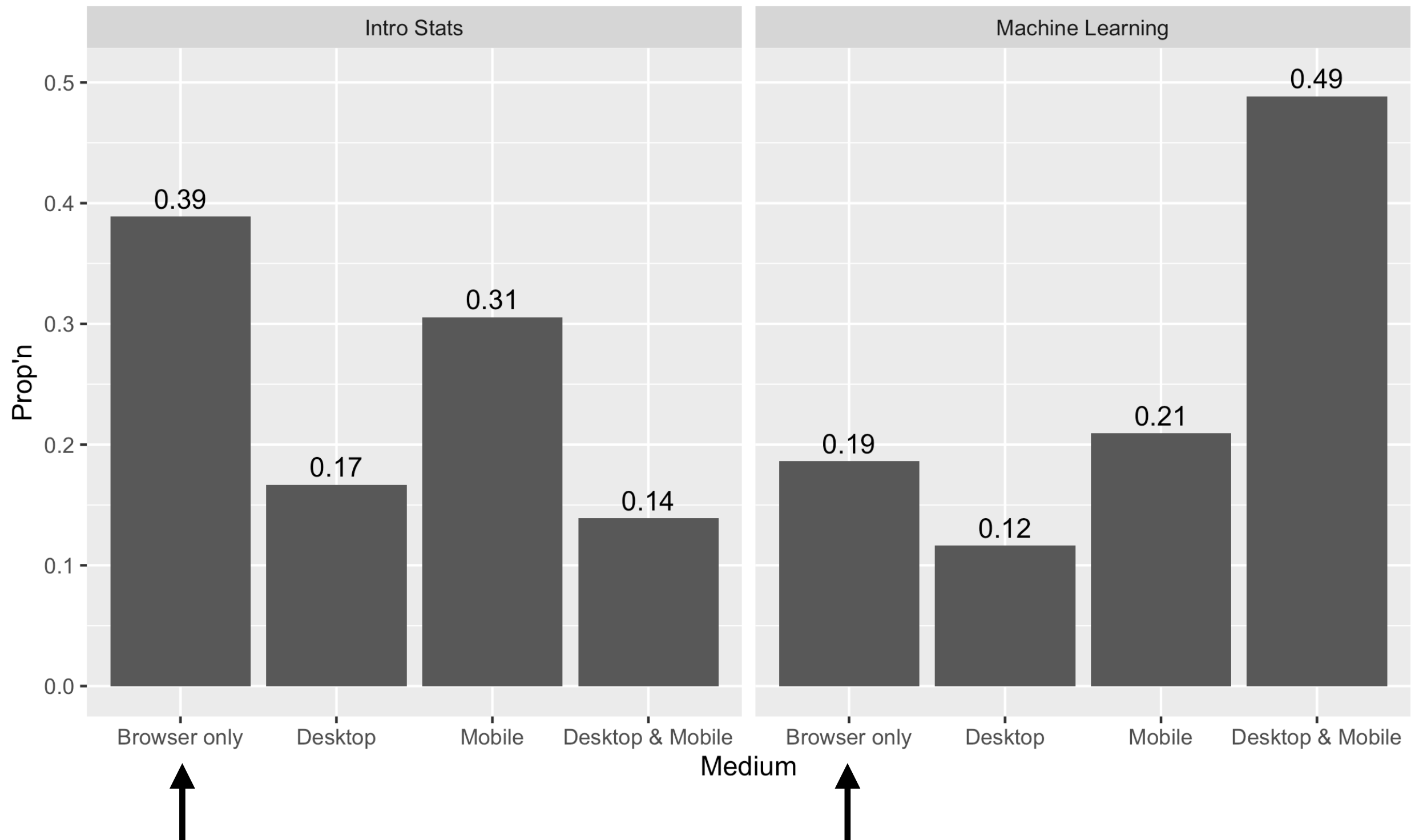
From two Spring 2019 courses:
- Intro stats: 36/40 responded
- Machine learning: 47/50 responded

Asked:
1. Interface used: Browser, desktop, mobile
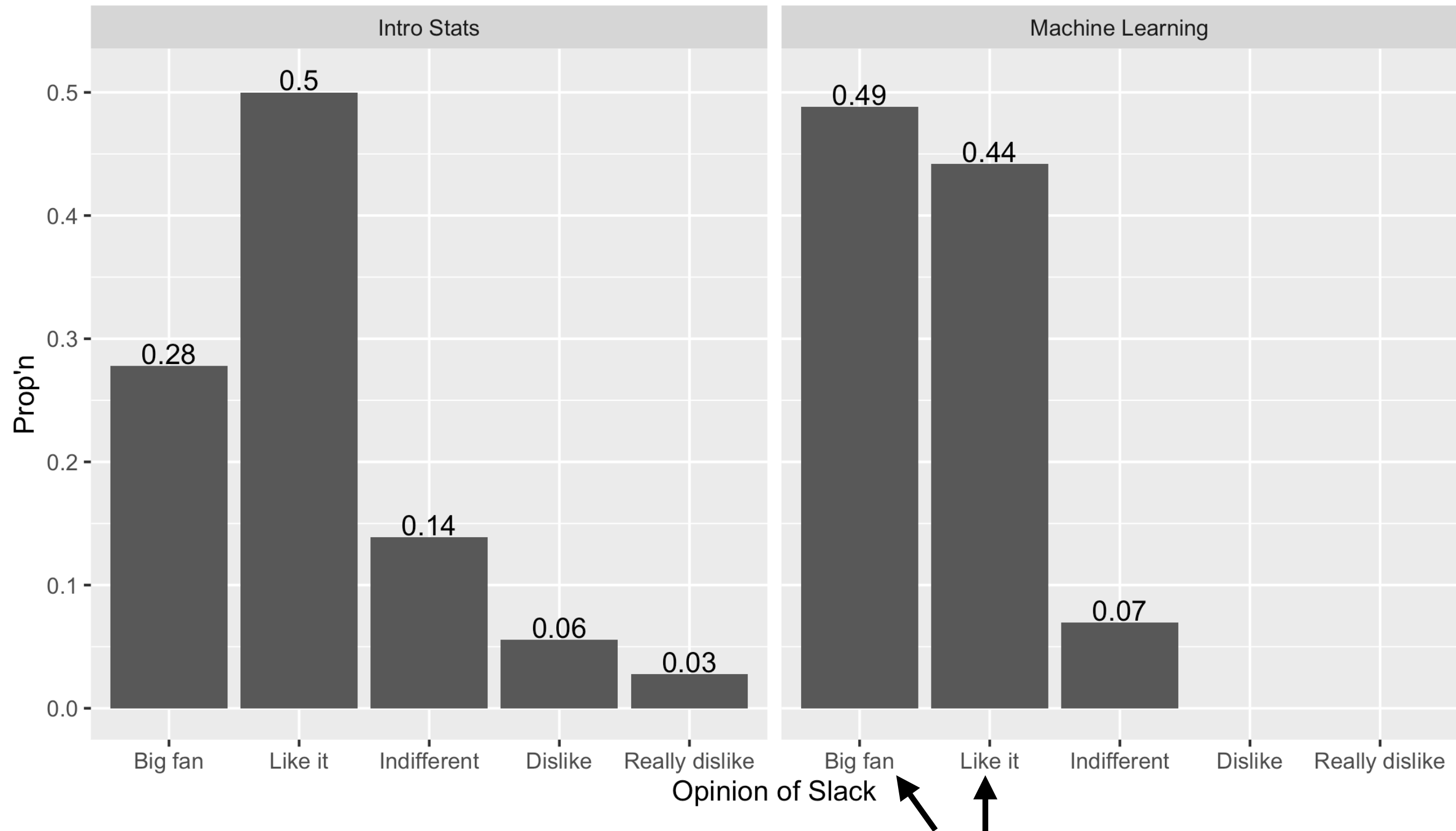2. Overall feelings about Slack
3. And four other questions

All responses [here](#) (with permission to share). Let's take a look!

Interface Used by Students

Speaks to issue of notifications. More later…

Opinion of Slack

Speaks to degree of Slack buy-in within SDS

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Some 🍒 Picked Comments

👍 comments:

- "… has a lot *less pressure* and necessity to be super formal than email."
- "Slack is better for chatting with *group members* & *sharing files*."
- "Liked the *code-sharing* & *emoji features*. The *threads* made it easy to communicate and follow ideas."

👎 comments:

- "I don't like having to check *multiple platforms*"
- "I didn't like the *notification* system… I felt like I was always missing things even with notifications on."
- "We hit the free plan's *space limit*"

All responses [here](#) (with permission to share)

Potential Pitfalls

Above all else

Managing notifications:

My Attempt at Managing Notifications

- Especially 1st time, create a burner profile (fake student profile) to test. Ex: Guy Incognito
- Inform students of browser & mobile interfaces
- For browser only students: How do I trigger email notifications?
  - Individual and group DM's will trigger
  - In `#general` channel, using `@everyone` will trigger (can set to only admins)
  - In all other channels, using `@channel` will trigger
- Next time: After a few weeks, I will spend time talking about notifications. Probably a good life lesson anyways…

Live demo with mystery 👻 audience member!

Screencast of demo is available [here](#)!

Conclusion

Reasons to Use Slack in Class

In my opinion (IMO):

- Are there multiple groups to coordinate: instructors & TA's & graders & students? ✅
- Does your class involve a lot of group work/collaboration? ✅
- Does your class involve sharing a lot of **code**?
  Either directly or via GitHub? ✅
- Do other instructors in your dept use Slack? ✅
- Do you hate email? ✅
- Do you care about my students feeling that instructors are more accessible? ✅

As you accumulate ✅'s, the case for Slack gets stronger!

Thank you!

Slides available on Twitter @rudeboybert and bit.ly/slack_sdss