

Recommendations for Camera Use During an Online Synchronous Class Meeting

Distance Learning Committee (DLC), October 27, 2020

The Distance Learning Committee recommends:

- That faculty do not require or grade on whether students keep their cameras on during a synchronous class, with exceptions including: presentations with audio, video, and/or skills demonstration requirements; course safety needs; certification or accreditation requirements; and proctored exams (proctored exams are addressed in a separate recommendation from DLC).
- That disciplines with essential audio and visual requirements give adequate notice to students (in syllabus), clearly identify situations in which video will be required, and encourage the use of electronic video backgrounds.
- That Mt. SAC determine the legal requirement to request consent for recording Zoom sessions, inform faculty of these requirements, and create a process as necessary.

Rationale

The General Counsel of the California Community Colleges issued the following legal opinion.

“While there is no express prohibition against faculty requiring students to attend live online synchronous classes with their cameras on, an indiscriminate cameras-on requirement risks violation of student privacy rights under the California Constitution, and potentially implicates other federal and state privacy and civil rights laws. However, if there are circumstances where full audio and visual student participation is essential to instruction, a carefully tailored cameras-on requirement might be appropriate.”

The legal opinion noted that “many students object to this practice as an unacceptable intrusion into their living circumstances, which not only burdens their personal privacy but highlights existing equity gaps between students” and “not all students have the technological resources to reliably maintain a video presence during their classes.” Although cameras on provides “faculty ... with valuable visual feedback during the course of instruction,” faculty interest does not outweigh student privacy concerns.

As stated in Guidelines for Synchronous Instruction, [students have a right not to have their video recorded](#) during online class sessions. Faculty may request that students keep their videos on during class, and [articles about online teaching](#) recommend this practice. However, as noted above, students may not have a stable Internet connection, and may need to call in on their phones. Students may be self-conscious about their living situations and not want other people to see them. Students may be engaged without being “on,” and students may also *not* be engaged even though their cameras are activated.

Recommended Recording Considerations

- Do not record in Gallery View.
- Set your Zoom settings to only record Shared Screen or Shared Screen with Active Speaker in order to avoid recording students' faces.
- If the class is recorded, [make it available within the course shell](#) so only authenticated students can access it. Do not upload to the web.

Determining Student Engagement Activities During Synchronous Sessions Without a Camera

- To judge attention and attendance, form breakout rooms and visit each of them, include research presentations, or ask for answers in Chat. Plan exchanges at regular intervals (every 5-20 minutes).
- Encourage students to ask questions and share insights using Chat, audio, or polls.
- Assign a pre-reading or an activity before the session, ask students to prepare a question, quotation, or talking point for the session, and use the session for conversation.
- Schedule student presentations. Whether individual or group, student-student presentations should be captioned. Options include FlipGrid, VoiceThread, Screencast-o-Matic, and YouTube. Contact the FCLT to determine how to integrate these options into your class.
- Have a different student monitor the Chat each session.

References

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