

Guidance for Faculty Regarding Student Camera/Microphone Use in Online Learning

Policy Rationale:

The UM System created guidelines regarding the use of video in online classrooms in 2020, during the Covid pivot to remote learning. However, this guidance was never formalized. Furthermore, the context has changed since it was drafted, and it was not tuned to UMSL's needs. Access is a fundamental part of UMSL's mission. Online, synchronous teaching modes are intended to be used intentionally and thoughtfully and are reserved for situations where the benefits to student interaction without travel to campus outweigh the technological barriers and concerns about privacy that come with the technology.

The proposed policy clarifies expectations for both students and instructors. It is designed for the current context in which students generally opt-in to classes and programs that use online synchronous modes, while also speaking to situations in which students are required to unexpectedly pivot into remote learning. Greater flexibility regarding the use of cameras / microphones continues to be required of instructors in the case of unexpected pivots, as noted in the final passage. It also consolidates much of the information relevant to instructors' policies regarding students' use of cameras/microphones for regular instruction in online synchronous classes, including policies on providing notice to students, formal accommodations, adherence to FERPA, and online proctoring.

Guidance Regarding Students' Use of Cameras and Microphones in Online Synchronous Classes:

UMSL respects faculty's expertise and judgment about rules regarding student's the use of video cameras and microphones in online synchronous class meetings. Instructors may set appropriate policies, including requiring the use of a camera and microphone in class meetings, that are listed in the course schedule as having an online synchronous mode to facilitate student engagement and to help students meet the learning objectives of the course. In setting course policies, instructors should adhere to the following principles:

- *Transparency and advance notice:* Instructors are expected to communicate any requirements or expectations regarding the use of cameras and/or microphones in a course clearly and in advance by including the information in the syllabus and/or providing the information in the course schedule. Instructors are encouraged to articulate to students the reasons for their policy and how it benefits engagement and learning.
- *Flexibility:* Flexibility is encouraged where possible for students facing significant barriers to utilizing a camera or microphone, particularly where the barrier is short-term and does not substantively impact students' ability to meet the learning objectives or when there are alternate ways of meeting those learning objectives.
- *Information and Support:* Barriers that limit students' access to online synchronous classes are not limited to having working hardware and a reliable internet connection. They can also include lack of access to a private space to take part in the class that allows the student to focus on the course and preserves the privacy of class discussion and of those who share the student's space. Instructors are encouraged to work with UMSL's [Center for Teaching and Learning](#) and the UM System's [Academic Technology Office](#) to provide information and resources about how to overcome these barriers and protect the online classroom as an environment that facilitates

learning, such as information about how to use headphones and a blurred or virtual background, or lists of available spaces suitable for online-synchronous class meetings.

- *Consistency with Existing Policies:* Some of the most relevant policies include the following:
 - *Disability Access:* Students with disabilities may request accommodations through UMSL's [Disability Access Services](#) for all academic contexts including online synchronous classes.
 - *Privacy Policies:*
 - Any recordings of class meetings should protect confidential student information pursuant to the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). If a recording includes students asking questions, making presentations, or leading a class and it is possible to identify the student, then the portions containing recordings of the student constitute protected educational records. These records should not be shared publicly. They should not be shared with students in a different course section or future section of the course. If an instructor would like information about how to record a lecture or class discussion in way that does not make students identifiable and that can be shared across different sections or different semesters, they may contact [UM System's Academic Technology Office](#).
 - In addition, [Collected Rule 200.015.B.2.a](#), prohibits the distribution of audio or video recordings of a class by students to individuals who are not students in the course without the permission of the faculty member and any students who are recorded. Faculty members may also prohibit the recording of a course activity.
 - *Policies Regarding Online Proctoring:* Instructors who employ online proctoring in their courses are required to use a platform supported by UM System. Alternative assessments are encouraged in cases where a student faces a significant barrier to utilizing the video proctoring system.

In cases of emergency or extraordinary circumstances when use of an online synchronous mode could not be announced in advance (a sudden shift of a face-to-face class to online synchronous learning due to campus closure, etc.), faculty *must* provide alternatives that enable students to complete the assignments and course.

Key features of the proposed, updated policy:

- Makes a distinction between *scheduled* online synchronous classes and unexpected emergencies or special circumstances where students are not able to self-select into the mode of learning. As noted in the final passage, in the case of unexpected emergencies or special circumstances, faculty would continue to be expected to provide alternatives to using a camera or microphone to allow students to complete the course.
- Requires faculty to notify students of their policies at the beginning of the semester.
- Reiterates that students have the right to request formal accommodation through DAS.
- Clarifies faculty and student obligations in relation to FERPA and other privacy policies if any online classes are recorded.

Comparator Policies:

Mizzou (this was the original, UM System guidance formulated in 2020):

<https://teaching.missouri.edu/about/policies>