



University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Chapter

STATEMENT ON RECORDING OF TEACHING May 30, 2024

The UNC-Chapel Hill chapter of the AAUP condemns the secret recording of any instructors for any purpose. This practice violates ethical standards and the law. The “prevailing academic practice,” according to the national AAUP’s surveying of colleges and Universities across the United States, deems faculty as the copyright owners of their teaching content.¹ As such, recording the teaching of any content by any instructors for any purpose without their consent violates that principle and copyright law. Furthermore, UNC’s own policy states: “A classroom recording should not be used for any purpose except to meet the educational objectives of that particular class.”²

This past April, press outlets reported that an Associate Dean at UNC secretly recorded class lectures of an instructor. A letter from the professor’s academic unit stated that they “recorded and reviewed” classes on four different days in April using an existing classroom camera. According to the Dean, “notice is not required to record classes, and we do record classes without notice in response to concerns raised by students.”³ This practice is unacceptable and must end immediately.

The creation and use of new recording software (e.g., Zoom, Panopto) provided key teaching support during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many instructors have opted to continue to record their lectures to make them available for students with accessibility accommodations, for students who may be absent due to authorized travel and illness, and for students to review the material. These new technologies can aid in the pedagogical teaching techniques of instructors to enhance learning, but these technologies should never be abused by administrators or others for clandestine surveillance and evaluation and dissemination. Despite its sinister name, Panopto should never be used to keep watch over instructors. Most universities, including UNC, have policies specifying that neither administrators nor students have the right to record the audio or video of classroom sessions without permission of the instructor. For example, UNC’s Keenan-Flagler’s IT policy states about Panopto that “recordings are to be accessed and used only as directed by the faculty member(s) teaching the course.” And the UNC legal department has blocked requests in the past for administrators to access recordings by instructors.

The use of cameras and other recording technology in the classroom should aid learning outcomes rather than produce a chilling effect that indirectly controls course content. The UNC-Chapel Hill Chapter of the AAUP rejects all infringements of academic freedom and we affirm the copyrighted, proprietary basis of instructors’ lessons and pedagogical choices and their academic freedom in the classroom. We ask that UNC affirm this ethical, academically sound, and already prevailing policy.

¹ <https://www.aaup.org/issues/covid-19-pandemic/pandemic-resources-faqs-remote-teaching-and-copyright>

² <https://keepsteaching.unc.edu/best-practices-for-recording-classes-at-unc-chapel-hill/>; and see “Recording Classes Best Practices:” <https://catalog.unc.edu/policies-procedures/university-policies/#text>

³ See, for example: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/faculty-issues/academic-freedom/2024/05/20/letter-says-unc-chapel-hill-secretly-records>; <https://www.theassemblync.com/education/higher-education/unc-chapel-hill-recorded-professor-larry-chavis/>; <https://poetsandquantsforundergrads.com/news/unc-kenan-flagler-prof-b-school-secretly-recorded-my-classes/>.