

Dear Colleagues:

So many faculty members who have been in touch with the union have expressed considerable upset about the one-size-fits-all approaches to online teaching that the administration has so far communicated about in its plans for the fall. This is of concern substantively—the best teaching is often idiosyncratic and distinctive. And also for reasons of process: there is disconcertingly little representation on the Task Force from the faculty, especially those whose scholarship and practice revolve around best pedagogical practices.

A thoughtful and insightful UICUF member is particularly concerned with one requirement—the recording of lectures. This faculty member understands the impulse for such a recording but puts forward the powerful, competing concerns that any policy in this area must also address. They speak to the ethical necessity in certain circumstances of *not* recording lectures—as well as trusting faculty to make decisions that are best for our students.

Please push back on the idea of requiring recording. There are serious privacy concerns with it on multiple fronts, opening the university up to lawsuits and opening faculty up to harassment, embarrassing students forced to disclose their living circumstances, and basically being non-functional for a class with lots of student participation. My classes rely on what we call the “cone of silence”—nothing in the class is meant to be shared outside the class—and the students' work would be severely compromised without that shared commitment to preserving privacy.

The provost in her office hour answered someone's question on this basically by saying she wasn't going to enforce the requirement. There's no reason, then, it has to be a requirement. And it shouldn't be, given that that puts extra onus on vulnerable faculty to break the rule and risk censure / punishment.

It's easy enough to instead provide this guideline: "Unless there are compelling reasons otherwise, the university recommends recording lectures in the interests of equity, for students whose circumstances may make it impossible to attend a class."

We have also heard the same concern in this way:

Our department's classes routinely engage highly controversial issues related to class, race, gender, and sexuality. Faculty and students in the classroom could feel limited knowing that their spontaneous speech could become fodder for outside attack.

Faculty—like so many people--don't do well with inflexible rules, especially those imposed without their substantive input and voice. We will, in turn, always be our students' staunchest allies.

With best wishes,

Robert

Robert Johnston
Professor of History
Vice President and Chief Steward, UIC United Faculty
johnsto1@uic.edu