Welcome to Tuesday Topics, a monthly series covering topics with intellectual freedom implications for libraries of all types. Each message is prepared by a member of OLA's Intellectual Freedom Committee or a guest writer. Questions can be directed to the author of the topic or to the IFC Committee.

Intellectual Freedom Committee

Oregon Library Association

November 2020: Distance Learning with Video and Audio - Privacy Considerations

As most Oregon teachers and professors meet with students on Zoom, Google Meet, or other video conferencing tools, privacy is an urgent concern. Teaching online may not be ideal for most, but is still an opportunity to connect with students and stay safe during the pandemic. However, because there was little advanced planning, many instructors -- and those who support them, including school and academic librarians - jumped to online platforms without time to thoroughly vet the policies, procedures and tools. Public libraries are also dealing with these issues as they plan for online library programming, such as author visits, trivia nights, guest speakers and more.

Some issues librarians and educational institutions should consider include:

Students (or parents) may be uncomfortable allowing an entire classroom (virtually) into their home. Can students use blurred or virtual backgrounds? It's important to keep this option turned on in the institutional settings, so that students and teachers can choose to hide their living spaces. This is difficult on some devices, however, including Chromebooks, the device most K-12 schools distribute to students -- they don't support Zoom backgrounds. A class project creating a physical backdrop for students' virtual classroom space might be helpful.

What can or should teachers require of students' camera use? Requesting that students keep their cameras on, for example, seems reasonable. Requiring it may be problematic. For one thing, not all students have the stable wifi needed for both audio and video. For another, requiring "video on" is difficult sometimes for students who are anxious about their surroundings or their appearance.

Many teachers are recording their classes. Where are these videos stored? How are they shared and accessed? How long are schools keeping them? What shows in the video - only the teacher and their presentation, or the entire class? Should class discussions be

recorded? What if there is a classroom management issue caught on camera during a class? There are so many issues with recording and sharing classes, and [we have barely begun to discuss them](#).

Anyone (student, parent, or roommate) can use a phone or screen capture software to record portions or all of an online class. Those videos can ([and already have](#)) been posted to social media or used to bully other students. Are there protocols at the institutional or classroom level to address such instances? Are students being taught the ethics around recording others? For public library programming, should staff warn participants that they should be aware of their surroundings or content?

What do teachers do if they see or overhear problematic or worrisome things during distance learning? While of course it is a positive thing if teachers are able to detect and report abuse or neglect, there is also the potential for over policing. For example, the [Washington Post reported in September](#) that police officers were sent to a Black 7th grader's house because he was playing with a Nerf gun during an online art class.

How secure are online video platforms like Zoom and Google Meet? While [Zoom has improved its security settings](#), it's still important to ensure that schools are using the best settings and security practices, for both meetings and storing video recordings. Platforms need to be FERPA and COPPA compliant and have safeguards like waiting rooms, passcodes, and authentication turned on.

Teachers who are working from home - not their classrooms - should also be aware of their environment and what is in the background, or what students may overhear. They should also be aware that parents are now able to watch and listen to their classes, which may have an impact on academic freedom and their ability to discuss controversial topics with their students. Students may also be inhibited as far as discussions, knowing that what they say won't necessarily stay within classroom walls.

Testing is another issue that is challenging during distance learning. There are testing programs that increase surveillance on students - for example, software that is essentially spyware that students are required to install (both in [higher ed](#) and in [K-12](#)). If it's installed on their own (not school-owned) computers, that's an even more daunting issue. Even on school-owned computers, determining who has access to search history, camera views, and more can be challenging.

As we continue with distance learning in most Oregon school districts, colleges, and universities, at least for the near future, there are some good tips for families in [this New York Times article about online privacy](#). For teachers, Torrey Trust, an Associate Professor of Learning Technology at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, has some [excellent resources](#) on distance learning and on using video conferencing with students, including [this graphic](#). Public libraries can also possibly offer workshops or tips on protecting online privacy

when on camera. Last but not least, the Library Freedom Project wiki has an excellent summary and list of resources.

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**Sample School Camera Policy (courtesy of Lakeridge Middle School, Lake Oswego,
Oregon)**

At Lakeridge Middle School we want students to feel safe and meaningfully engaged during

distance learning. One of our school-wide classroom expectations is that students are fully

invested in their learning and in the shared learning of their class. One helpful way to

demonstrate this is by keeping webcams on during class time. However, we also recognize that

this is not the only way students can actively engage and "webcams always on" may impact

some students' internet bandwidth, may be a source of self-consciousness or anxiety, or may

not be appropriate or necessary for other reasons based on the learning activity happening in

class. **As a best practice, students and teachers will work together to develop agreements

and commitments regarding their classroom expectations including options for actively

engaging in classwork.**