

# Privacy in the Digital Learning Environment



As University classes move to digital learning environments instructors have greater abilities to share course information in diverse ways. McMaster University is compliant with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA)* in safeguarding the personal information of University community members.

## What is Personal Information (PI)?

Personal Information (PI) includes, but is not limited to:

- name\*
- home address
- personal email address
- personal phone number
- student email address
- student number
- race\*
- national origin
- ethnic origin
- skin colour\*
- religion, age
- image of the individual\*
- date of birth
- sex
- sexual orientation
- marital status
- family status
- education
- medical history
- identifying symbol
- biometric data
- fingerprints
- blood type
- employment history
- financial information
- the views or personal opinions of an individual\*

Several elements of PI (\*) may be captured in video recordings and should be protected under *FIPPA*.

## Should I require my students to have their cameras on during online classes?

With the continued pressure to deliver University courses virtually, many have discovered advantages and disadvantages of digital learning environments. Many instructors may miss the visceral experience of on-site teaching and have found benefits in seeing students in the virtual environment. However, aside from technology challenges, some students may not feel comfortable activating their camera with a view to their home and personal effects. In some cases, family members may be at risk of capture in course video use.

## I am recording my classes – can I publish the recording?

One of the advantages in the digital learning environment is the ability to record course events (e.g. lectures). The University's [\*Notice of Collection Statement\*](#) provides clear communication regarding the the collection of PI. Information collected by the University is used for the academic, administrative, employment related, safety and security, financial and statistical purposes of the University. This provides a broad range of use for PI and it is vital to be sure that any new use falls within the scope of the *Notice*.

Video files do include the PI of those captured in the recording. Posting, or publishing a video recording will constitute a disclosure of PI and must be carefully considered to ensure the University makes appropriate use of the PI.

Each class situation is unique, and the table below provides some guidance on recommendations regarding consent, recording and posting videos situated in the digital learning environment.

<b>RECORDING OF LECTURE:</b>	<b>VIDEO POSTED INTERNALLY</b> <small>for students in the class only, e.g. MacVideo, A2L</small>	<b>VIDEO POSTED PUBLICLY</b> <small>for anyone in the world, e.g. on YouTube</small>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>includes <b>all</b> student participation in video and/or audio</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>compliant with FIPPA, only with the consent of the students for the posting of the video</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>not recommended, but may be done with the <i>explicit consent</i> of the students (consent form)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>includes student participation with their <u>written</u> consent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>this is compliant with FIPPA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>not recommended, but may be done with the <i>explicit consent</i> of the students (consent form)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>after removing all student interactions, <u>or</u></li> <li>no student interaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>this is compliant with FIPPA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>this is acceptable</li> <li>it is recommended instructors discuss this with the Faculty Office to confirm (re: access to academic content)</li> </ul>

### Additional options to protect privacy in digital learning environments:

- 1) use the spotlight function within Zoom to maintain focus on specific speakers (e.g. lecturer).
- 2) include a statement informing learners if classes will be recorded and whether the video will be posted. This statement may also include acceptance of learners deactivating their camera and microphone to avoid video capture in the recording.
- 3) provide instructions to learners to deactivate their camera and microphone.
- 4) learners who are not actively using the camera and microphone may use the chat function to interact within the class. In this case, it is a good idea to monitor the chat window.
- 5) if a TA is available, they may provide support as a moderator to facilitate learner entry into the class and monitor the chat contributions.

For any questions regarding the collection and use of personal information, please contact the Privacy Office, in the University Secretariat, [privacy@mcmaster.ca](mailto:privacy@mcmaster.ca)