

Resolution 15: Requesting that First-Year Writing Seminar Instructors be Allowed to Hold Virtual Discussions in Whatever Way They Deem Appropriate

Abstract: Some First-Year Writing Seminar (FWS) instructors have concerns about the privacy, equity, and logistical implications of recording live-video discussions which will then be viewed asynchronously by students who cannot attend. This is especially an issue for FWS instructors who have internet connectivity issues or who cover sensitive topic matter. This resolution asks that FWS instructors be given the freedom to hold discussions in whichever way they deem is most appropriate for their class.

Sponsored by: Arielle Johnson, Life Sciences Voting Members

Whereas, First-Year Writing Seminars (FWSs) are an integral, and required, part of the Cornell experience for undergraduate students¹, and

Whereas, these courses are taught by graduate student instructors, who generally have flexibility in designing the courses, allowing them to provide individualized instruction and highlight the strengths of their subject matter, and

Whereas, FWS instructors have had to revise their course format in order to accommodate the transition to online learning due to COVID-19, and many instructors started planning as soon as possible, and

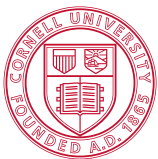
Whereas, the Faculty Senate² and Graduate and Professional Student Assembly³ have endorsed the document entitled *An S20 Commitment to Academic Integrity, Equitable Instruction, Trust, and Respect*, and

Whereas, many FWS instructors used these guidelines and/or similar principles of equity, privacy, and fairness when redesigning their courses, and

¹ <https://as.cornell.edu/First-Year-Writing-Seminars>

² <https://theuniversityfaculty.cornell.edu/faculty-senate/next-online-senate/>

³ https://assembly.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/resolution_12_-_an_s20_commitment_to_academic_integrity_equitable_instruction_trust_and_respect.pdf



Cornell University Graduate and Professional Student Assembly

Whereas, some FWS instructors received a communication from Dean Rachel Bean on March 31st requesting that FWS instructors provide live-video discussions for students who can participate and record these sessions for students who cannot⁴, and

Whereas, this is an unreasonable request for several reasons, and

Whereas, this method of teaching would create a two-tiered hierarchy of students receiving live-video instruction and asynchronous instruction, and

Whereas, providing unequal learning experiences to students based on time zone and internet connectivity directly contradicts principle 3 for faculty of *An S20 Commitment to Academic Integrity, Equitable Instruction, Trust, and Respect*: “I will promote classroom equity by taking steps to ensure that no student is disadvantaged because they have to work in a challenging environment or one that has limited resources and internet connectivity”, and

Whereas, this method of teaching would also create privacy concerns because students registered for FWS courses with the expectation that none of their comments during class discussions would be recorded, and

Whereas, this method of teaching would additionally compromise the privacy of instructors, and

Whereas, this is especially disturbing given that distributing recordings of class discussions has been used as a tool by alt-right organizations such as Professor Watchlist to target and harass professors multiple times over the past four years⁵, and this could be done by a single individual with password-protected access to the video, and

Whereas, these privacy concerns for both students and instructors relate to principle 2 for students of *An S20 Commitment to Academic Integrity, Equitable Instruction, Trust, and Respect*: “I will respect principles of academic freedom for instructors and classmates and will maintain the privacy of the virtual classroom environment: I will not record, photograph, or share online interactions that involve classmates or any member of the teaching team”, and

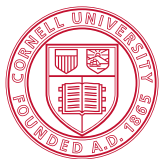
Whereas, some instructors have internet connectivity issues that preclude their teaching synchronously, and

Whereas, having a mandatory requirement that FWS instructors provide both live-video and asynchronous teaching increases the pressure that is already being put on instructors who are working hard to adapt their classes to a virtual format in stressful times.

⁴ Specifically, Dean Rachel Bean wrote, “FWS instructors should plan to provide synchronous teaching starting next week. To do otherwise would go counter to what the university is telling students/and what students are expecting. We anticipate that some of our students will be seeking synchronous instruction, and instructors should provide that to maintain continuity and clarity. To accommodate those students who can’t participate synchronously, FWS instructors should record their synchronous instruction sessions and post them on canvas and also provide asynchronous discourse opportunities (e.g. discussion boards).”

⁵ <https://www.professorwatchlist.org/index.php/watch-list-directory/search-by-name/48-brent-terry>

⁶ <https://www.latimes.com/socal/daily-pilot/tn-dpt-me-professor-watchlist-20161213-story.html>



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57 **Be it therefore resolved,** that FWS instructors be allowed the freedom to hold their discussions in
58 whichever manner they feel works best with the logistical, privacy, and equity needs of their class.

59 Respectfully Submitted,

60 Alice Wolff

61 Medieval Studies PhD Student

62 Arielle Johnson

63 Life Sciences Voting Member