Resolution 2020-F01-1100

Ban of Webcam Monitoring Spyware in Academic Programs

The Undergraduate Student Government
Legislative Body
First Reading: August 31, 2020
Second Reading/Voting: September 14, 2020

Chief Sponsor(s): President Wasan Kumar,

WHEREAS, the student body faces a number of challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic including the transition to hybrid remote and on-campus learning. The Undergraduate Student Government recognizes the strain this places on faculty, graduate teaching assistants, and students; and

WHEREAS, Respondus Lockdown Browser has been implemented at UIC in various courses, as a means to monitor and record a student’s environment, and seize control over their computer. This web browser is a downloaded tool, which some faculty require to be launched before assessments, to record through your webcam device; and

WHEREAS, There are clear ethical and civil liberties concerns for students being monitored in their own homes. The use of student data without a dedicated bill of rights has been challenged by faculty unions.¹ This level of monitoring presents a form of trauma to students, particularly BIPOC students,² who have been historically overly surveilled. Clearly, the stressful environment of a test or quiz is not one that needs further constraints. Students with learning disabilities, such as ADHD, may face difficulties with eye-movement tracking software, and the Disability Resource Center has noted some incompatibilities with Respondus and accessibility software.³ Mundane issues such as reading a question aloud or writing out a problem or having a family member walk into your room can flag this software; and

WHEREAS, As evidenced by the Zoom and Blackboard outage on August 24th, 2020, an over-reliance on web-based technologies for education is often harmful. Internet outages at the university or at home can lead to Respondus malfunction and forfeiture of control over your

³ https://drc.uic.edu/online-course-testing-accommodations/
device for a period of time.4 Students who lack webcam access or printer access are given the added burden of procuring these devices; and

WHEREAS, Respondus has been banned at institutions due to these clear concerns, including the University of California at Berkeley, and faced significant student and faculty criticism at the University of California at Santa Barbara.5 An internet search indicates 23 Change.org petitions to prevent the use of Respondus,6 and 26 to prevent the use of Honorlock7 with thousands of supporters at several higher education institutions. Our very own Academic Computing and Communications Center has recommended against the use of these software tools.8 We have collected testimonials from Computer Science students on Piazza discussing the dangerous root-level access this program (which they refer to as ‘malware’) induces on student devices; then

LET IT BE RESOLVED, that USG rejects the use of webcam monitoring software and lockdown browsers as part of academic programs. The USG calls upon Provost Susan Poser to issue a campus-wide ban on these mechanisms. We recommend instead professors who have concerns of cheating pursue alternative avenues that are non-punitive. This includes, but is not limited to, open-notes assessments or group assessments. Please find a list of suggested alternatives in Appendix A.

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED, that USG cares about the mental health of our universities’ professors. We are readily available to join task forces or committees to collaborate on transitioning these assessments to a healthy and generative structure, whether that be at the university-wide, departmental, or individual instructor level.

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President, Wasan Kumar

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Speaker of the House, Daisy Stancheva

4 https://www.uu.edu/it/includes/respondustroubleshooting-student.pdf
5 https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/10/us/online-testing-cheating-universities-coronavirus.html
6 https://www.change.org/search?q=Respondus&offset=10
7 https://www.change.org/search?q=honorlock
8 https://accc.uic.edu/contingency/online-teaching-instructors/designing-assessments/online-proctoring/
APPENDIX A

- Create tests with test pools on your LMS (Canvas or Blackboard) so not all questions on all tests are exactly the same.
- Randomize questions and/or answers in your online multiple-choice exams so it’s not easy for students to give each other a quick set of answers.
- Create an online open-book test that requires thoughtful responses that require higher-level thinking skills.
- Consider doing some aspect of the test differently, such as creating thoughtful projects or writing assignments. Assignments, discussion boards, and even groups are available on your LMS (Canvas or Blackboard).
- Limit the timeframe in which students can take the test. For instance, only allow the normally allotted class time, or only allow students 60 minutes from when they start an online test. This can deter too much conferring with other students.
- Ask students to “show their work,” and perhaps even take pictures of their work/handwriting to verify it’s from the student.
- Write questions that Google can’t answer. These might be questions relevant to students’ lives or opinion pieces.
- Ask students to sign or somehow indicate that they will uphold strong standards of academic integrity as they do an assessment.
- 50 Classroom Assessment Techniques (Angelo and Cross; link below) that could be reformatted for online learning.\(^9\) \(^{10}\) \(^{11}\)
- Weekly short assessments
- Use Respondus in a less intrusive way by only allowing lockdown browser without the use of eye tracking or web camera.

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\(^9\) [https://blogs.chapman.edu/academics/2020/03/14/remote-assessments/](https://blogs.chapman.edu/academics/2020/03/14/remote-assessments/)

\(^{10}\) [https://accc.uic.edu/contingency/online-teaching-instructors/designing-assessments/tests-quizzes/](https://accc.uic.edu/contingency/online-teaching-instructors/designing-assessments/tests-quizzes/)

\(^{11}\) [https://vcsa.ucsd.edu/_files/assessment/resources/50_cats.pdf](https://vcsa.ucsd.edu/_files/assessment/resources/50_cats.pdf)