Zoom or other Video Conference Policies for Webcam Use
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For reasons of equity and respect for privacy, students will not generally be required to turn on their webcams during online classes.

There are sound pedagogical reasons to ask students to turn on cameras for specific purposes. Faculty should consider whether asking students to turn on their webcams is necessary to accomplish a learning objective and explain to students why they would like for them to leave on their video feed, but must allow the student to make the final decision to do so based on their circumstances without penalties of any kind.

In short, the default would be for students' webcams to be allowed to be off, with certain learning goals and instructional practices making it justifiable for the professor to ask students to turn on their webcams if they are willing and able. The only exception to this would be during assessment activities that require the use of a webcam.

Background:

The use of webcams in live online meetings can add to the educational experience in many ways. Some of these include:
- Students working in groups
- Building community
- Showing physical evidence or materials
- Proof of attendance
- Classes that focus on communication skills, performance, or physical movement

Students may wish to not use or be unable to use their video feeds because:
- Their internet speed cannot support the use of streaming video. Bandwidth problems are real for many students regardless of their location.
- They may have privacy concerns (e.g. roommates, children, or other family members in the background)
- Students may wish to keep their webcams off because leaving them on may reveal their exact geographical location or other unique identifying information to the rest of the class
- They may have a visually busy environment or otherwise distracting background that could detract from others' ability to attend to class content
- They may have personal or environmental concerns that make sharing their likeness or their personal spaces problematic. Not all computers can replace backgrounds with virtual backdrops that would alleviate these concerns.
- They may have a disability where the video feed will decrease their success in the course
- Students may not have a webcam on their computer. This item has not been a component of the university required laptop/desktop description.

Faculty members should be aware of the privacy, hardware, software, disability, and equity concerns and require the use of webcams or video feeds only when the educational value of requiring video supersedes those concerns. In such instances, there may still be students whose specific disabilities preclude the use of webcams. The Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities will work to assist students who have gone through the proper accommodation request process and for whom the use of webcams is not possible.

Decisions to make about webcams:

Instructional

- Is the webcam materially beneficial?
  - There are instances where having the video on is unnecessary (e.g. while students listen to a lecture)
  - There are instances where having the video on is impractical (e.g. larger than 15-20 attendees, meaning it is necessary to scroll to view students)
- Can you limit the time you are requiring a video feed?
  - Temporary, periodic use of the webcam can be much more amenable to students with privacy and technology concerns
- Can you use another method to reach your pedagogical goal? (i.e. Instructional practices can address some of the concerns that may make webcams seem mandatory)
  - Periodic live polls ar checks for understanding can help ensure regular attendance and attentiveness throughout the the class session
    - Polling tools are available in Zoom and in iClicker Reef
  - Community building can happen asynchronously using discussion tools in D2L or Packback
  - Collaborative authoring using Google Docs or Microsoft products and foster collaboration in both synchronous and asynchronous environments, and give the instructor a view of students' progress
  - Group work can happen in non-video environments such as Microsoft Teams, Discord, or Slack
  - Recorded video can allow students to demonstrate competency in some performance and communication skills
    - Kaltura Media Space's mobile app (KMS Go) allows students to record and post content directly to Media Space.

Assessment

- Can you require that students turn on webcams during assessment?
  - Yes, but you should inform students of this practice as soon as possible. Ideally, this should be in the syllabus so that students can make an informed decision about their ability to effectively participate in required course components. Students should also be able to consult with a faculty member if new concerns arise where faculty could provide an alternative approach.

- Can you require that students have specific hardware not specified in the MSU tech requirements?
  - No, unless departments or programs have an established policy of more stringent hardware requirements that students have been informed of, students are only expected to have the university required laptop/desktop, which does not require a webcam. More information on alternatives to webcams for assessment

Relevant MSU Documents and Policies

- Restrictions on instructors requiring students to turn on their webcams is supported by MSU's Student Rights and Responsibilities, Article 2.II.B 8 (The student has a right to protection against improper disclosure of his/her education records[2] and personal information such as values, beliefs, organizational affiliations, and health) and Article 2.III.B 10 (The student and the faculty share the responsibility for maintaining professional relationships based on mutual trust and civility).
- Related to requiring the use of webcams is the proper use of video recordings of the synchronous sessions and how to deal with these files in light of the Family Educational Records Protections Act (FERPA). MSU's Office of General Council recently put together this guide: https://www.law.msu.edu/teaching-online/MSU_Classroom_Use_of_Recording_Technologies.pdf