

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

October 4, 2022

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Steering Committee
FROM: Tyler Silvestri
Secretary for Academic Governance
SUBJECT: Use of Artificial Intelligence to Monitor Students

The Office of Academic Governance received the following request for Steering Committee action from a member of the faculty:

There was an article published in the Dallas Morning News yesterday listing MSU as one of several universities that use an AI service to monitor students' social media. While there are valuable uses for the service (e.g., identifying potential suicides), the article also mentions MSU as using the service to monitor student protests. I think it is very disturbing that the university has (continues?) to engage with this service. In addition, do we know whether the service is used to monitor faculty's social media use?

Here is a link to the article: <https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/tracked-how-colleges-use-ai-monitor-student-protests>.

Since this item was submitted, [reports have surfaced](#) indicating that the university paid \$42,500 for the "Social Sentinel" service over a three-year period. An MSU spokesperson was quoted as saying, "MSU has not had a contract with Social Sentinel since 2018. In support of our mission to keep campus safe, the platform was one of many tools MSU Police and Public Safety could use to help address an emerging safety threat to campus. It's important to note that this tool only captures publicly available information."

Section 4.9.3. of the *Bylaws for Academic Governance* reads, "The [University Committee on Student Affairs] shall advise the Vice President for Student Affairs and Services on all policies of the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs and Services and on other University policies as they affect the academic achievement of students."

While the use of Social Sentinel is not necessarily decided by the unit previously known as the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs and Services, it could be considered one of the "other University policies [that affects] the academic achievement of students."



Office of Academic Governance

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Additionally, that unit and UCSA have a long history of considering issues related to student protests.¹

Accordingly, I recommend that the Steering Committee refer the issue to the University Committee on Student Affairs for study. I also recommend that the Steering Committee authorize UCSA to refer the matter to another body (e.g., ASMSU or back to the Steering Committee) if the members of UCSA believe the issue is outside of the committee's scope.



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¹ See, e.g., <https://onthebanks.msu.edu/Object/162-565-7296/vice-president-for-student-affairs-student-protest-files/> and the creation of the Academic Freedom Report.