

BEYOND 'BAD' COPS: HISTORICIZING AND RESISTING SURVEILLANCE CULTURE IN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we define and examine surveillance culture within US college classrooms, a logical extension of pervasive carceral and capitalist logics that underlie the US educational system, in which individual success is tied to behavior monitoring, rule following, and sorting, particularly within marginalized student populations. Reflecting anxieties about the expansion of educational access, we argue for how crisis and change have historically contributed to the urgency and opportunity to expand surveillance culture and consider why this has continued to happen as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. We offer suggestions and alternatives to surveillance culture that have helped us foster student engagement in our own classrooms while also arguing for more substantial structural changes that could challenge surveillance culture beyond the individual unit of the classroom.

Keywords: Pedagogy; Surveillance; Online teaching; Plagiarism, Cheating.

Since March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic caused a turn to virtual learning, stories have proliferated reporting a substantial rise in student cheating among college students. Students are reportedly forming GroupMe chats to share quiz and test answers (Loeb 2021), and increasingly purchasing essays from essay mills (Weale 2021). They are portrayed as seeking out “quick” answers on homework help sites (Lancaster and Cotarlan 2021), and hiring professionals to pose as them in online courses (Chen 2020). They are even admitting to cheating due to what they perceive as a “diminished” quality of learning online (Sellers 2021).

As writing specialists, and in our professional capacities as a Writing Program Administrator (Amy J. Wan) and a former digital pedagogy specialist at a Center for Teaching and Learning (Lindsey Albracht) at the City University of New York (CUNY), the public university system in New York City, we had commonly responded to faculty concerns raised by stories like this well before the pandemic began: we empathize with faculty, who often feel individually responsible for preventing cheating and plagiarism; we recognize that cheating and plagiarism happen, and that it might be happening more in this unprecedented moment. However, while these stories are not new, they are often

used to sell both expensive surveillance technology “solutions” to institutions, and to cement strict, zero-tolerance policies and procedures designed, on their face, to “preserve” academic integrity. We argue that responses like these are not only commonly ineffective, but that they also exacerbate surveillance culture.

Surveillance culture is part of the pervasive carceral and capitalist logics that underlie the US education system. These logics are reflected in both subtle and overt ways on many US college campuses. The presence of a pervasive school-to-prison pipeline in the US (Heitzeg 2009; NAACP 2005), is likely to disproportionately impact marginalized student populations—such as those at a public-serving, access-oriented, majority-minority, urban institution like CUNY—before they arrive at college. This means that the close monitoring of behavior, the naturalization of rule following and sorting, policies which come with overly punitive consequences, and an automatic assumption of criminality or bad intentions from people in positions of authority are part of what many of our students come to expect from school before they even set foot on our campus. However, there are also more direct ties between US universities and the US system of mass incarceration and policing. For example, while close to 70% of US campuses have their own “campus safety,” or security employees tasked with providing law enforcement services, public college campuses are more than twice as likely as private college campuses to use the services of “sworn police officers,” who possess state power to arrest, and whose jurisdictions tend to reach into the surrounding community (Reaves 2015). Divestment campaigns at a variety of prestigious private US institutions has also recently drawn attention to how many universities include stocks for private prison corporations, such as the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) and the GEO Group, within their investment portfolios (Watson 2016). State-funded public schools and colleges are commonly required to purchase furniture and supplies from incarcerated workers whose rate of pay averages between fourteen cents to \$1.41 per hour (Sawyer 2017). These kinds of university-supported carceral ties help to directly and indirectly grow the criminal punishment system while increasing and reinforcing both the literal and metaphorical policing that students receive in earlier moments of their education.

Amidst forced rapid decisions, uncertainty, and dependence on educational technology and virtual classroom spaces, as happened in the early chaotic days of the pandemic, surveillance culture commonly intensifies and becomes increasingly naturalized. In this article, we consider how moments of institutional change and crisis have historically made colleges more vulnerable to enacting surveillance-enabled “solutions” that do not necessarily prevent cheating or promote effective pedagogy, but that do position students and faculty as adversaries, and make surveillance culture seem logical, inevitable, and even equitable. Whether through the collection and monetization of student data, or through increasingly sophisticated surveillance policies and technologies, these “solutions” have commonly conveyed suspicion of students and positioned students and faculty as adversaries for decades. Untangling these narratives positions us to more impactfully resist surveillance culture in moments of future crisis, and also to understand its alternatives.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHEATING AND PLAGIARISM RESEARCH

It is helpful to understand our contemporary shift toward surveillance culture through considering how researchers and universities have historically framed the problem of academic dishonesty, shifting the focus from institutions and faculty to the behavior of the individual student during moments of acute change or crisis. While it is beyond the scope of this article to comprehensively outline all of the research on cheating and plagiarism in the US, understanding this shift and how it impacted imagined solutions and interventions can provide a new way of contextualizing pandemic-induced plagiarism and cheating narratives.

Before the early 1960s, research on cheating and plagiarism concerning higher education was relatively sparse. However, in the few studies that do exist, it was routinely acknowledged that students’ decisions to cheat or plagiarize were complex. Some researchers more forcefully blamed bad course design, assignment design, or incompetent instructors (Hawkins 1932; Whitsel 1954), noting how and why instructors should treat accusations of plagiarism as carefully as possible (Kuhn 1957). One researcher gave two other reasons aside from instructor incompetence: a lack of trust

between a student and an instructor, and fear of the impact of one, high-stakes examination in the determination of an entire course grade. She suggests working on building trust, and designing more low-stakes assignments as methods of preventing cheating in the future (Gillentine 1937). In a student survey issued by the *Phi Delta Kappan*, students blamed themselves, finding that the fear of not passing, a strong desire to please parents and to participate in grade-based activities, and laziness are the most common reasons why cheating and plagiarism occur (Carter 1928).

Many proposed solutions to combatting or discouraging academic dishonesty feel surprisingly contemporary and progressive. Writing from City College of New York in 1959, English professor Leo Hamalian suggests that plagiarism resulted from a lack of appropriate resources and the prevalence of increasingly overcrowded classrooms, which made students feel detached from the value of their work. He suggests taking a far more relaxed approach to paper deadlines while building trust with students who seem resistant to learning. In the *Phi Delta Kappan* survey, students suggested that cheating policies and punishments should be openly discussed and democratically decided upon by members of the class or by elected student government officials, since student-to-student disapproval of cheating would be its most impactful deterrent (Carter 1928). Other solutions included implementing policies like honor pledges (Doyle and Foote 1925), or even suspending traditional exams until we can take a more comprehensive approach to studying how and why cheating happens (Wrightsmann 1959).

While there were several local studies of plagiarism and cheating on campuses, it wasn't until William Bowers conducted the first multi-institutional survey of 5,000 students from across almost 100 US-based institutions that we had a more comprehensive picture. Half of students who were surveyed admitted to engaging in some form of academic dishonesty since coming to college: findings that were relatively consistent with a number of local campus studies (1964, 193). The study also found that students overwhelmingly both disapproved of cheating and also engaged in it, finding it simultaneously “morally wrong” and irresistible (194).

The latter half of the twentieth century brought a number of important cultural and demographic shifts to US college campuses. The Cold War era youth culture figure of the “bad boy” challenged conformity and institutionalism in new ways (Medovoi 2005), creating new opportunities to understand cheating as subversive and “cool” rather than as shameful. Meanwhile, post-war increases in federal funding for higher education and advances of the Civil Rights movement produced “dramatic growth” in college access (Kim and Rury 2007). During this era, research on cheating and plagiarism remained similarly multifaceted. However, it also significantly *accelerated*, despite very little empirical evidence that the problem was getting worse beyond the perception of change. Suggestions for penalties also grew more comprehensive, and in many cases, more severe. This was also despite evidence from the same era which suggested that more severe penalties do not necessarily decrease the prevalence of academic dishonesty (Salem & Bowers 1970).

While it is too tidy and too inaccurate to suggest that all pre-1960s researchers blamed factors other than students compared to post-1960s researchers who primarily blamed students for cheating and plagiarism, it is noticeable that blame for academic dishonesty increasingly shifted to the way that a “culture” of cheating develops on campuses through students who enable it in the latter half of the 20th century (Bowers 1968). Research increasingly predicted which personality types or students who shared particular demographic features were more likely to plagiarize if the situation allowed for it (Hetherington and Felman 1964; Steininger et. al. 1964). Students were also assumed to be increasingly “cynical” (Daniels 1960), disillusioned, and disinterested countercultural acolytes, rejecting what was commonly framed as the university’s tradition of intellectual honesty and, therefore, increasingly likely to cheat (Stravisky 1973; Trachtenberg 1972). There was an interest in exposing the practices of essay mills (Stravisky 1973; “Term Paper Companies and the Constitution,” 1974; Trachtenberg 1972), advocating for faculty to solicit more reference texts from students to compare styles, to give more weight to final exams and oral presentations than to papers, and to require all essay writing to happen in class more frequently in order to combat these

problems. In 1960, UCLA officially adopted a policy to dismiss students accused of plagiarism from the university (American Association of University Professors).

The shift in blame from a lack of institutional resources, inadequate faculty development, and inadequate assignment design to perceived student motivations, personalities, and “predispositions” toward complying with university rules and standards has commonly resulted in a difference in solutions. It mirrors an intertwined capitalist emphasis on an individual’s behavior as the reason for success or failure, and also a carceral emphasis on efficient, covert, and monodirectional detection and punishment. When we imagine ourselves to be supporting students who are momentarily disengaged in their learning, afraid of consequences, new to the kind of academic work that we are asking them to do, or who lack sufficient agency, *and* when we have adequate institutional support to treat students as individual people, solutions tend to be more nuanced and focused on teaching and learning. When we imagine our role is to “catch” and penalize students who are doing something wrong because of their lack of moral character, their lack of respect for academic work or for academic institutions, or when we patronizingly try to “protect” students from their own worst impulses, likening cheating to crime becomes more common, and solutions become both more individualistic and more punishment-oriented.

SURVEILLANCE CULTURE IN THE SHIFT TO COMPUTER MEDIATED AND ONLINE LEARNING

The shift toward online learning and other forms of computer-mediated instruction in the mid-1990s reignited anxieties about academic dishonesty that bore some similarities to the ones which surfaced after the mid-century. While distance education through the mail, radio, and television had persisted since at least the 18th century (Kentnor 2015), learning online and learning in person but with the assistance of computers was a new terrain to navigate. However, it wasn’t the late 1990s and into the early 2000s that the price of computers and the more widespread availability of internet access made online learning a possibility for a much wider range of students. Likewise, it wasn’t until then

that a perceived need for technologies that perform a surveillance function entered into the equation.

Tracing the development of Learning Management Systems (LMSs) like Ilias, Dokeos, eCollege, Moodle, and eventually Blackboard can be a helpful way to understand how the growth of surveillance culture has become normalized and pervasive in moments of change and educational democratization. The specific ways that these LMS technologies have continued to develop reflects some troubling assumptions about students, their perceived deficiencies, and the “need” to monitor and control them.

In *Pedagogy and Practice: A Multi-modal Approach for a Multi-ethnic Online Classroom*, Mary-Lynn Chambers documents the initial development and marketing of LMSs to universities, noting that because the interest in computer-assisted learning still primarily came from predominantly white and wealthy schools where students had access to expensive technologies, this meant that the majority of LMSs were initially “designed by whites, implemented by whites for a predominately white audience, and promoted by whites” (2016, 37). Yet, as the popularity of online learning grew, so did the surveillance capabilities of LMS products. Platforms that were initially dedicated to storing material and facilitating collaboration—or even to providing a free or low-cost open-source option based on the pedagogical theories of social constructivism like Moodle (38)—began to develop more sophisticated ways to track and report student behavior. This was due in part to the fact that advances in computing technology made the tracking of student engagement through learning analytics more possible. However, it was inevitably also because offering surveillance options seemed necessary if an LMS desired to compete within a marketplace of increasingly sophisticated platforms claiming to track student “outcomes” for the purpose of improving them.

Today, LMSs capture a wide variety of data on student (and faculty) behaviors, often without the consent or knowledge of students and faculty who use them. Ann Hill Duin and Jason Tham call attention to instructors’ common use of LMSs without knowing about their surveillance capabilities. They describe the pervasive amount of data collection that “includes the compilation and sharing of aggregate data across all

courses and institutions as a means to better understand learning and improve student success” (2020, 16). As Estee Beck describes, “Blackboard and Canvas, two commonly used learning management systems within many universities, use data analytics to track student engagement, including the amount of time logged into their systems and clicks across modules” (2016). In many cases, data like this is only available to faculty, not students, and in fact, students often do not know that faculty have access to this information as part of the class. If an instructor uses an LMS, opting out of this data collection is not an option, as these agreements are made between educational technology companies and the institution.

For some faculty, the predictive analytics available to them via an LMS might seem like more “benign” surveillance, or even a helpful way to keep students on track with their own work. However, analytics like these can also miss a more complex picture. They can equate something that is as complicated as academic engagement with time that a student has a browser window open and not idle on their device, and can encourage an antagonistic relationship to develop between students and professors built on impartial information. Faculty must also recognize that these surveillance capabilities can easily be used to assess *their* own efficacy in the classroom by the larger institution. For example, Blackboard, one of the most popular LMSs on the market today, claims to measure which faculty are the most “innovative,” the instructional design practices that lead to “improved student performance,” and as a result, which students are the most “at-risk” of earning a low grade or withdrawing from a course (“Blackboard Analytics for Learn”). Metrics like these could be used to support students who are struggling as easily as they could be used to sanction faculty whose “low performing” students are indicative of their own “poor” performance. If faculty believe that the data that Blackboard collects does not necessarily tell an accurate story about what happens in our classroom or why a student is failing to engage with content that we assign—if we would not want to be monitored in these ways without our consent or knowledge—we should not be doing this to our students.

The link between predictive analytics that are meant to track and report the potential for certain kinds of student or faculty behavior are also concerning both for

the ties that these tools have to policing, crime, and punishment, and also for what we know about the way that algorithmic models teach themselves based on the collection of previous data. In the book *Weapons of Math Destruction*, Cathy O’Neil argues for how predictive tools like PredPoll CompStat, and HunchLab—tools used by the criminal punishment system to analyze historic crime data in neighborhoods in order to predict the likelihood of future crime—focus disproportionately on communities with poor, racialized residents. The result, argues O’Neil, is that “police departments... zero in on the poor, stopping more of them, arresting a portion of those, and sending a subgroup to prison” (2016, 91). The areas where it seems that it is more likely for crime to occur are the areas where crime is *already* overly documented, even though the vast majority of what the tools predict are the possibility of “nuisance crimes,” or non-violent offenses like panhandling and selling or possessing small quantities of drugs (86). O’Neil argues that these “digital dragnets” are just as likely to predict and continue to single out crimes of poverty as the broken windows and zero-tolerance policies that preceded them (104).

With this in mind, it is useful to consider not only what predictive analytics are likely to detect, but also whether surveillance advancements like this would have been made in the first place had the demand for LMS technologies not expanded. The use of the platform by students who are more frequently figured in deficit narratives as more likely to “struggle,” or to lack aptitude or motivation for schoolwork, has undoubtedly increased an appetite for these features. While we are not arguing that there are no students who are more likely to struggle, or that some students show less enthusiasm for their coursework, predictively anticipating which students will fail shares the potential to disproportionately identify students who are struggling for the wrong reasons. This can create the false narrative that students are failing *because* of a fairly simplistic lack of motivation or will: because they are too lazy to do the readings, and not because predictive analytics are identifying students who are experiencing a greater lack of access to things that support their basic needs, like housing, food, healthcare and mental healthcare services. In individual, classroom-level cases, this might lead to bad assumptions and inappropriate interventions. Building relationships with students

can reveal a much more complex picture of how and why they are struggling in a class than what we can glean from looking at a spreadsheet that reveals how much time they spent looking at a video.

Surveillance technologies also rhetorically position students as liabilities to the university's academic integrity—potential liars or cheaters who need to be rescued from their own worst impulses—a story we have been telling about students ever since a greater number of non-white, female, international, working-class, and poor students have joined our campuses. These technologies put administrators and educators in the position of law enforcement officers entrusted with ensuring the validity of the degree that students earn. They can also quantify an extraordinarily complex process—like innovative, supportive, caring, culturally responsive, community-engaged teaching and instructional design—in crude, simplistic, and patronizing ways tying faculty efficacy to students' course grades and to superficial metrics of engagement.

Still, our choice to use or avoid a certain LMS or particular features that it contains might not be fully within our control, and these platforms *do* provide critical affordances. So, while it might not be possible to opt completely out of the surveillance functions that they perform, writing studies scholars like Duin, Tham and Beck argue for the necessity of making these surveillance capabilities visible so students can begin to recognize the various ways their information is tracked and stored: not just by LMSs but also other technologies like phones and search engines. Such approaches put the instructor in the position of collaborating with students to address surveillance technologies, rather than deploying them in service of seeking out students to track, manage, or punish. On this matter, faculty who are in less vulnerable employment positions should demand to know the way that their own behaviors are tracked within these platforms as well, and to advocate for transparency on behalf of untenured, contingent, and graduate student faculty.

PLAGIARISM DETECTION SOFTWARE AND SURVEILLANCE CULTURE

Use of technologies that claim to help faculty to detect plagiarism has also been a pervasive and persistent way that universities have monitored students' behavior for at

least two decades. Platforms such as TurnItIn operate by collecting a continuously-expanding archive of student and professional writing onto a database, and then comparing that writing to the new writing that students submit for their classes. As Sean Michael Morris and Jesse Stommel (2017) have detailed, this means that when students upload their work, it ceases to belong to them, and becomes a way for the for-profit tool to expand its own efficacy.

Depending on university preferences, sometimes individual students are allowed to consent to “opt out” of the collection of their paper. However, in these cases, universities can also create a local version of the database, storing student work that comes only from within a single institutional context. Either way, it is the university’s decision to set the preferences for students, and students cannot opt out entirely, nor do they have the permission to delete their paper from the database after the semester ends (“Top 15 Misconceptions”). The bottom line is that this product is continuously strengthened by the addition of work that students do not necessarily consent to share, and that students themselves cannot remove.

In 2007, Susan E. Schorn, a writing coordinator at the University of Texas at Austin, found that a simple Google search (or, in other words, copying and pasting language that seemed incongruous with the rest of a student’s text into Google) detected plagiarism at a much more accurate rate than either TurnItIn or Safe Assign. A follow-up test in 2015 showed similarly high false positive and false negative plagiarism rates. While these tools are commonly referred to as “plagiarism detection software,” they do not necessarily *detect* plagiarism, but simply flag papers for their similarities.

Schorn’s presentation at the 2016 Council of Writing Program Administrators Conference further pointed to the double standard that “academic integrity” policies create in universities. As Schorn noted, ghostwriters in university communication offices regularly write speeches and official communications on behalf of college administrators. Faculty commonly use model syllabi, assignment prompts, or other teaching materials without attribution. Even college plagiarism policies—the language

that many professors are required to copy and paste directly into their own syllabi—are, ironically, commonly plagiarized.

Other research within our field has suggested that software designed to curb or detect plagiarism is not only largely ineffective, but it can also have other negative impacts, such as “overemphasiz[ing] attention to surface issues” (Vie 2013), oversimplifying or confusing the meaning of plagiarism (Mott-Smith 2017, Price 2002, Howard 2001), and monetizing student data for corporate profit without the consent of students themselves (Morris and Stommel 2017). These tools not only do not work but they also treat student writing as a product for corporate consumption. They devalue student writing, separating students from their agency and universities from money that could be used to support students (and their instructors) rather than to monitor them. At CUNY, Luke Waltzer, Lisa M. Rhody, and Roxanne Shirazi testified to the CUNY Board of Trustees in December 2020 against the impending contract approval for almost 2 million dollars for Turnitin, citing its ineffectiveness as plagiarism detection and questioning its cost in the context of budget cuts that have reduced the hiring of those who actually teach writing at the university.

And while surveillance tools like Turnitin and SafeAssign give the illusion of teaching writing practices like research, citation use and academic integrity, they often only show students how to address the particular systems that are monitoring their writing for “originality.” Lesson plans center around how to avoid plagiarism by focusing on the lengths of quotations, rather than understanding how to integrate sources into the argument of an essay, or understanding why conventions and rules exist in the first place. Sometimes teachers require students to run their essays through surveillance tools before handing it in for a grade in order for students to see the percentage of their paper that is deemed “original.” The attention on students’ potential to plagiarize or cheat, thus creating a need to surveil students in the process, is not only misdirected, but it also impacts the efficacy of our teaching and the quality of relationships between instructors and students. The deployment of these technologies shifts students’ focus away from understanding, valuing, critiquing, and even altering existing citation and

knowledge-production practices to suit their own rhetorical purposes and goals, and toward complying with opaque rules that carry high-stakes consequences.

SURVEILLANCE POLICIES

While plagiarism software and LMSs provide prominent examples of teachers trying to prevent a small number of students from cheating by subjecting a wide number of students to surveillance and to the non-consensual theft of their work as a result, our everyday teaching practices can also create pervasive opportunities for surveillance. It is not only the use of expensive and inaccurately deployed technological surveillance “solutions” to what may or may not be a media-manufactured cheating “epidemic” that concerns us as faculty educators. It is also the proliferation of what Jeffrey Moro has called “cop shit,” defined as “any pedagogical technique or technology that presumes an adversarial relationship between students and teachers” (2020). For Moro, “cop shit” includes practices like unforgiving deadlines and absence policies, which contribute to a culture in which a teacher is spending more energy on making sure students are not engaging in “wrongdoing” rather than learning.

We find the presence of “cop shit” in our own classrooms constantly and, as individual people who are part of large systems that we do not control, we have to make difficult decisions about how to meaningfully eliminate it while giving students enough structure to remain on track. A lack of dedicated and ongoing time and space to professionally develop and to encounter alternatives makes it easy to do unto students what was done unto us. However, confronting our own “cop shit” commonly comes with a sense of relief. Less often than in the past, we find ourselves in the position to make impossible, arbitrary judgment calls that do not align with the rest of our pedagogical philosophy. For instance, Amy J. Wan had a long-standing policy of decreasing paper grades by a third for each day it was late, and was spending an extraordinary amount of time and emotional labor fielding students’ reasons for late papers and determining which “excuses” were legitimate, not to mention keeping track of the late penalties and their impact. The policy was always there, passed down to her when she was a graduate instructor and it stuck, unnoticed, until she spent some time a few years ago trying to

make her syllabus policies friendlier, more inviting, and adhering the principles of universal design. That late paper policy actually surprised her, hiding in plain sight but then revealed with this different framework about how the structure of the class communicates a particular set of values and attitudes to students.

Lindsey Albracht also inherited policy language and practices as a graduate student instructor that seemed logical or inevitable when she first began to implement them, but that were really just “cop shit” on further inspection. One policy instructed students about the harsh penalties that they would face for perpetually checking their cell phones, claiming that seeing or hearing a student’s phone would be grounds for asking them to leave the class. Another policy refused late papers outside of “extreme” circumstances, noting that even “most illnesses and computer problems do not constitute an ‘extreme’ circumstance,” a position that Lindsey never really found tenable or necessary, but felt initially obligated to uphold because of warnings that students would take advantage of her if she seemed more flexible.

Both Wan and Albracht now not only do not have late penalties: they advertise this fact to students, telling them that deadlines are in place to help them with their own time management, but that a meeting after a deadline has passed to make a new set of deadlines is always possible. Not only do students mostly continue to turn in work at the same rate that they did in the past (most are on time, some are a little late, and some work never comes), but students who were behind for very legitimate reasons are now more likely to feel that it is possible to catch up. However, for both Amy and Lindsey, it was not until they encountered colleagues’ more generous policies (and had the time to reflect on those policies) that they felt motivated and empowered to change the language initially copied and pasted from syllabi provided by a department or program: syllabi which communicated, tacitly and explicitly, the department’s own expectations on its instructors.

Unfortunately, changing policy language alone will not disrupt surveillance culture without a commitment to helping faculty develop meaningful alternatives that feel authentic to their pedagogical values. In examples from our own institution, the City University of New York (CUNY), is classified by the United States Department of

Education as a non-attendance taking institution. While institutions within our system interpret the meaning of this classification differently, the Academic Policies and Procedures document for Queens College (where we both teach) states that “absence in and of itself shall not affect a students’ grade.” However, professors make choices about how to implement (or to “get around”) this policy that are commonly embedded in a variety of ingrained assumptions about students that can greatly limit imagination and agency.

When we hire and train new instructors, or when we teach mid-career faculty about translating their face-to-face course into an online format, this policy is one that gets questioned most often. Many teachers cannot conceive of being in charge of a class in which we are not keeping track of which students are present, and then penalizing those who do not attend. Instructors often fixate on how we can continue to ensure students’ presence in our classrooms, rather than on how we can find ways to increase student engagement in our classes that can happen with or without students’ physical presence. Thus, the common practice of tying students’ grades to “participation” becomes a solution to teaching in a non-attendance taking institution. Counting up how many times a student spoke, or wrote something in a forum, becomes a proxy for “engagement.” The practice of requiring a certain number of low-stakes activities that students must be present to complete persists, too. The effect is that students attend classes where there is a grade-based attendance policy in defiance of the stated rule. And practices like this render our non-traditional policy indistinguishable from traditional ones, and rely on systems of rewards and punishments to do work that should be far more pedagogically complex.

During distance learning, an additional CUNY policy stated that we could not require students to use their cameras during synchronous class times or for the purposes of proctoring exams. There were many sensible reasons for this policy in response to our particular student body. In New York City apartments, where a majority of our students live in multigenerational households where they share their learning spaces, it is common for students to learn online in spaces where other people are present, including children. Parents must give consent for minor children to appear on screen,

and this is not something that we can consistently guarantee. We also have students who live in a variety of congregate living situations (including shelters) or who need to access their classes in other public places and may not have felt comfortable to advertise this to their peers or their professors. We've had students take synchronous online courses from their car while parked in a parking lot where they could access high-speed internet when this wasn't a possibility at home, or "tune in" to class during a last-minute work shift, or attend class while caring for young children or siblings.

The impulse to "get around" this policy, or to disregard it entirely, was real and understandable. Having and emphasizing a rule that says that students are not required to use their cameras has meant and continues to mean that we must sometimes teach in Zoom rooms full of a sea of black boxes where we are unable to see our students' faces and monitor their physical presence in the classroom. While we both recognize why requiring cameras can participate in surveillance culture in ways that were not pedagogically feasible, we share the sense that it can be difficult, lonely, and joyless to teach to the boxes. However, rather than deferring to surveillance, we have been challenged to build community and participation in other ways such as collaborating with students to use tools like Padlet, Google Docs, Slack, Jamboard, MentiMeter and Hypothes.is. The black boxes have encouraged us to make creative new uses of the Zoom chat or polling feature, to play games, to develop a class shorthand with a variety of reaction buttons and emojis, and to lighten up the chat with gifs and memes. Amy has had students video or audio record their essays to share with the class, and invited others in the class to respond, which almost every student has done. Lindsey sets aside class time in the first several weeks near the beginning of the semester to facilitate get-to-know-you synchronous chats and other activities where students are encouraged (though never required) to share pictures of our pets and houseplants, pictures of things we have been cooking or eating, places we love in Queens, what we are watching, the places that we miss from campus, and songs that we are listening to as we write.

We have found that strategies like recasting engagement, and realizing when engagement is possible (during class, or after class in asynchronous writing tasks) means that we hear from more students than we would in a more traditional class

discussion. Many times during class, students do not have their cameras on, but are writing their responses to one another in other spaces. Yet we recognize that this has required a mindshift in many ways. We have to resist feeling resentful about the silence, and create different, new, and similarly meaningful ways to invite students to engage in the class without surveilling them. These new ways of engagement do not *replace* the kind of face-to-face engagement that we are used to. However, they open new possibilities for engagement that would not have been possible with cameras: possibilities that have ultimately made both of us better teachers.

Curbing our own attachments to surveillance culture is difficult and vulnerable work. It can be hard to hear what students are trying to communicate to us about their lives and the conditions under which they are trying to successfully do school when they cheat, when they do not attend classes, or when our efforts to engage them fail. Sometimes, it is impossible to know whether students are telling us that their lives are complicated, or that they do not find value in the task that they are completing and that we tried to thoughtfully design. They might be telling us about something that is completely out of our control: that our class size is too big, that the resources that are provided to enable their academic success are insufficient, or that a required class doesn't feel that relevant to their life, despite our best efforts. Sometimes they are telling us that most of college feels like completing an arbitrary, endless series of disconnected tasks for unclear and uncertain rewards in a rapidly changing world. Students might be communicating that they do not understand something—or even that they are *indifferent* to understanding it—and because we are professors, what we are teaching is likely to be something that has brought great personal meaning to our own lives. Students might be telling us something about the trauma they have experienced in school, and their fear of more failure. They might be telling us something about our efficacy, our identity, or their disagreement with our deepest pedagogical beliefs.

We can acknowledge these difficulties and the pain and uncertainty that they can bring. However, we must also acknowledge that we will not impactfully address *any* of these concerns by monitoring and punishing students more: by communicating that we do not trust them, and that we expect that they will try to trick us, or that we are

their adversaries. Surveillance culture only makes it more difficult to build relationships based on trust and care, which are essential for the kind of deep learning that we want all of our students to do.

MOVING FORWARD WITHIN ENTRENCHED SYSTEMS OF SURVEILLANCE

Surveillance culture has yielded “solutions” to the real or imagined increase in academic dishonesty that often fails to function in the way that many professors and administrators intend. We encourage educators to consider how their own practices—such as how they handle attendance, late papers, technology policies, and policies designed to encourage engagement or participation, how they deploy surveillance technologies, and how they teach students about the collection of their data—might participate in or resist surveillance culture. However, we must also make space to consider the larger structural conditions under which such surveillance-oriented practices feel necessary and entrenched. Sanctioning an individual instructor’s rigid policy or practice without considering the entire system in which that practice was incubated can carry the suggestion that systemic transformation involves a process of rooting out the “bad apples,” rather than rooting out what’s harmful within the system itself: what incubates and feeds surveillance culture, and what makes it feel natural and inevitable.

Departmentally-mandated grading distributions, unjust labor conditions, a job market that went from bad to catastrophic during a global pandemic, austerity, and administrative pressures to “return to normal” under conditions which remain unsafe can further entrench the desire to use surveillance culture to solve problems. Paired with stock language on syllabi, the models that we all had as students, and a severe lack of institutional investment in faculty development opportunities it can become almost inevitable that we will use surveillance with students in the same ways it was used with us. Additionally, since approximately 50-75% of the faculty in the United States are contingent faculty members (Betensky, Kahn, Maisto, and Schaffer 2021), all or most pedagogical work that’s beyond teaching from model materials and prior experiences becomes labor that vulnerable faculty are giving to the institution for free.

Rather than using moments of crisis to further exacerbate surveillance culture, we can co-create classroom spaces where most of their students simply voluntarily appear, even in required classes. For example, we can design policies and practices that honor students' humanity and privacy while also challenging them; we can resist surveillance technologies, or help students to use and understand them more thoughtfully, and examine our inherited materials; we can remember how moments of crisis can make surveillance seem logical, inevitable, and even the most sensible option, and know that it is particularly important to resist plagiarism panics in these moments of change. We should do these things with compassion toward individual people, and with an acknowledgement that actions happen within systems that individuals do not necessarily create, control, or transform alone. Ultimately, these individual actions must be paired with adequate ongoing professional development support, fair wages for our contingent peers, solid student support services, and ongoing political education. When faculty are adequately supported and challenged to consider how "automatic" practices in their pedagogy might reflect values that they might not actually share, or communicate with students in ways that they might not actually intend, the space for other possibilities emerges. Combatting surveillance culture is possible.

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