

Class recordings in Code Yellow

1. Introduction

Due to the **improved COVID-situation** the restrictions at our university have been loosened. Instructors are therefore **no longer required to record lectures**. Such development **deeply concerns** the Ghent Student Council.

The decision to scratch the obligation was taken by the board of Ghent University without consulting its student section and became effective the next working day. As the Ghent Student Council, we **regret that the board dismissed the 'culture of dialogue'** which it enthusiastically propagates to the outside world. The voice of the students is of **vital importance** regarding education matters. For the upcoming times We call on the board of Ghent University to stick to its public claims and to increase its practise of the culture of dialogue. Students should be able to take part in discussions and processes of policymaking that directly affect their study experience and success, such as those about lecture recordings, both short and long term.

2. The importance of class recordings

In **December of 2018**, the Ghent Student Council (GSR) and the Department of Educational Policy (DOWA) conducted a **survey on class recordings**, completed by over 7000 students¹. COVID was not among us yet, but the GSR already recommended **recording as many classes as possible**. Up until the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in **March of 2020**, the outcome of our survey however didn't receive much attention. The pandemic finally brought the issue of lecture recordings back on the table, resulting in lectures being taught in hybrid forms and the University increasing its **investment in class recordings**.

The recordings became reality and **showed their use**. Students which, for whatever reason, previously could not attend their classes, were now able to reap all benefits of an in-person lecture. Students who are ill, quarantined or out due to unexpected circumstances, are not forced to either go to campus or miss their classes altogether. Students with a functional impairment (e.g. someone in a wheelchair) that face difficulties when coming to the university or following the tempo of the teacher, can now fully enjoy their classes. In general,

¹ GHENT STUDENT COUNCIL, "Conclusierapport enquête lesopnames" (2019), see https://gentsestudentenraad.be/static/persistent/files/10db9278-d032-4636-b845-2472e5cf6feb-Conclusierapport_Lesopnames.pdf

class recordings offer the possibility to catch up on your classes independently or watch them at your own pace. **The fact that code yellow is now the norm in our society, does not diminish the value of and need for class recordings and live streams.** Some students are still ill and/or quarantined, others are still in need of a more accessible university, something the recordings contributed to.

It is no secret that our city is dealing with a housing problem and that the prices are rising dramatically, especially for students. This year, many students decided not to rent in Ghent but instead opted to follow as many classes as possible from their hometown. Also in the past commuting students could be observed missing classes partially due to irregularities in public transport or general commuting times. Livestreaming and lecture recordings also yields benefits for students with a personalised learning track and other students whose classes, often from the same academic year or cluster, overlap can now follow them all via the recordings, instead of having to choose. For **working students and caregivers** the recordings considerably enhanced their flexibility. **A lot of students composed their programme thinking that everything would be recorded.** Due to the sudden switch, these students lose a calculated certainty. We deeply regret that **no one was warned** and that **no transition period was provided** during which changes to one's curriculum could be made. It is simply not feasible to look for student housing, change your class schedule, and/or request study facilities in one weekend. Additionally, we raise the question of whether students should be worried about missing classes, instead of focusing on their studies, work, or other commitments.

We understand that teachers do not see recordings as an established right and have their doubts, but we are still convinced that **the benefits of flexibility and inclusion** outweigh the drawbacks.

3. Participatory culture at Ghent University

Ghent University has an **impressive history of student participation.** It is, therefore, no coincidence that the culture of dialogue is being pushed as a **core value** of its policymaking, not in the least on the university level. Nevertheless, we have noticed that when taking this decision, which affects students to the same degree as teachers or the other persons involved, **the students were not heard.** This is very regrettable. **Let this not give rise to a precedent.** We call on the board of the University of Ghent to give us a seat at the table when making these kinds of decisions, now and in the future. Above all, we cannot forget what it means to be student representative: together with all the stakeholders, striving for (more) quality in education, with the explicit intention to bring in our perspectives and impressions.

As students, we are represented in different councils and committees at Ghent University. We attribute great value to cooperation, participation, and the opportunity we get to see the broad and diverse student population represented at all levels. **How the university's policy regarding the class recordings was changed in one weekend, without informing or consulting the students, does not reflect that culture of participation and dialogue.** First, we plead for, when the impact of a decision is this sizable, a transition period wherein

programme committees, teachers, and students have time to adapt and work out a collective and balanced vision. Secondly, we are convinced that if this change of regulation was discussed with the programme committees, the faculty councils, and the central level, together we could have achieved such a shared vision and a workable transition period.

4. The future of our education

Finally, bearing in mind the mentioned culture of dialogue, we call for a **true debate** on the class recordings and the future of our education. For the past two years, the more optimistic voices pointed to the current opportunities, such as experimenting with different forms of education and considering what elements of those experiments we would want to keep. Now the time is ripe. 'On and off' policies are very confusing to the students and no longer sustainable. **We acknowledge and congratulate everything the professors have done during the pandemic.** We thank them for making their classes available online. A lot of them still continue to record and livestream, which is encouraging. **However, we now need a long-term vision.** The valuable work of countless teachers, staff members, and other stakeholders has paved the way for a collective future. Let us seize this opportunity and no longer avoid this fundamental discussion. Let us anchor the role of class recordings.

Digital education is part of the future. How hard one might try, the wave of digitalisation will not be stopped. We notice that **other universities** (e.g. the VUB and KUL) have already made the explicit choice for the combination of digital and traditional education because it is more **democratic** and **flexible**, in some cases even prior to the pandemic. Future students will consider this when choosing a university.

The digitalisation of our higher education is a fact. In these changing and challenging times, Ghent University has to do what it is good at: **dare to think. It is possible.** Give our institution the chance to reinvent itself, enhance its quality and become an international forerunner when it comes to hybrid education. This is, without any doubt, one of the biggest challenges Ghent University will face in the post-COVID era. As the Ghent Student Council, we **trust** in the fact that we can write a **successful story** if we create an open-minded culture of dialogue without taboos. For this to succeed, the university's board will have to allow the students to hold the pen together with the academic, administrative and technical staff. Together, on equal footing, we can tackle this situation.

Dear Ghent University. Dare to think. Dare to be critical. Dare to change.