[Information sent to Jan Boxill and Andrea Biddle by a faculty member, May 11, 2011; some information has been removed to preserve privacy.]

Jan, Andrea:

A student I trust just raised with me an issue that arose in at least one course in which she was enrolled this year, and that she had also heard about from students in some other courses, namely courses including assignments that include mandatory bogging or other postings on publicly accessible internet sites. Here's the example she gave, but I suspect that there may be more than a few others:

> *In one of my courses, the professor decided to put together a website based on required course assignments by each student. Additionally, they were hoping to put up interviews and papers based on the interviews on the website as well. After our conversation, I sent the TA an email asking whether our names would be on the website and to say that I wanted to make sure my name wasn't on the website, and I noted that the interview couldn't be put on the website as well. I think it was really inappropriate that the issue was never brought up, so if a student didn't think to ask to have their name kept off the website, it might have been put up regardless. In other courses I have heard of students being expected to post a blog on a publicly available website.*

I . . . think there are several issues of serious concern here. One, as the student notes, is the posting of interview materials on an openly accessible website, which seems clearly inappropriate to at least the spirit if not the letter of our IRB policies. More generally, however, what a student or anyone posts on the public internet will have the potential to follow them forever, leading to potential harm if a future employer (for instance) looks at immaturely reasoned postings, or ones where a student chooses to play devil's advocate, or later changes their mind, or takes a politically unpopular position, or just shows a candor that they would not necessarily wish to display on a potentially controversial issue outside the environment of the classroom. Or if a student recognizes this risk, it has the potential to seriously diminish the robustness and freedom of academic debate in the protected educational environment, deeply contrary to our commitment as a faculty to maintaining the university as a safe space in which to explore controversial and sometimes personal issues.

I would like to see EPA and FC address this and communicate a clear policy, to all faculty and TAs and anyone else with classroom authority, that (1) under no circumstances should students be required to post content on publicly accessible websites, for the reasons given above: all classroom discussions and assignments should be shared only on

password-protected university educational sites such as Blackboard; (2) consistent with the principles and risks for which we have IRB procedures, whether or not the IRB technically has jurisdiction over classroom assignments such as interviewing, students should not post interviews or other potentially sensitive personal information about identifiable individuals without the written consent of the individual identified, even on password-protected websites shared with other students, and instructional personnel should not encourage or even allow such postings without such permissions; and (3) it should be clearly identified as a breach of the Honor Code for any student to repost the contents of others' opinions or other potentially sensitive personally identifiable information -- either other identifiable students, or other individuals quoted or otherwise identifiable in other students' postings -- onto the publicly available internet without explicit written permission from the student responsible for the original posting (who in turn is responsible for the information they have posted about anyone else).

Thanks for considering this --