

Queensborough Community College
Senate Committee on Environment, Disability, and Quality of Life Issues
Report on Video Surveillance on Campus
March 29, 2016

Following an email request from Dr. Pecorino, the committee on Environment, Disability, and Quality of Life Issues has gathered information regarding cameras and video surveillance at QCC. Below are Dr. Pecorino's questions and the information received from Ed Locke and Lt. Black regarding cameras operated by Public Safety and from Bruce Naples regarding cameras operated by the Academic Computing Center.

-How is the information recorded?

The vast majority of the cameras on campus are recording all the time, while some are motion activated. Some of them are static cameras, pointed in a specific direction (such as in classrooms with smart technology), and others pan over larger areas (such as the cameras in QCC parking lots). These cameras record in public places where there is not an expectation of privacy, places such as the student union, the library, outdoor spaces, parking lots, and hallways. There are not cameras in spaces where there is an expectation of privacy, spaces such as bathrooms, locker rooms, and faculty and staff offices.

-Who has access?

Public Safety has access to data from all cameras in public places such as outside campus buildings and inside building hallways, open spaces such as in the library or the cafeteria, and building entryways. Cameras in classrooms that are equipped with smart podiums or computer labs are accessed only by the Academic Computing Center team. Public Safety does not have regular access to the data from these cameras, but in the event of a reported criminal or illicit incident, they can request the data from ACC. The approval process for access to ACC camera data is stringent. Some individual departments or offices also have access to the data recorded by cameras in their vicinity: the Art gallery staff has access to cameras in their spaces, Student Union staff has access to cameras in the student union, and Building and Grounds can access certain cameras on campus as needed.

-For how long is data held?

Data collected by Public Safety cameras is saved for between two weeks and three months. Footage possibly recorded by a camera related to an incident reported six months after it has taken place, for instance, would no longer be available. Due to size constraints, data collected by ACC cameras is saved on the ACC server for two weeks.

-What sorts of incidents might result in looking at the data?

Formal incident reports of criminal or illicit activities would prompt Public Safety to review available surveillance footage on their cameras or to request access for ACC camera data. ACC staff may make use of cameras in podium classrooms to note that a projector has been left on and to remotely shut down the projector. Projector bulbs are very expensive, so this is a cost and energy saving effort.

-For exactly how long have the cameras been recording? What are the exact dates when cameras started operation for each different location?

The college has steadily increased the presence of surveillance cameras over the last ten years. Since there are now 200 individual cameras operated by Public Safety, there is no data on the exact installation dates for the location of all 200 different cameras. There are plans to install additional cameras in building hallways such as in the Humanities buildings.

ACC operates cameras in about 110 classrooms that are fitted with smart podiums and projectors.

-Do the cameras work 24/7 or are they intermittent?

While a few cameras are motion activated, it should be assumed that they all operate 24/7. ACC cameras in classrooms with technology can be turned off by individual instructors during a class if the instructor desires (Dr. Pecorino shared instructions detailing how to do this in a previous series of emails). ACC cameras can be turned back on remotely by the ACC staff after a class has ended.

-Is there an opportunity for misuse of data recorded (or use other than what the cameras' stated intentions are)?

The primary purposes of the cameras are to serve as deterrents, and signs on campus indicating surveillance cameras are running alerts the community to their presence. They also function to make data available in the case of investigations of criminal or illicit activities. Public Safety representatives stressed that the footage for these cameras is only reviewed or formally accessed in the case of such a report. A member of the committee asked what might happen if, say, a supervisor requested access to footage from a particular camera in order to check up on an employee under him or her without there being a formal incident report attached to the request. Ed Locke indicated that in such a case, the supervisor would not be given the data and would instead be referred to Labor Relations.

Dr. Pecorino's email refers to a case where ACC camera data was apparently used for purposes unrelated to protecting classroom technology. Without knowing the specifics of the case in question, Mr. Locke and Lt. Black indicated that there is no guarantee that footage from cameras whose primary purpose is to protect technology won't be used for other purposes such as investigating a report of criminal or illicit activity. If for instance, a person were to attack another person in a smart classroom and that incident was recorded by an ACC camera whose primary purpose is to protect the technology, Public Safety would indeed request that footage in order to investigate the incident.

-What would be the full range of "incidents" for which data would be used?

Ed Locke and Lt. Black reinforced the point that footage is only accessed in the case of investigating formally reported criminal or illicit activities on or around campus.