

Regulation Regarding Anonymous, Hyperlocal Platforms

I. Purpose.

Modern technology has drastically reshaped our college campuses in ways even an early 2000s graduate could not have imagined. The same features that allow research collaboration across the globe and virtual connectedness at nearly the speed of light also provide tools to amplify hateful and threatening speech towards others, all at a time when college students are facing a mental health crisis.

In recent years, anonymous, Hyperlocal Platforms have gained popularity among college campuses for allowing users a part of a certain, narrow geographic region to post anonymously. However, it is precisely the anonymous and Hyperlocal features of these Platforms that allow them to be used as weapons against our students and other members of our campus communities. Users hide behind anonymity as they post comments that normal social decency would otherwise prevent them from saying out loud. College campuses throughout the nation have reported instances of these anonymous posts being used to spread hate, harassment, and threatening speech. Our very own student leaders have expressed concern regarding the detrimental impact these Platforms have on the mental health of our students. Further, the hyper-locality of these Platforms all but ensures the posts are made on or within the immediate vicinity of our campuses, meaning these instances of harassment, threats, and cyberbullying are occurring on our campuses by members of our campus communities against members of our campus communities. As institutions of higher education, we have the responsibility to prevent this harm that is being committed within our communities through Information resources over which we have substantial control.

Anonymous speech has a strong pedigree in the history of the United States. That history shows anonymous speech can further public discourse by offering ideas judged on their merit without detraction or distraction from who offers them. It rightly receives heightened protections from the First Amendment of the U. S. Constitution, which itself was sharpened, argued, and debated using the tried and tested tool of anonymous speech. However, the First Amendment does not protect harassing or threatening speech. As institutions of higher education, our responsibility is not only to protect our students' free expression but also to protect our students' physical safety and mental health.

By blocking access to these anonymous, Hyperlocal Platforms on our Information resources, we are publicly condemning the cyberbullying and harassment that takes place on these Platforms. Although this action may not prevent users from using other resources to access these anonymous, Hyperlocal Platforms, it sends a message—the University of North Carolina and its constituent institutions do not condone the harmful attacks being delivered on these Platforms.

II. Definitions.

- a. "Platforms" means websites, software, applications, or social media.

b. "Geolocation" means location technologies such as, but not limited to, global positioning systems, internet protocol addresses, or cellular triangulation that identify and track the geographical location of connected electronic devices.

c. "Hyperlocal" means relating to or focused on a specific geographical community with access restricted by user location within the prescribed geography determined through Geolocation and/or through University-issued e-mail address or other unique University-issued identifier.

III. Use of University Information Resources & Information Technology.

a. Information resources made available to persons shall be operated in such a way to serve the University mission and comply with federal and state laws.

b. Beginning on and after July 1, 2024, UNC System's chief information officer, with the Chief Information Officers Council and constituent institutions, shall use reasonable efforts to prevent access via Information resources to Hyperlocal Platforms that allow users to publish and view anonymous content.

IV. No Penalty Created.

a. Nothing stated in this policy shall be interpreted as creating or supporting any penalty or disciplinary action against users of these anonymous, Hyperlocal Platforms, including student users, so long as such use does not violate other campus policies or local, state, or federal laws or regulations.