



Representing UW-Madison Faculty.
Strengthening Wisconsin.

PROFS Statement on the Proposed Change to the Universities of Wisconsin Policy on Copyright

Universities of Wisconsin (UW) is proposing, with no consultation with faculty or shared governance at its campuses, a change to its policy on copyright. The current policy ([G27/SYS191](#)) holds that the university held no property interest in materials that result from faculty members' traditional teaching, research, and scholarly activities.

While the current policy is consistent with the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) [statements on copyright](#), the proposed policy would assert the university's copyright on all work product created under their scope of employment.

The new policy would transfer the copyright of creative and scholarly work (i.e., research) to the faculty member who produced it, but the university would reserve the right to use that material and, presumably, monetize it. And it changes the status of syllabi and other course material – including a faculty member's lecture notes, presentations, PowerPoint slides, and even videos taken of a class – which currently are considered the property of the course's creator, but under the revised policy would become the property of the university.

The UW asserts that this change is meant only to bring our policies into alignment with federal copyright law. But, as an organization that represents faculty who work daily on the front lines of the UW's premier institution (UW-Madison), PROFS believes this is a broad over-reach by the administration of the university to exert ownership on the intellectual property of its faculty and staff, who have until now had broad discretion over the use of their work.

Further, UW institutions already face a negative reputation in the academic marketplace following previous attacks on tenure and shared governance by the Wisconsin Legislature and the UW Board of Regents. Over-reach in limiting faculty copyrights would be seen as yet another attack on the work of the faculty, and would make it even more difficult to recruit and retain top faculty members.

It is particularly disturbing that under the new policy, syllabi and course material – unlike research – can't even be assigned copyright to their creators. It's not an option under what the UW proposes. Syllabi are, for many in our state, the most visible indication of the work of the faculty, their work in the classroom, and to have UW make claims that it's their work, and not the faculty members', is deeply troubling. University faculty members' syllabi and course materials are developed over years of work, and are often directly related to their own research – copyright for which the university assigns *to the faculty member* for this reason – and are unique to the faculty member, not to the institution.

PROFS urges that the UW must rethink this change in policy. At the very least, any proposed change in the copyright status of faculty work must include a provision that the university will, on the request of the faculty member, assign copyright to them for creative, scholarly, or instructional work product, including syllabi and course materials, and that the university must ask permission of the works' creators to use or share their work for any purpose, including its monetization, beyond that intended by its creators.

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