

FERPA (Student Privacy) Information

What is FERPA?

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) sets forth requirements regarding the privacy of student records. FERPA governs 1) release of these records (known as educational records) maintained by an educational institution and 2) access to these records.

As an employee of Austin Community College, you may be authorized to have access to student records. The confidentiality, use and release of student records are governed by FERPA. Your utilization of this information also depends on the nature of the duties and responsibilities associated with your position. Your job places you in a position of trust, and therefore you play an integral part in ensuring that student information is handled properly. Students have a right to expect their academic records to be treated with all due care and respect.

In general, all student information must be treated as confidential. Even public or "directory" information is subject to restriction on an individual basis. Directory information is defined and listed inside the College catalog, the course schedules and on the ACC website. Any requests for disclosure of information, including defined directory items, especially outside the College, should be referred to the Public Information Officer. Release of confidential information contained in a student's educational records without the written consent of the student is in violation of FERPA.

As a faculty or staff member, you may encounter people who are not authorized to receive student data, but who apply a great deal of pressure on you to release such information, or to discuss a student's confidential records. Parents, relatives, spouses and ex-spouses, employers or potential employers, attorneys and other representatives of law firms and representatives of a variety of other types of organizations (e.g., collection agencies) are not entitled to confidential student data. If you receive a phone call or a visit from someone like this, you should direct the call or person to any Admissions Office.

Faculty members have their own account and password for use of the Datatel and Faculty Online Services systems. You are responsible for your personal account and its use; your log-on information should never be shared with other individuals. Your log-on ID and password are critical for security. Your password protects your account and provides the only way the system can verify that you are actually who you say you are. Please make every effort to protect your log-on ID and password information.

No confidential information about a student may be released without written consent of the student. ***Such items as grades, test scores, Social Security numbers, gender and ethnic background, and class schedules may never be released to anyone other than the student. This includes parents or guardians.*** You may discuss student progress with your department chair and your dean. As your supervisor(s) they have a legitimate educational interest in your work, including your students' progress and other issues when relevant. In no case should a student's information be released by Email. Release of information by telephone should only be made when you have positively identified the person to whom you are speaking through a series of questions, to which the answers would be known only by the student (grades on an assignment in your class, room number of class, list of last semester's courses and grades, etc.)

Posting of Grades by Faculty

The public posting of grades either by the student's name, institutional student identification number, Social Security number or any portion of such number is a violation of FERPA. This includes posting grades to a class/institutional website and applies to any public posting of grades for students taking distance education courses. Even with names obscured, numeric student identifiers are considered personally identifiable information. The practice of posting

grades by Social Security number, student identification number or any portion of the number violates FERPA. Notification of grades via a postcard also violates a student's privacy.

There is no guarantee of confidentiality when sending grades via the Internet outside of the ACC system. The institution would be held responsible if an unauthorized third party gained access, in any manner, to a student's educational record through any electronic transmission method. A third party in this definition could be parents or guardians, boyfriend or girlfriend, roommate, etc. Only secure websites (Blackboard) are approved by FERPA for accessing grade information.

Writing Student Recommendation Letters and FERPA

Recommendation letters written on behalf of a student that contain specific information from the student's educational record, such as grades or grade point average, are in violation of FERPA unless the faculty member has received prior written permission from the student to disclose such information. When you receive requests for letters of recommendation from the student, you should have the student sign a written authorization enabling you to disclose such relevant information in the letter. In the alternative (no consent to release), the content of the letter should not contain information from the student's educational record as described above.

To avoid violations of FERPA, please DO NOT:

- At any time use the Social Security number, institutional identification number or any portion of the number of a student in a public posting of grades. If you assign numbers to students for grade posting purposes, you must not assign them based on the alphabetical order of students' names. Otherwise students may be identified based on their position in the class roster.
- Never link the name of a student with that student's Social Security number or institutional identification number in any public manner.
- Leave graded tests or papers in a stack for students to pick up by sorting through the tests or papers of all students
- Circulate a printed class list with student name and institutional identification number as an attendance roster
- Discuss the progress of any student with anyone other than the student (including parents/guardians) without the consent of the student; you may discuss student progress with your department chair and your dean. As your supervisor(s) they have a legitimate educational interest in your work, including your students' progress and other issues when relevant.
- Provide anyone with lists of students enrolled in your classes for any purpose
- Provide anyone with student schedules or assist anyone other than college employees in finding a student on campus