FERPA questions for faculty and staff

May I access confidential information about students?

Access to personally identifiable information contained in educational records may be given to appropriate University administrators, faculty members, or staff members and appropriate administrators or staff members of Grand Valley State University who require this access to perform their legitimate educational duties. Faculty members do not have access to student academic records unless their normal job duties specifically require access. This type of access is termed "legitimate educational interest." Before you look, ask yourself, "Do I need this information in order to do my job?"

How does FERPA affect letters of recommendation?

Writing a letter of recommendation may require express, written permission from the student to allow you 1) to access the student's educational records and 2) to disclose confidential information about the student to a third party. A faculty member may access a student’s educational records without the student's express written permission only if specific job duties, such as the duties of an academic advisor, require access to those records. However, a faculty member, or any other appropriate University official, may not disclose confidential information from a student’s educational records to a third party without express, written permission from the student. Personal observations about a student may be disclosed without the student's consent.

Does FERPA affect the return of assignments?

Personally identifiable information about a student may not be disclosed without the student's express, written permission. Therefore, extreme care should be used to protect such information when returning assignments to students.

Does FERPA affect the posting of grades?

University policy prohibits the disclosure of any confidential student information in a personally identifiable manner without the student's written consent. Faculty members may use student-specific, password-protected systems (such as Blackboard) to communicate academic work grades or other confidential information to students on an individual basis. Students may also access their final course grades using MyBanner.
How do I properly dispose of confidential information?

Dispose of all material containing confidential information (such as tests, papers, class rosters) by shredding or by placing them in a receptacle intended for the collection of material to be disposed of in a secure manner.

What information about students may I release to faculty members and other University staff members?

Items defined as directory information (name, local phone number and e-mail address) may be released without a student's written permission, provided that the student has not chosen to restrict his or her directory information. All other personally identifiable information in a student's educational record is confidential and may be disclosed to appropriate University administrators, faculty members, staff members, appropriate administrators or staff members of Grand Valley State University or contractors acting on behalf of the University, who require such access in order to perform their legitimate educational and business duties, when such records are needed in furtherance of the educational or business purposes of the student or University.

What information about students may I release to parents?

You may disclose directory information to a parent (as you may to any third party) if the student has not restricted his or her directory information. If the student has restricted all of his or her directory information, you should respond to any inquiries by saying "I have no information to provide about that individual." Confidential information may be released to parents with the express, written permission of the student. Check with the Office of the Registrar in room 150 of the Student Services building, by calling (616) 331-3327 or emailing regdept@gvsu.edu before you release any information to the parent.

Do I have to keep a record of the release of information from a student's educational record?

A record of each request for access and each disclosure must be kept, unless the request was made by or the disclosure was made to one of the following:

- The student
- A school official who has legitimate educational interest
- A party with written consent from the student
- A party seeking directory information only

These records must be kept with the educational records of the student as long as the educational records are maintained by the University.
May I release confidential information to officially registered student groups?

Student groups do NOT have legitimate educational interest and consequently may not be given confidential information about a student or students without each student’s express, written permission.

What do I do about subpoenas?

At Grand Valley State University, subpoenas are handled by the University Counsel Office at 260 Lake Michigan Hall, phone number (616) 331-2067 and email uco@gvsu.edu

Whom should I contact with FERPA questions or concerns?

Please direct questions to the Office of the Registrar or University Counsel Office.