

Staff and Faculty Responsibilities under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974

FERPA pertains to everyone who works at Grand Valley State University, regardless of his or her position. What FERPA says, in effect, is that we may all have access to as much information about students as we need to do our jobs. Clearly, many people who work at the University have no access to student records and have no need for individual student information. Some of these same people, however, may come across confidential information in the course of doing their job. The janitorial staff, for example, may come across information about students. They are equally obliged, as we are, to respect its confidentiality.

Beyond any legal requirements, the University is bound by professional ethics to safeguard the integrity and confidentiality of student information. This includes all university officials, persons employed by the university in an administrative, supervisory, academic or research, or support staff position, regardless of their work classification of full-time, part-time or temporary. What follows are some guidelines in compliance with the FERPA regulations and University policy to follow in order to maintain, report and make available information included in student educational records.

NOTE BELOW – “WE” refers to the entire GVSU campus community

1. We may have access to all the information we need to do our jobs; but we have no right to any information not needed to do our jobs. Use a specific “need to know” (rather than a “right to know”) approach when accessing students’ education records. University officials as well as the faculty and staff at GVSU must have a legitimate university-related educational or administrative interest and a need to review an education record in order to fulfill their professional responsibility.
2. We may not disclose any information about any student to anyone who does not need this information to do his or her job at the University.
3. We may not browse through student records, whether in computer files or scanned files, for information about students at random or for information about persons we know.
4. We must take ALL reasonable precautions to safeguard access to student information. These include shredding documents, not sharing computer IDs and passwords, not allowing anyone else to do work under our IDs and passwords, and not leaving the student information system (BANNER) up and running and accessible when we are away from our computers.
5. We should check the student’s record on the student information system or contact the Office of the Registrar if the student has requested nondisclosure before releasing directory information about the student to someone who is not a university official with a need to know.
6. We should not release information to others when in doubt. Consult with the Office of Registrar as necessary.
7. We should refer requests for information from the education record of a student to the proper educational record custodian, e.g., academic, financial, medical, placement, security or other as deemed necessary.
8. We should not display student scores or grades publicly in association with names, social security numbers, or other personally identifiable information.
9. We should keep only those individual student records necessary for the fulfillment of our teaching or advising or other academic/administrative responsibilities. Private notes of a professor/staff member concerning a student and intended for a professor’s/staff member’s own use are not part of the student’s educational record.

10. We should not provide nondirectory information to third parties such as prospective employers (in letters of recommendation), associations, honorary organizations, etc. without the student's written consent.
11. We should keep any personal professional records relating to individual students separate from their educational records. Private records of instructional, supervisory and administrative personnel and ancillary educational personnel are to be kept in the sole possession of the maker and are not to be accessible or revealed to any other person, except a substitute.
12. We should not provide copies to students of their transcripts from other institutions. If you release copies of transcripts, you are acting as a third party testifying as to the accuracy of the information on the transcripts. Students can only view their transcripts from other schools as part of their right to inspect their records maintained in the Office of the Registrar. Students needing copies of such records must request them from their previous institution.
13. We should understand that only the appropriate educational record custodian may release information about a student's educational record to a third party outside the University.
14. We should not share nondirectory information from a student's education records, such as grades or class schedules, with parents. Please refer these inquiries to the Office of the Registrar.
15. We should direct all student information requests in the case of an emergency to the Dean of Student Office at 616-331-3855 during regular office hours or Public Safety (University Police) at 616-331-3255 after hours.
16. We should refer all judicial orders, subpoenas or other written requests for access to information or data subject to the Freedom of Information Act immediately to the Office of the University Legal Services.

Registrar's Office

Office of the University General Counsel

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