



FERPA Policies for Parents

What does FERPA mean for parents of college students?

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (sometimes referred to as the Buckley Amendment) was designed to protect the privacy of educational records and to establish the rights of students to inspect and review their educational records. It also provided control over the release of educational record information.

Mount St. Mary's University complies with the provisions of FERPA, as amended, and any regulation promulgated thereunder. A copy of the Mount St. Mary's University institutional compliance statement is located in the Office of the Registrar and will be made available upon request.

“What does FERPA mean for me as a college parent?”

Generally speaking, FERPA rules mean that student academic information *will be given to the student and not the parent*. College students are considered responsible adults who may determine who will receive information about them. College representatives are prohibited from discussing information about the student's academic record with parents.

“When is a student protected by FERPA?”

When a student turns 18 years of age, or attends a postsecondary institution, the student, *and only the student*, may access, seek to amend, and consent to disclosures of his or her educational records. This means that all academic information regarding your college student goes directly to the student unless they have given specific, written permission to release that information to someone else.

“As a parent, what am I allowed to access under FERPA?”

Unless your son/daughter has explicitly stated otherwise, you, and anyone else who inquires, has access at any time, to student directory information. At Mount St. Mary's University, directory information includes: student's name, address, telephone number, dates of attendance, previous institutions attended, major fields of study, enrollment status, awards, honors, degree(s) conferred (including dates), and date and place of birth. All other academic information requires written consent from the student.

“Does this mean that I have no way to discuss my student's academic record and performance?”

Because FERPA legislation prevents parents from finding out student grades and academic standing directly from the school, the best way to find out how your student is doing is to ask them. The sharing of student academic information with parents becomes a family issue rather than an institutional issue. It is a decision that families should discuss and make together. Perhaps one of the benefits of the FERPA rule is that it provides an additional opportunity for parents to communicate with their college student about their expectations and the student's responsibilities.

“Can my son/daughter grant me access to their academic records?”

If your son/daughter chooses to grant you access to their academic records, they may do so by filling out and submitting an Academic Record FERPA Release Form to the Office of the Registrar. This can be a one-time release or a permanent release. A student can choose to reverse a permanent release by submitting a signed request in writing to the Office of the Registrar.

Mount St. Mary's University's Educational Record FERPA Release Form is located online at www.msmary.edu/ferpa. This form **must** be signed by the student; a parent may **not** sign for the student. Please note that this form is different from the Financial FERPA Release Form that is required by the Accounting and Finance Office of all students.

“If my son/daughter signs a waiver, does that mean that academic information will automatically be sent to me?”

If a student signs an Academic Record FERPA Release Form, it allows the university to release academic information to the designated party if that information is *requested*. This means that a parent will still need to request information; it will not automatically be sent.

For the Office of the Registrar to release protected academic information to parents the following conditions must apply: (1) the student must have signed and submitted an Academic Record FERPA Release Form indicating the University has consent to release the information, (2) the parent must make a request for the academic information in writing. At the time of the request, if conditions are met, the Office of the Registrar will mail a printed copy of the academic information.

“Can I speak to someone over the telephone about protected academic information?”

The easiest way for the University to communicate with parents and students about FERPA protected information is in writing. With written communication it is easier to verify whom we are speaking with, and there is a document trail housed in the student record, that we can trace back should the need arise. However, if your student has signed an Academic Record FERPA Release Form, and you are experiencing circumstances where a discussion is warranted and *urgent*, we can discuss FERPA protected information via telephone. Upon calling to discuss this protected information, you will be asked a number of questions to verify your identity. Failure to answer these challenge questions correctly will mean we cannot discuss any protected information over the telephone with you.

“Do FERPA rules prevent college employees from seeing my student’s records?”

There are some individuals who will have access to your student’s records for professional reasons. School officials with legitimate educational interest may have access to records, as well as officials from another school where the student intends to enroll or state or local educational authorities for the purposes of auditing or evaluating an educational program or federal law related to the program.

“Are there any exceptions to the restrictions limiting the release of student information?”

There is a health and safety exception to FERPA regulations. If a student is considered a threat to himself or to others, or there is a need to protect the health and safety of the student for some reason, information may be shared with parents. A school may also disclose to parents any violation of the use or possession of drugs or alcohol by students under twenty-one. An important note here is that the law *allows*, but does not *require*, such information to be released to parents.

In sum...

It is easy to feel frustrated by FERPA regulations. Parents often feel that they need, or should have, access to student information. As college parents, we need to remember that college students are working toward increased independence and responsibility. Allowing them to determine who receives their academic information is a part of that growing independence. Some students handle this responsibility wisely and some may struggle with it. As with many aspects of the college experience, increased communication between parents and students will make the experience go smoothly for everyone.

Any questions regarding this information can be directed by email to registrar@msmary.edu, by telephone to 301-447-5215 or by mail to:
Office of the Registrar
16300 Old Emmitsburg Road
Emmitsburg, MD 21727