

FERPA Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act

Review Sheet

Objective

Protect the rights of Northwestern students by applying FERPA law and University policy when you respond to requests for student records from students, officials, parents/guardians, and external parties.

Student Rights

1. inspect and review records,
2. seek amendment to records, and
3. control disclosure of education record information.

Definitions

Student: Person who is currently attending or has attended Northwestern University in the past, regardless of age.

Educational Record: Education record information contains **personally identifiable information** about a student and is maintained by an **educational institution**. In general, student education record information is **confidential**. Examples include grades, papers, disciplinary records, grade point average, shared advising notes, etc. Students can authorize release of education record information by providing written consent with an official University or School FERPA Release Consent Form.

Exceptions

Some exceptions when student information may be shared without written consent:

- Northwestern officials who have “legitimate educational interest”
- health or safety emergencies
- parents/guardians with legal proof of dependency
- Directory Information (as defined in Northwestern policy) unless subject to a FERPA hold

How to Comply

- Don’t share protected information without written consent unless an exception exists.
- Check for a FERPA flag before sharing directory information.
- Document disclosures of information (who, what, and when) and basis for the disclosure and maintain this documentation with the record.
- Ensure education records are secure.
- Be alert to exceptions, such as health or safety emergencies.

Common Request Scenarios

Requests for student records are common from students, parents/guardians, University officials, and external parties.

#	Scenarios	Response Options
1	Requests from Students	
1.1	A student asks to review their disciplinary record immediately.	Schedule within 45 days
1.2	A student disputes the grade received from a professor.	Not covered by FERPA. Refer to university or school policy.
1.3	A student disputes the grade that was recorded in the educational record.	FERPA officer facilitates the review and request for amendment.
1.4	A student/TA/professor requests student email addresses and phone numbers from a departmental assistant to create a course contact list.	Create an opt-in list-serve or online group.
2	Requests from University Officials	
2.1	A professor asks an advisor about a student's personal life to cross-check the story a student provided to rationalize a request for extension.	FERPA does not apply, as the information does not come from the student's educational record. The advisor may share what he/she knows.
2.2	A professor is grading papers and finds a disturbing essay from a student.	FERPA does not apply; it does not prevent action in health and safety emergencies. Contact the Dean of Students, CAPS, or University Police, as appropriate.
2.3	A professor asks you for the phone number of a graduate student immediately for an academic presentation tomorrow.	Contact the student, or provide the number, as there is legitimate academic interest.
2.4	A professor is writing a letter of recommendation for a student and asks you for grades in courses he/she does not teach.	Refer the professor to the student.
2.5	A faculty advisor group asks for students who are on academic probation to invite them to a workshop.	This is a legitimate educational interest would be acceptable to provide.
2.6	Is it okay to publically post student grades on a website or course management system?	Only if posted without any personally identifiable label, including name.
3	Requests from Parents	
3.1	A parent requests a copy of their child's grades.	Refer the parent to the student.
3.2	A parent calls to discuss the case of their child who was cited for an academic integrity issue.	With written release from the student, the case may be discussed.
3.3	A parent calls to discuss the academic performance and difficulties of their child.	Refer the parent to the student for details about performance. It is appropriate to

		discuss academic help resources in general.
3.4	A parent calls wondering if their child has been attending class.	Refer the parent to the student.
4	Requests from External Parties	
4.1	A journalist asks you about a current student's major and expected graduation date.	Check for FERPA Hold, and if none, then share, as this is Directory Information.
4.2	An employer is doing a background check on a Northwestern alum who is applying for a job.	Check for FERPA Hold, and if none, then you may verify degrees earned and dates of attendance, as these are Directory Information. For any non-directory data, check for a written release from the student and verify the requestor's credentials before sharing.

Email Address Lists

Requests are common for the names and email addresses of students with certain major and GPA combinations.

#	Request Scenario	Provide?
1	A Northwestern academic department requests asks for names and email addresses in a certain major to soliciting interest in a new undergraduate certificate program.	Yes, this is a legitimate educational interest of University officials. You do not need to check for FERPA Holds for legitimate education interests when the information isn't going to be publicized.
2	An outside firm or organization asks for engineering major names and email addresses for the purpose of employment recruitment.	Yes, names, email addresses, and major field of study are Directory Information, so they may be released outside the University. However, if a student has placed a FERPA Hold on Directory Information, that student's information may not be shared, even though other students' information may be shared.
3	The Office of Fellowships would like to advertise a pre-doctoral fellowship opportunity - but they would like the information for only those students with GPA's above 3.8.	Yes, this is a legitimate educational interest within the walls of the University. You do not need to check for FERPA Holds for legitimate education interests when the information isn't going to be publicized.
4	A fellowship granting institution outside the University wants contact information to market to students with GPA's above 3.8, within a certain discipline.	No, GPA is not Directory Information and therefore cannot be released outside the University without student consent. The appropriate action is to send the information to the student on behalf of the third party if it is deemed appropriate.

Policy

[Refer to the Office of the Registrar website for policy.](#)