

FERPA for Faculty and Staff

An education record is defined as any record that directly identifies a student and is maintained by the institution or educational agency or by a party acting for the institution or educational agency. A key distinction of education records is that education records are shared. Education records can exist in any medium including the following: handwritten, typed, computer generated, videotape, audiotape, film, microfilm, microfiche, e-mail, and others.

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 student workers. Faculty/Staff members and student workers should not access student academic records unless their normal job duties specifically require access. This type of access is termed "legitimate educational interest."

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. It is recommended that before writing a letter of recommendation that contains confidential information i.e. grades, GPA, class rank, etc, that you receive the student's written permission to specifically release this information to a third party. Personal observations about a student may be disclosed without the student's consent.

What is directory information? FERPA has identified certain information, called directory information, which may be disclosed without the student's written permission. Slippery Rock University designates the following student information as public or "Directory Information." Such information may be disclosed without a student's previous consent by the institution for any purpose, at its discretion.

- Name
- Addresses (local, permanent, and e-mail)
- Telephone number (local and permanent)
- Date and place of birth
- Program and concentration
- Student activities, including athletics
- Weight, height (athletic teams)
- Dates of attendance

- Degrees and awards received
- Date of graduation
- All educational institutions previously attended
- Academic Awards/Scholarships
- Title of Master Thesis
- Number of credits (full- or part-time) for which a student is registered
- Pictures of students
- Class level
- Anticipated graduation date
- Student ID number used to communicate in electronic systems that cannot be used to access education records without a PIN, password, etc.

Currently enrolled students have the opportunity to withhold disclosure of all 17 categories of information under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974. The University will not partially withhold this information, so students are advised to think carefully before requesting non-disclosure. To withhold disclosure, written notification must be received in the Office of Academic Records & Registration, Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, Pa 16057 prior to the end of the second week of each semester/summer session. Forms requesting the withholding of “Directory Information” are available in the Office of Academic Records & Registration, Room 107, Old Main.

Slippery Rock University assumes that failure on the part of any student to specifically request the withholding of “Directory Information” indicates individual approval for disclosures. Former students and alumni are not covered under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974. As such, the University is not obligated to honor requests for non-disclosure of “Directory Information” from former students.

NOTE: Students requesting that “Directory Information” not be disclosed during their final semester of enrollment will have this information withheld indefinitely after leaving the University. Students are cautioned that making such a request may adversely impact future requests from potential employers, and other important individuals/organizations.

What information may I disclose to parents? The University views parents as important partners in assuring student success. When speaking with parents, please remember, they have every reason to be interested in their son's or daughter's academic performance. Let them know you'd like to work with them but must respect FERPA and their student's rights to privacy. Although you may not share specific academic information i.e. attendance pattern, grades, etc. with parents without the written permission of their student, faculty are welcome to share with parents the contents of their syllabi, including

attendance expectations, grading methodology, assignments, etc. You should also tell parents that if their child will give you written permission, you would be happy to discuss their student's performance in your class in greater detail. Parents, like all other third parties, may have access to their student's directory information. If a student has restricted his or her directory information, then directory information is also considered confidential.

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. Please do not leave graded papers at the front of the room for students to pick up.

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 D2L) to communicate academic work, grades or other confidential information to students on an individual basis. Students may also access their final course grades using D2L. Grades should never be posted using a student's name or any portion of their social security number or SRU ID.

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 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, 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.

Do I have to release information from a student's educational record? FERPA regulations state that you MAY release directory information about a student, but FERPA does not require or compel you to do so.

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 SRU, subpoenas are handled by the Director of Academic Records & Registration. If you receive a subpoena from an outside agency, you must forward it as soon as possible to that individual in 107 Old Main (x2010).

Whom should I contact with questions or concerns? Direct general questions to:

Office of Academic Records & Registration
104 Maltby Avenue, Suite 107
Slippery Rock, PA 16057
724-738-2010
724-738-2936 (FAX)
academic.records@sru.edu

For more information, see Students' Rights Under FERPA page and SRU's Policies and Procedures Governing FERPA & PA's Right to Know Law Document