

FERPA Tips for Instructors

The **Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974** (FERPA) protects the privacy of student records and regulates how student education information is utilized. Students' rights under FERPA begin when they are considered a student at OSU; the institution defines that as when an individual is registered for START or has registered for classes, **whichever comes first**.

There are some pieces of student information that are considered public (unless the student has filed a confidentiality request). These pieces of information are called directory information. You can find out what OSU considers directory information [here](#).

In order to ensure you're honoring students' privacy rights, here are some tips and guidelines:

- If you're grading on Canvas or answering emails from students, lock your computer screen when it's not in use.
- Before you start talking about a specific student in your class with a colleague, ask yourself if your colleague needs to know the student's identity before disclosing it. You should only disclose the student's identity if it is critical to your colleague being able to perform their professional duties. You can talk about a student situation without disclosing the student's identity.
- If a current and/or former student asks you to write a recommendation letter for them, ask them to identify if it is acceptable to discuss your performance in their class (e.g. comments that reflect their performance on assessments; identifying the specific course in which they were enrolled). Make sure this is in writing, as FERPA requires expressed written consent.
- If you're using online tools, such as social media or blogs, consider the ways in which students can remain unidentifiable and/or how you can make sure non-directory information (e.g. your course number) is not associated with a student name. For more information, please see the [Instructional Use of Social Media Policy](#).
- Refrain from using student assignments as examples unless: a) the student has consented to its use or b) you have removed all identifying information.
- If you need to return graded assignments to students and are unable to do so in person, arrange for students to pick up their assignments from a staff member who can verify the student's identity. ****Do not leave a box of graded assignments out for students to pick through.****
- If you plan to videotape or photograph your students for use outside the classroom, you will need to obtain consent from students. For research, please see the [flowchart on AV recording](#) in an education setting.

Other helpful reminders!:

- There is no such thing as implied consent. Make sure any time you're releasing student education data to someone who does not have a legitimate need-to-know, you've obtained written consent from the student(s). Emails that students send from their oregonstate.edu email address listing consent may be considered written consent.
- If you have a graded assignment you never handed back to students at the end of the term, retention policies say that you must hold that, as well as class rosters, for a year after the course ended.
- Box is a great place for storing grades or for sharing any documents that might include non-directory information. It provides one additional layer of security (over sending files via email or storing information directly on a desktop).