“FERPA Q & A”

When is a student covered by FERPA?

A UA applicant’s coverage under FERPA begins when they register for a class (unless they have previously attended UA).

Can I email a student their grade?

At UA, it is strongly advised that grades not be emailed. An excellent alternative is to email students instructing them to access UAOnline for final grades, or the campus course management system for grades on individual assignments.

If a caller says they are a student and there is a confidential hold on that account, what should I say?

“I’m sorry. I cannot confirm any information regarding this account. Please come to (your office) with a state or university picture ID so we can resolve the problem and help you in person.”

If a parent calls to see if we received the scholarship check for her son's tuition, what can I tell her?

“Your son will be your primary link to the university. We will communicate directly with your student about anything that might affect his educational experience; you can learn about these communications by talking with your student directly. Your student can look up scholarship information online. If you would like future access to your student’s record, ask your son to complete an Authorization to Release Education Record Information.”

Can I leave a phone message for a student that has a confidential hold on their account?

If you must communicate with a student who has a confidentiality hold on their account you may not make any reference to the purpose of your communication or that the individual is a student. If communicating via email or telephone, simply state, or note, your name, the office from where you are calling, and where you can be contacted.

Is five pieces of personal information enough for a confirmation over the phone?

There must be more than questions regarding ID, SSN, or DOB asked. Ask questions until you are certain in your professional judgment that the person answering is in fact the student.

Questions we use to confirm identity on the telephone:

1. What is your student ID#?
2. In what month were you born? What year?
3. What are the last four digits of your social security number?
4. From what high school did you graduate? When?
5. What was the last semester you attended at UAX?
6. What were some of the courses you took that semester? What grade did you receive?
7. What mailing address do I have on file for you here at the University?
8. What is the permanent address I have on file for you here at the University?
9. Who is your emergency contact?
10. What is your middle name or middle initial? (If not already stated.)
11. Have you ever attended the University under a different name? What name?
12. What degree program are you in?

What information can't we email to students?

The primary items UA employees should not be emailing students are Social Security numbers, grades, or other strictly confidential information. The best approach is to email students instructions to login to a secured web location, such as UAOnline, to access the information they need.

Do we have to email the students only at the UA generated account? Can’t we send to their personal address?

UA employees are required to contact admitted and enrolled students at the UA generated email account. This is the official email account for correspondence, and students are encouraged to forward these accounts to their personal address if they want to manage just one account. The sender may opt to copy the email to additional email addresses held by the student in banner.

Can we respond to an email we receive from a student via their private email account?

UA employees may respond to “general” requests from students from their personal email account. Examples of a general request would be “what’s the last day of registration” or “please send me the URL for the campus map.” Requests for personal information and/or student record information, such as “did my scholarship check come in?” require the response to go to the UA generated email account.

Parents and grandparents call to make a payment on students’ account. May we tell them the amount that is due?

No. We are not permitted to release information about the student’s record unless we have an Authorization to Release Education Record Information on file where the student has granted permission to this family member to discuss their account. Ask them to have their student complete this form so that they may complete this transaction.

If they ask how many credits are they paying for, may we tell them?
No. We are not permitted to release information about the student’s record unless we have an Authorization to Release Education Record Information on file where the student has granted permission to this family member to discuss their account. Ask them to have their student complete this form so that they may complete this transaction.

**Can I leave a stack of graded assignments for students to pick up outside my office door?**

Leaving personally identifiable, graded papers unattended for students to view is no different from posting grades in the hallway. If these papers contain "personally identifiable" information, then leaving them unattended for anyone to see is a violation of FERPA if the instructor has not obtained the written permission of each student to do so. A possible solution would be either to leave the graded papers (exams, quizzes, and homework) with an assistant or secretary who would ask students for proper identification prior to distributing them or leave them in a sealed envelope with only the student's name on it.

**Can I call the student’s mom or dad in an emergency?**

If non-directory information is needed to resolve a crisis or emergency situation, an education institution may release that information if the institution determines that the information is "necessary to protect the health or safety of the student or other individuals." Factors considered in making this assessment are: the severity of the threat to the health or safety of those involved; the need for the information; the time required to deal with the emergency; and the ability of the parties to whom the information is to be given to deal with the emergency.

**I’ve heard that I need to get permission to write a letter of recommendation for a student, is that true?**

Written permission of the student is required for a letter of recommendation if any information included in the recommendation is part of the "education record" (grades, GPA and other non-directory information).

Send your suggestions for Q & A to be added to this list to sysas@email.alaska.edu.