

A Writing Newsletter



September 16, 2011

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974

♪ If you're interested in hanging a certificate up in your office to spruce things up, I know of a place where you can find one. As I was playing around on UAonline the other day, I came across a link that provided teachers and other university officials with e-learning modules under "Employee Services." Curious, I clicked on the link and went through one of the training sessions. The e-learning module I completed was on FERPA, The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, and only took thirty minutes to complete. Upon completion, I received a pretty official-looking certificate. It was neat.

- FERPA outlines the various protocols to follow when handling student records with regards to confidentiality. While this newsletter may be a review for many of the seasoned teachers within the department, after mentioning FERPA to other GTAs I discovered that I was not the only person who was unfamiliar with the legislation.

♪ This act operates under the notion that all students at the university level are independent adults, whose academic records are theirs alone. Students who are still in high school also benefit from FERPA. A parent (or other third party) can only request their child's grades if the student gives written consent. If a student does not give written consent, parents can access the grades only if they submit to the university their most recent federal income tax form to prove that their child is still a dependent. What this means for you as a teacher is that unless your student gives you written permission to release their grade to a third party, you shouldn't do it. (This also applies to any potential high school teachers who want to check up on their students – if they don't have consent from the student, then they don't have access to the grades)

- FERPA also covers the mediums that are appropriate for communicating grades to your

students. Student identification numbers, social security numbers, and (of course) student names that correspond to student grades violate FERPA, as they all trace back to the student. According to the act, email is not a secure place to discuss grades either; rather, the module suggests that teachers tell their students to check their grades on UAonline when the final grades go up. However, as many students want to know their progress in the class long before final grades are ready to go out, it seems most prudent to inform them verbally during a private conference.

Friendly Reminders When Handling Student Records



- do not release student records to a third party unless that student has given you written consent

- do not email a student his/her grades in the case that their email is not secure

- do not leave graded assignments for students to pick up unattended