

Armstrong Atlantic State University

FERPA On-Line Tutorial

Maintaining confidentiality of student records is everyone's responsibility at Armstrong Atlantic State University. Why? It's [federal law](#). This tutorial is designed to provide a basic knowledge of FERPA and regulations governing the release of student record information. University employees (including student workers) who currently have access or have requested access to Armstrong's Student Information System will be required to complete this tutorial before access is permitted. Employees may be asked periodically to review and acknowledge their understanding of this material to remain current with federal regulations.

What Is FERPA?

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), as amended, is a federal law that sets forth requirements regarding the privacy of student records. FERPA governs the release of records maintained by an educational institution as well as access to those records. FERPA rights begin when a student registers and attends his/her first class. Institutions that receive funds administered by the Federal Office of Education are bound by FERPA requirements and failure to comply may result in the loss of federal funding.

FERPA grants four specific rights to the student:

- The right to review and inspect their educational records
- The right to have their educational records amended or corrected
- The right to limit disclosure of some portions of their educational records
- The right to file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education concerning alleged failures by institutions to comply with the Act

At Armstrong Atlantic State University, students are notified of their FERPA rights in the AASU Student Handbook.

What are Educational Records?

Under FERPA, education records are defined as any personally identifiable information that is directly related to a student and maintained by an educational agency, institution, or party acting for the agency or institution. Education records can exist in any medium, including, but not limited to, typewritten, hand-written, computer generated, videotape, audiotape, film, microfilm, microfiche, and email.

Education records do not include:

- Sole possession records, i.e., records/notes in sole possession of the maker, used only as a personal memory aid and not revealed or accessible to any other person except a temporary substitute for the maker of the record. This may include notes an instructor makes while providing career or professional guidance to a student.
- Medical treatment records that include, but are not limited to, records maintained by physicians, psychiatrists, and psychologists.
- Employment records, unless employment is based on student status, i.e. a graduate teaching assistant or work-study student.

- Records created and maintained by a law enforcement unit.
- Post-attendance records, i.e., information about a person that was obtained when the person was no longer a student (alumni records) and not related to the person as a student.

Basic Rules:

- Student educational records are considered confidential and should not be released to any person without the written consent of the student. Employees are granted access to student information only for “legitimate educational interest” -- completion of job responsibilities such as advisement or assigned tasks. They have a responsibility to protect the confidentiality of education records in their possession, regardless of the medium in which the records are stored or presented. Unauthorized release of student record data without written consent of the student may trigger legal sanctions.

At Armstrong, examples of student record information that MAY NOT BE RELEASED without prior written consent of the student are:

- Social Security Number/AASU Student ID Number
 - AASU Student Email address
 - Grades, Credits hours (attempted or earned)
 - Grade point average
 - Enrollment status (part/full time)
 - Degrees and dates of graduation, including anticipated graduation dates
 - Residency status
 - Tuitions and fee payment records
 - Marital status
 - Race
 - Gender
 - Citizenship
 - Parent’s name and address
 - Current class schedule
 - Disciplinary actions
 - Academic actions
- Employees may not disclose information contained in education records without the student’s consent, except under certain limited conditions. For example, the University may disclose what is considered to be “directory” information unless the student has restricted disclosure of such information. However, an institution is not obligated to release directory information to anyone. FERPA only says that an institution MAY release information, but there is no obligation to do so. When in doubt, do not release information.

If a student has restricted the disclosure of directory information, the following warnings will appear in S.H.I.P. and Banner.

S.H.I.P.: This student has requested that personal data remain confidential.

Banner: *Warning: Information about this student is confidential*

Directory information at Armstrong Atlantic State University is defined as:

- Name, address, telephone listing
 - Field of study
 - Dates of attendance
 - Most recent educational agency or institution attended
 - Participation in officially recognized activities or sports
 - Weight and height of members of athletic teams
- If you are ever in doubt, do not release any information until you contact the Registrar's Office at (912) 921-5414. The Registrar's Office is the only university office authorized to issue official transcripts and certify students' enrollment status. All requests for such documentation must be directed to that office.

Parent or Legal Guardian Requesting Information

When a student reaches the age of 18 or begins attending a post secondary institution, regardless of age, FERPA rights transfer to the student. Concerns such as progress in a course, deficiencies in a subject area, scores and grades on papers, exams, etc. are all examples of personally identifiable information that constitute part of the student's education record. This information is protected under FERPA and parents may not have access unless (1) the student provides written authorization that specifically identifies what information may be released to the parent(s) or (2) the parent(s) establish that the student is a dependent according to the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, Section 152.

Please refer a parent or legal guardian requesting student record information to the Registrar's Office.

Posting of Grades/Return of Assignments

The public posting of grades by the student's name, Social Security Number or AASU Student ID number is a violation of FERPA. This includes the posting of grades to a class/institutional website and applies to any public posting of grades for students taking distance education courses. Even without the name, using an AASU Student I.D. number or any part of a Social Security Number violates FERPA, as the information may be personally identifiable to the student. Faculty can use code words or randomly assigned numbers that only the instructor and individual student know. Even then, the posting of grades should not be in alphabetical order. Personal notification of grades via email is slightly more secure, however, there is no guarantee of confidentiality on the Internet. Armstrong would be held responsible if an unauthorized third party gained access, in any manner, to a student's education record through any electronic transmission method.

Students should be directed to S.H.I.P. to view final course grades. Final course grades posted via S.H.I.P. will appear immediately on the student's Permanent Student Record (PSR).

Assignments and papers that contain "personally identifiable" information should not be distributed to the student in a way that would allow other students to view the information. Graded papers should not be left unattended in an office or classroom for students to sort through or returned to students via another student. Both of these

examples are a violation of FERPA. A possible solution would be to leave the exams, quizzes, etc. with an assistant or secretary who requests proper identification prior to distributing the information to the student.

Note: An inadvertent and unauthorized release of grades to someone other than the student is a violation of FERPA.

Recommendation Letters

As an employee, you may be asked to write a letter of recommendation for students seeking admission to programs or in support of a job application. Statements made by a person making a recommendation that are made from that person's personal observation or knowledge do not require a written release from the student who is the subject of the recommendation. However, if personal identifiable information obtained from a student's educational record is included in a letter of recommendation (courses taken, grades, GPA and other non-directory information) the writer is required to obtain a signed release from the student, unless the letter is released to the student for distribution. The signed release must specify the records to be disclosed, the purpose of the disclosure and the party to whom the disclosure can be made. If the letter of recommendation is kept on file by the person writing the recommendation, then it becomes part of the student's education record and the student has the right to read it unless he/she has specifically waived that right of access.

Reminders – “Do’s and Don’ts”

Do’s

- **DO** keep only those individual student records necessary for the fulfillment of your job responsibilities. Private notes of a faculty/staff member concerning a student and intended for a faculty/staff member's own use are not part of the student's educational record.
- **DO** forward all judicial orders, subpoenas or other written requests for data access to the Registrar's Office.
- **DO** direct all student information requests in the case of an emergency to Student Affairs at (912) 927-5272 during regular office hours or Public Safety (University Police) at (912) 921-5555 after hours.
- **DO** refer requests for information from the educational record of a student to the appropriate record custodian. Only the record custodian may release information about a student's educational record to a third party outside the university. Below is a list of records/custodians at the university.

Admission and Academic Records
Financial Aid
Financial (Fee Payment Records)
Housing Records
Placement Credentials
Student Disciplinary

Registrar's Office
Financial Aid Office
Financial Services
Student Affairs
Student Affairs
Student Affairs

- **DO** help prevent the unauthorized use of AASU student email addresses. AASU has not designated student email addresses as “directory” information. When

using the email utility on your Class List on S.H.I.P. to send email messages to students always use the “BC” (*Blind Copy*) option.

- **DO** properly discard any reports/computer files containing student personal identifiable information.

Don'ts

- **DO NOT** display student scores or grades publicly in association with names, Social Security Numbers, AASU ID Numbers, or other personal identifiers
- **DO NOT** use a part of or the entire Social Security Number or AASU Student ID number of a student in any public manner
- **DO NOT** share information from the student educational records (including grades, grade point averages, class lists) with individuals outside the University
- **DO NOT** provide anyone with student schedules or assist anyone other than university employees in finding a student on campus
- **DO NOT** share your user id and password to SHIP or COVE with anyone.
- **DO NOT** store personal identifiable information on your desktop computer or in portable electronic devices. If storage of personal identifiable information (including SSN) is required, proper security measures must be taken to protect access by third parties.

Need to Review?

Click on any of the links below to review the material covered in this tutorial.

- [What Is FERPA?](#)
- [What are Educational Records?](#)
- [Basic Rules](#)
- [Parent or Legal Guardian Requesting Information](#)
- [Posting of Grades/Return of Assignments](#)
- [Recommendation Letters](#)
- [Reminders – Do's and Don'ts](#)

Who to Contact with Questions/Concerns/Feedback?

- The Registrar's Office at (912) 921-5414
- Student Affairs Office at (912) 927-5271

Document Source:

American Association of Collegiate Registrar's and Admissions Officers
The AACRAO 2001 FERPA Guide

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