

# **Grinnell College FERPA FAQ for Students**

## **What is FERPA?**

Sometimes called the Buckley Amendment, FERPA is the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. Passed by the U.S. Congress in 1974, FERPA is a federal Act that grants four specific rights to eligible students:

1. The right to consent to disclosure of their educational record.
2. The right to inspect and review their educational record.
3. The right to request an amendment to their educational record.
4. The right to file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education's [Family Policy Compliance Office \(FPCO\)](#).

## **Why should I care about FERPA?**

As a Grinnell College student, it is important to know that once you are in attendance at a post-secondary institution (defined at Grinnell as being officially registered for a course and the course has begun), FERPA rights transfer to you *regardless of your age*.

## **What does that mean, “*regardless of your age*”?**

At primary and secondary educational institutions in the United States, FERPA rights are granted to the parent, but those rights transfer exclusively to the student once they are officially in attendance at a post-secondary institution (e.g. Grinnell College.) This means that FERPA rights transfer to you, a student in attendance at Grinnell, even if you are under the age of 18. Please see the [FERPA Glossary](#) for a more information on what defines an “eligible student.”

## **How does FERPA define “parent”?**

The term "parent" is defined as including natural parents, a guardian, or an individual acting as a parent in the absence of a parent or a guardian. Please see the [FERPA Glossary](#) for a more detailed definition.

## **OK, I have FERPA rights. How does that affect third party access to my educational records?**

In short, you must authorize the College in writing to release any portion of your educational record to a third party, even a parent, with some notable exceptions.

## **What is considered an educational record?**

FERPA covers a broad range of records. Please see the [FERPA Glossary](#) for a specific definition.

## **Why is access to my educational record so limited?**

From a legislative perspective, FERPA's primary purpose is to establish a uniform framework for access, review, and amendment of educational records, at all schools, nationwide. From an institutional perspective, a student's right to consent to disclosure of their educational record is in keeping with the College's policy on [self-governance](#).

## **I'm married. Does my spouse have access to my educational record?**

No, spouses have no rights under FERPA.

## **Will my parents receive my grades at the end of the semester?**

Grinnell will NOT release grades (or any portion of your educational record) to a parent without your prior written consent. Even with prior written consent on file, Grinnell College will not *proactively* provide grades (or any portion of your educational record) to parents. Parents must request grades from the [Office of the Registrar](#), who will release the information once possession of a waiver to disclose grades has been verified.

## **Can my parent request my academic transcript?**

No. See the section above regarding grades.

## **How does I get access to my grades?**

Grades are made available to students online via Grinnell's secure student portal called [WebAdvisor](#), typically within 2 weeks after the semester ends. A Grinnell College network ID and password are required to obtain access.

## **Can I give my Grinnell College network ID and password to a third party so that they can access my records online?**

No. Students should never share their account access information with anyone else.

## **I am a high school student participating in Grinnell's [Advanced Scholars Program \(ASP\)](#). How does my parent gain access to my educational record (e.g. grades, course schedule, etc.)?**

As a student in attendance at Grinnell College, rights under FERPA have transferred to you and school officials at Grinnell are not permitted to disclose information without your prior written consent. However, under FERPA, if you are enrolled at both a high school and Grinnell College, the two schools may exchange information. If you are under the age of 18, your parent still retains the rights under FERPA at your high school and may inspect and review any records sent by Grinnell College to the high school.

## **Will Grinnell College notify my parent if I am in academic jeopardy (i.e. academically warned, placed on academic probation, suspended or dismissed from the College)?**

This information is typically only made available to you and the appropriate Grinnell College school officials. We recommend that, if appropriate, you keep your parents informed about your academic performance.

## **Does FERPA still apply if a third party (e.g. my parent, grandparent, employer, nonprofit organization, etc.) is paying the bill?**

Yes, as a matter of institutional policy as allowed under FERPA, your written authorization is required to release any portion of your educational record to a third party, even to the parent of a dependent.

## **What information about me do third parties have access to?**

Under FERPA, Grinnell College defines some student information as [Directory Information](#). This information is considered public and may be released without the student's written authorization. (Do not confuse Directory Information with the information contained in the College's online directory. Directory Information refers to a very specific set of data defined as public by the College.) Please see [Grinnell College Directory Information](#) for a full listing of data defined by the College as public information.

Remember that, under FERPA, students may choose to block even Directory Information from disclosure. Submit a [Request to Block Directory Information](#)

## **What is I don't want my Directory Information disclosed to third parties?**

Under FERPA, students have the right to block even Directory Information from disclosure. Submit a [Request to Block Directory Information](#) to the [Office of the Registrar](#) to suppress your Directory Information. There are far-reaching consequences to suppressing your Directory Information and many advantages to allowing its disclosure. Contact the [Registrar](#) if you have questions.

## **I want a third party (e.g. a parent, grandparent, employer, nonprofit organization, etc.) to have access to my FILL-IN-THE-BLANK (grades, academic transcript, conduct record, etc.) How do I get them access?**

Depending on the type of educational record, you must provide written authorization to either the [Office of the Registrar](#) (for disclosure of academic information: e.g. grades, course schedule, degree evaluation, etc.) or the [Division of Student Affairs](#) (for disclosure of student affairs information: e.g. conduct records, etc.)

You must schedule an in-person meeting with either the [Registrar](#) or the [Associate Vice-President for Student Affairs](#) to sign the appropriate waiver. No one other than you and the Registrar or VP for Student Affairs may be present during the signing of the waiver. You must select the specific portion of your educational record (e.g. grades, conduct records, etc.) that you want disclosed and the specific

party (e.g. parent, grandparent, employer, nonprofit organization, etc.) to whom you want the information disclosed. The academic waiver is effective for 1 semester. The student affairs waiver is effective for 1 academic year.

Remember that certain information is protected by state or federal privacy laws (e.g. HIPAA) and must remain confidential, even when a FERPA waiver is in place.

## **Is there a single waiver I can sign so that a third party can have access to all of my records?**

Unfortunately, no. Systematic diversity at the College presents technological constraints to a single waiver. See the section above regarding access.

## **How can I make sure that college related bills are sent to the right place?**

Initial paper billing statements and email notifications are sent to you, typically in June. Simultaneously, an electronic bill is posted to your e-billing account. Parents can only access their student's e-billing account (and make payments) if their student sets them up as an authorized user. See the [Office of Student Accounts website](#) for more information.

The [Billing Authorization Form \(BAF\)](#) is included with the initial paper billing statement and also available on the [Office of Student Accounts website](#). The BAF authorizes Grinnell College to provide billing information to individuals designated by the student. Federal law mandates that the BAF be completed in order for the College to release any billing information to parents.

## **What if I'm injured or sick? Will Grinnell contact my parents?**

Only in extraordinary circumstances. Under FERPA and Grinnell's institutional policy, the College has the authority and reserves the right to contact parents regarding a variety of serious matters, including emergencies involving serious injury and threat to your life and/or safety or that of others. The cases in which Grinnell *may* notify parents cannot be completely enumerated or described; but the following examples are illustrative:

- You sustain a serious injury, particularly one that prevents you from contacting your parent yourself.
- You are hospitalized for a serious injury or illness, particularly if you are unable to contact your parent yourself.
- You are hospitalized for alcohol poisoning or a drug overdose.
- The College has serious concerns regarding your mental health.
- You are arrested or subject to other police action, especially stemming from alcohol (if under the age of 21) or drug violations.
- You are the victim of a violent crime.
- You commit an act of violence or significant abuse toward yourself or others.
- You engage in conduct that will likely result in suspension or dismissal from a College-owned residence or the College itself.
- You are unexplainably absent for several days or more. (The College may also contact your friends and/or relatives to help in locating you.)

## **Will Grinnell inform my parent if I am seeing a College counselor or other health professional?**

Grinnell administrators follow medical ethics and confidentiality laws (e.g. HIPAA), agreeing with the concept of treating all students as adults. Students utilize [Student Health and Counseling Services \(SHACS\)](#) to confront their issues and concerns knowing that counselors and health care professionals respect their privacy and confidentiality. Of course, under FERPA, if a student becomes a danger to themselves or others, the Student Affairs staff will notify parents.

## **Will my parent be informed if formal disciplinary action is taken against me?**

Our judicial system adjudicates documented incidents involving students who have allegedly violated Grinnell's policies. Each student is entitled to a fair hearing, the purpose of which is to determine the student's level of responsibility for any infraction of College policy. Most violations will not be reported to parents, but there are some occasions when parents will be notified. See the section above on "Will Grinnell Contact My Parent?"

## **Can third parties contact my instructors or faculty adviser(s) with questions about me?**

Faculty and advisers must abide by FERPA and will be unable to provide any information.

## **What if I signed a FERPA waiver? Can third parties contact my instructors or faculty adviser(s) then?**

Instructors and advisers do not have the ability to verify possession of a waiver to disclose educational records. Contact one of the College's FERPA compliance officers (the [Registrar](#) or the [Associate VP for Student Affairs](#)) with questions.

## **Can a school official serving as a reference or providing a letters of recommendation disclose portions of my educational record to a third party without my written consent?**

No. Your written authorization is required. The school official will ask you to complete the [FERPA Authorization for Reference/Recommendation](#). This authorization allows you to disclose elements of a student's educational record to third parties.

## **Do students have the right under FERPA to inspect and review references or letters of recommendation that are written about them?**

Yes, unless the student waives that right in writing. Grinnell College school officials will ask you to complete the [FERPA Authorization for Reference/Recommendation](#). By signing this authorization, you waive your right under FERPA to inspect and review or request amendment to your reference/recommendation.

## **If I verbally ask a school official to serve as a reference or provide a letter of recommendation to a third party, is that sufficient?**

No, written authorization is required. Grinnell College school officials will ask you to complete the [FERPA Authorization for Reference/Recommendation](#).

## **If I ask a school official via email to serve as a reference or provide a letter of recommendation to a third party, is that sufficient?**

Technically yes, but it is best practice for all Grinnell College school officials to uniformly ask all student to complete the [FERPA Authorization for Reference/Recommendation](#).

## **What if I already signed a FERPA waiver with another institution, employer, government agency, etc.? Is that sufficient for a school official to serve as a reference or provide a letter of recommendation?**

Technically yes, though the school official will want to retain a copy of that waiver for their own records. Best practice is for all Grinnell College school officials to uniformly ask all students to complete the [FERPA Authorization for Reference/Recommendation](#).

## **Can I inspect and review the records that Grinnell's Campus Safety and Security office keeps on me?**

Law enforcement unit records (i.e., records created by a College law enforcement unit, created for a law enforcement purpose, and maintained by the law enforcement unit) are not considered educational records subject to the privacy protections of FERPA. As such, [Grinnell Campus Safety and Security](#) may refuse to provide you with an opportunity to inspect and review their records.

## **Can Grinnell's Campus Safety and Security office disclose information about me to a third party?**

[Grinnell Campus Safety and Security](#) may disclose law enforcement unit records to third parties without your prior written consent. However, educational records which the College shares with [Campus Safety and Security](#) do not lose their FERPA protected status just because they are shared with the law enforcement unit.

## **I am a member of a student organization, sport, etc. The national chapter has asked the faculty/staff sponsor for a list of candidates for an award but one of the criteria is a certain GPA, race/ethnicity, or other FERPA-protected, non-Directory Information. How do I authorize the disclosure?**

Students may submit a [One-Time Authorization for the Release of Academic Information](#), permitting the Office of the Registrar to provide access to student-specified data for one-time disclosure to student-specified third parties.

## **Are my employment records part of my educational record?**

If you are employed by Grinnell College *as a result of your status as a student*, then yes—your employment records are considered part of your educational record. The employment records of a Grinnell employee who takes a class at the College are NOT considered part of the educational record not protected by FERPA.

## **Can I inspect and review my admissions records?**

As a matter of institutional policy on document retention, admissions records (aside from the Common Application) are destroyed once a student is in attendance. Under FERPA, schools are not required to create nor maintain any educational records, unless there is a pending request from an eligible student to inspect and review those records. In other words, the College is prohibited from destroying records that eligible students have requested to see.

## **How do I request an opportunity to inspect and review my educational record?**

Depending on the type of educational record, contact either the [Office of the Registrar](#) (for review of academic information: e.g. grades, course schedule, degree evaluation, etc.) or the [Division of Student Affairs](#) (for review of student affairs information: e.g. conduct records, etc.)

You must complete a signed, formal request and schedule an in-person session with either the [Registrar](#) or the [Associate Vice-President for Student Affairs](#) to inspect and review your record. Grinnell College has 45 days from the date of your signed formal request to provide you the opportunity to inspect and review your educational record.

## **Can I get a copy of my educational record?**

No. FERPA only grants students the right to inspect and review their educational record.

## **What if I'm not at Grinnell, live out of state, or otherwise can't set-up an in-person opportunity to inspect and review my educational record?**

Depending on the type of educational record, either the [Office of the Registrar](#) or the [Division of Student Affairs](#) will arrange a proctored opportunity at an accredited institution near you.

## **How do I request an amendment to my educational record?**

You must complete a signed, formal request. Depending on the type of educational record, contact either the [Office of the Registrar](#) or the [Division of Student Affairs](#).

## **Where can I find more information about FERPA?**

Grinnell College's full FERPA policy is available on the [Office of the Registrar's website](#). The U.S. Department of Education maintains a [website](#) about FERPA especially for parents.

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