

## **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), 1974 A Primer for Parents of St. Olaf Students**

Revised 8/14/08, MC

St. Olaf staff, faculty and administrators often handle confidential academic information. Sharing of this information with anyone other than the student is regulated by FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act). For more detailed information for St. Olaf's current interpretation of the law see:

<http://www.stolaf.edu/offices/registrar/ferpa.html>

**What is FERPA?** FERPA stands for the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. It is a federal law designed to protect the access to and privacy of students' "education records."

**What is an "education record?"** An education record is any information directly related to the student that is maintained by an educational agency or institution or by a party acting for the agency or institution.

**Students' Rights** – the student has the right to:

- 1) inspect his or her education record
- 2) seek amendment to an education record that the student believes is inaccurate or misleading.
- 3) have some control over the disclosure of information from his or her education record (excludes internal disclosure to college officials with a "legitimate educational interest")

**Private information includes but is not limited to:**

- Grades
- Courses taken
- Class schedule
- Test scores
- Advising records
- Education services received
- Disciplinary actions

**Public information ("directory information") includes:**

- name, local (St. Olaf) addresses and telephone number
- full time/part time enrollment status
- parents' names
- previous school attendance
- major field of study (verified for graduates), and dates attended
- participation in officially recognized activities and sports (incl. height/weight of athletes)
- degrees and awards received

**If you have questions, call the Registrar's Office!**

**507-786-3015**

<http://www.stolaf.edu/offices/registrar/>

<http://www.stolaf.edu/offices/registrar/ferpa.html>

**OVER**

## Parental Access to Children's Education Records:

When a student reaches the age of 18 or, regardless of age, begins attending a postsecondary institution, FERPA rights transfer to the student. According to FERPA, institutions are not required to release any information to parents. Parents may obtain directory ("public") information only at the discretion of the institution. Parents may obtain non-directory ("private") information only at the discretion of the institution and after it has been determined that their child is legally their dependent (that is, that the parents claim the child on their tax return). Parents may also obtain non-directory information by obtaining a signed consent from their child.

St. Olaf College policy does not allow parental access to educational records as a matter of course. Under certain circumstances, the college may allow parental access, but we do require that both conditions stated above be met (legal dependent status, signed consent from the student) except in extraordinary circumstances.

Here are some practical suggestions for keeping informed about your child's academic progress while helping us comply with federal regulations:

1. Please allow your child to be responsible for his/her own academic program. You can do this by encouraging him/her to:
  - a. check his/her St. Olaf e-mail account daily and pay attention to e-mails s/he receives from the Registrar, the Dean of Students, and other college personnel.
  - b. comply with college policies, as they appear in the catalog and the student handbook, in a timely way.
  - c. meet with an instructor at the first sign of any difficulty with a course.
  - d. remain in contact with his/her academic advisor.
2. If your child calls you and is very upset about something, please advise him/her to make use of the many college resources that are available to help students. If your student is not sure where to start in getting help, suggest his/her academic (faculty) advisor or the Registrar's Office for academic matters; for personal matters, suggest the Dean of Students office. You might check in with your child the next day to see if the problem has been resolved. Sometimes problems that initially seem insurmountable are relatively easy to resolve once the proper source of help has been found.
3. If you sense that something is very wrong, and that your child is not getting the help s/he needs, by all means, contact either the Registrar or the Dean of Students for advice. We will seek out the student.
4. Since we do not mail grades or other academic information to students' homes, please ask your child to keep you informed of his/her academic progress. Every student has on-line access to his/her record and can print a copy of registration, grades, degree audit as needed. Students could also copy and paste the information into an e-mail and send it to parents.
5. By all means, become familiar with and make use of all of the available resources on the St. Olaf website when you have a question. Here are some places to start:
  - a. Registrar's Office: <http://www.stolaf.edu/offices/registrar> Take a look at our new *Academic Resources: A Guide for Students and Advisors* as well as the Registrar's letter to parents, both available from the above link.
  - b. Dean of Students Office: <http://www.stolaf.edu/stulife/deanofstudents/>
  - c. Academic Advising Center (AAC): <http://www.stolaf.edu/services/aac/>
  - d. Academic Support Center (ASC): <http://www.stolaf.edu/services/asc/>
  - e. Center for Experiential Learning (CEL): <http://www.stolaf.edu/services/cel/> (check the Explore Resource)
6. Please *do not*:
  - a. ask your child to give you his/her St. Olaf password; students have been specifically requested to keep this password confidential.
  - b. call faculty members and ask for information about students in their classes. This puts them in a very difficult position, since they are asked to comply with FERPA regulations and are not completely aware of circumstances of individual students, some of which may preclude revealing information to any third party whatsoever. Talk with your child. If this is not possible, please call the Registrar.