

Grinnell College FERPA FAQ for Parents & Guardians

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 \(FPCO\)](#).

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.

Why should I care about FERPA?

As the parent of Grinnell College student, it is important to know that once your student is 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 the student *regardless of their age*.

What does that mean, “regardless of their 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 your student in attendance at Grinnell, even if they are under the age of 18.

OK, FERPA rights transfer from me to my student. How does that affect my access to their educational records?

In short, your student must authorize the College in writing to release any portion of their 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 student’s 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](#).

As a parent, will I receive my student's grades at the end of the semester?

Grinnell will NOT release grades (or any portion of a student's educational record) to a parent without prior written consent from the student. Even with prior written consent on file, Grinnell College will not *proactively* provide grades (or any portion of a student's educational record) to a parent. 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 I request my student's academic transcript?

No. See the section above regarding grades.

How does my student gain access to their 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 use my student's Grinnell College network ID and password to access their records online?

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

My student is in high school and participating in Grinnell's [Advanced Scholars Program \(ASP\)](#). How do I gain access to my student's educational record (e.g. grades, course schedule, etc.)?

As a student in attendance at Grinnell College, rights under FERPA have transferred to your student and school officials at Grinnell are not permitted to disclose information without their prior written consent. However, under FERPA, if your student is enrolled at both a high school and Grinnell College, the two schools may exchange information. If your student is under the age of 18, you still retain 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 me if my student is 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 the student and the appropriate Grinnell College school officials. Ask your student to keep you informed about their academic performance.

Does FERPA still apply if I am paying the bill?

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

What information about my student do I 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. Please see [Grinnell College Directory Information](#) for a full listing of data defined by the College as public information. Under FERPA, students may choose to block even Directory Information from disclosure.

I want access to my student's FILL-IN-THE-BLANK (grades, academic transcript, conduct record, etc.) How do I obtain access?

Depending on the type of educational record, your student 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.)

Students 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 the student and the Registrar or VP for Student Affairs may be present during the signing of the waiver. Students must select the specific portion of their educational record (e.g. grades, conduct records, etc.) that they want disclosed and the specific party (e.g. parent, grandparent, etc.) to whom they 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 that my student can sign so I can have access to all of their 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 me?

Initial paper billing statements and email notifications are sent to your student, typically in June. Simultaneously, an electronic bill is posted to the student's 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 available on the [Office of Student Accounts website](#). The BAF authorizes Grinnell College to provide billing information to student designated individuals. Federal law mandates that the BAF be completed in order for the College to release any billing information to parents.

What if my student is injured or sick? Will Grinnell contact me?

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 the life and/or safety of your student or others. The cases in which Grinnell *may* notify parents cannot be completely enumerated or described; but the following examples are illustrative:

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

Does Grinnell inform parents when their student is 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 I be informed if my student has formal disciplinary action taken against them?

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 Me?"

Can I contact instructors or faculty advisors with questions about my student's academic progress?

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

Can I contact instructors or advisers if my student has signed a FERPA waiver?

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.

Who do I contact if I have concerns about my student's well-being, academic progress, etc.?

If you are concerned about your student, it is good to share that information with the [Dean for Student Success and Academic Advising](#). You may also contact either of the FERPA compliance officers (the [Registrar](#) or the [Associate VP for Student Affairs](#)) and they will communicate your concerns to the appropriate school official.

How does my student request an opportunity to inspect and review their educational record?

Depending on the type of educational record, your student should 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.)

Your student 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 their record. Grinnell College has 45 days from the date of your signed formal request to provide your student the opportunity to inspect and review their educational record.

Can my student get a copy of their educational record?

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

What if my student is not at Grinnell, lives out of state, or otherwise can't set-up an in-person opportunity to inspect and review their 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 your student.

How does my student request an amendment to their educational record?

Your student must complete a signed, formal request. Depending on the type of educational record, they should 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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