

# FERPA for TAs

## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

A summary of FERPA regulations pertinent to USC TAs.

## HOW DO I USE IT?

Review the document before teaching, and revisit when questions of student confidentiality arise. For assistance, please [contact CET](http://cet.usc.edu/).

Note: The contents of this document are derived from [https://arr.usc.edu/records/ferpa](https://arr.usc.edu/records/ferpa/) and <https://arr.usc.edu/records/ferpa/faculty.html>. For further information, visit those sites or the [USC Registrar's Office](https://arr.usc.edu/services/onestop/generalinfo.html), (213) 740-1164, MC 0912

### FERPA

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) is a federal law regarding the privacy of student records and the obligations of the institution, primarily in the areas of release of records and the access provided to these records.

### Educational records

According to FERPA, personally identifiable information in an education record may not be released without prior written consent from the student. Some examples of information that may not be released without prior written consent of the student are:

* Grades and exam scores
* Grade point average (GPA)
* Disciplinary status
* SSN and student I.D. number
* Ethnicity
* Gender
* Marital status
* Birth date
* Religious affiliation
* Citizenship
* Test scores (such as SAT, GRE, etc.)
* Progress reports such as STARS

The university will not release personally identifiable information from a student's education record without the student's prior written consent. Even parents are not permitted access to their son’s or daughter's education records unless the student has provided written authorization permitting the parents' access. There are exceptions to this rule, which are best handled by a faculty member, not a TA.

### Posting grades

The public posting of grades either by the student's name, institutional student identification number or Social Security number, without the student's written permission, is a violation of FERPA. Even with names obscured, numeric student identifiers are considered personally identifiable information and therefore violate FERPA. Instructors can assign students unique numbers or codes that can be used to post grades. However, the order of the posting must not be alphabetic.

### Returning assignments

Leaving personally identifiable, graded papers unattended for students to view is no different from posting grades in the hallway. If these papers contain "personally identifiable" information, leaving them unattended for anyone to see is a violation of FERPA if the instructor has not obtained the written permission of each student to do so. Possible solutions include leaving the graded papers (exams, quizzes, and homework) with an assistant or secretary who would ask students for proper identification prior to distributing them; or leaving them in a sealed envelope with only the student's name on it.

### Sending grades to students

Instructors can notify students of their final grades via the U.S. mail if the information is enclosed in an envelope. Notification of grades via postcards violates a students’ privacy. Notification of grades via email is permissible. However, there is no guarantee of confidentiality.

### Parents requesting information

Such things 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 make up part of the student's education record. This information is protected under FERPA and parents may not have access unless the student has provided written authorization that specifically identifies what information may be released to the parents.

### Letters of recommendation

Written permission of the student is required for a letter of recommendation if any information included in the recommendation is part of the "education record.”