

Bates is required by law to protect student records.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) was passed by Congress in 1974. It grants four specific rights to a postsecondary student:

- To review the education record the institution is maintaining about them;
- To seek to amend those records and, in certain cases, append a statement to the record;
- To consent to the disclosure of those records; and
- To file a complaint with the Department of Education.

FERPA applies to any educational institution that receives funds administered by the Department of Education. This includes Bates. As a college official, you're expected to understand and comply with FERPA.

If you're ever in doubt about releasing information about a student, we're always happy to chat. You can reach us by email at registrar@bates.edu and by phone at 207-755-5949.

What's an education record?

Education records are records directly related to a student that are maintained by Bates or a party acting on behalf of Bates. These records include but aren't limited to grades, transcripts, rosters, student schedules, student financial information, Degree Audits, attendance records, and conduct records. The medium of the record doesn't matter. There are some exceptions in the definition, primarily for certain law enforcement, employment, or medical records.

What's directory information?

Bates designates certain student record information as directory information for the purposes of FERPA. We publish the list of the designated items annually in the [Bates Catalog](#). Directory information can be shared publicly unless the student's taken formal action to block its release, but we're not required to release any information about a student, including directory information. College policy limits what we share beyond the restrictions mandated by FERPA. If you're ever not sure if you can release something, check with the Registrar's Office.

What does all of this mean for me as a member of the Bates community?

It's unlawful to share information about students to third parties without the students' written consent, including verbally. If you have a student's consent, you can release information in accordance with the consent. Make sure the consent covers the information you're releasing, and if you have questions about collecting consent from a student, ask the Registrar's Office. It's also a violation of FERPA to share information about students to other members of the Bates community unless that individual has a legitimate educational interest and needs the information to perform their duties.

What are some things I should watch out for to avoid unintentionally violating FERPA?

- Don't leave graded papers, exams, lab reports, etc. in publicly accessible places. This means not leaving them outside your door for students to pick up. It also means not passing them back in a stack for students to sort through to find their own assignment.
- Don't release GPA or grade information to a third party without a signed consent, even for letters of recommendation or other references.
- Don't give students access to emails or other materials that contain non-directory information about other students. Best practice is to send individual, student-specific emails to share information; if you're sending group messages be very careful that they don't contain protected information. If you're sending group messages that don't contain protected information, it's best practice to use Bcc: to protect the identities of the other recipients.
- Don't share protected information with other members of the Bates community unless their official responsibilities identify their legitimate educational interest in having the information. Figuring out legitimate interest isn't always straightforward, so unless you know for sure the person should have access to the information, ask the Registrar's Office.
- Don't leave protected information unattended. Lock your computer screen when you get up. Shred printed material you're done with.
- Don't save student records on your personal devices, and always make sure you're storing or sharing them securely.

Questions? Just ask!

If you're ever not completely sure you're doing right by FERPA or you have questions about a particular situation, we'd love to help. Email us at registrar@bates.edu or call us at 207-755-5949.