TEXAS TECH™

Communicating with Parents or Family Members

Texas Tech values the family members who send their students to study with us. We recognize that many families support their students financially, provide encouragement throughout the college experience and desire to see their students be successful and graduate. If a TTU employee (faculty or staff) is contacted by parents or family members, what is our responsibility in communicating fairly and appropriately?

FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974)

FERPA is a federal law that pertains to the release of, and access to, educational records. FERPA helps to define a student's rights regarding their educational records and how the institution should protect those records. FERPA applies to personally identifiable information in educational records. Texas Tech posts midterm grades for students in their first semesters and final grades for all students on Raiderlink (www.raiderlink.ttu.edu). Printed grade reports are not mailed. More FERPA information for faculty and staff can be found on the Office of the Registrar's website.

What is a FERPA Authorization?

If a student wishes to give someone (such as a parent or spouse) permission to access their educational records, the student must complete a FERPA authorization (also known as a "connection request") through the Red Raider Family Network. The student may grant access to information, such as, course enrollment, grade(s) information, financial aid information, business account information, and holds. The authorized individual will have access to that information through the Red Raider Family Network portal. FERPA authorization does not grant the right to act on the student's behalf.

What information can be released?

Some student information may be released without the consent of the student, if the student has not restricted the release of their directory information. Directory information includes the following:

Student Name
Permanent and Local Addresses
Place of Birth
Classification
Major Field of Study

Dates of Attendance
Degrees, Awards, and Honors Received
Specific Enrollment Status
Full-time, Part-time, Half-time
Undergraduate, Graduate, Law, Veterinary Medicine
Participation in Officially Recognized Sports and Activities
Height/weight of members of Athletic Teams
Previous Institution(s) Attended

Educational Records: While FERPA allows schools to disclose student education records without consent in certain situations, generally, schools must have written permission from a student to release any information from a student's education record to any party not meeting a stated exception (contact the Office of the Registrar for more information). Faculty and staff can access student FERPA authorizations via the Red Raider Family Network.

Parents, spouses, other students, and even staff and faculty who do not have a legitimate educational interest should not access the student's information. **It is the responsibility of all Texas Tech University employees who have access to student information to safeguard that information.** Any faculty and staff who require access to student records via the university's electronic systems must successfully complete the online FERPA training, with an 80% score or higher, prior to attendance of system-specific trainings.

Even if a student has completed a FERPA authorization, it is still not necessarily your responsibility to discuss academic matters with the parent or family member. All discussions regarding a student's educational record must be conducted in a private, secure manner. This includes all discussions relating to grades, advising or tutoring appointments, class schedules, enrollment, and all methods of communication (verbal, email, written, etc.).

Guidelines for Interacting with Parents or Family Members
The good news is that you are unlikely to be in this situation. Most parents do not attempt to interact with faculty members or staff on behalf of their students, but there may be occasional times in which a parent or family member will reach out. They want their students to be successful and are accustomed to advocating for and being involved with their students. Families of first-year students in particular are still learning to navigate this transition and support their college student.

We should not assume that a student is aware when a parent or family member has contacted you. If there is no FERPA authorization on file, you may politely but firmly inform the parent or family member that you are not at liberty to discuss the student's academic record due to FERPA guidelines.

In general:

- We do not work with the parent or family member in place of the student.
- We cannot confirm attendance or enrollment in a class.
- Remember that a FERPA authorization does not require you to speak with a parent or family member, but it does allow a parent access to certain information through the Red Raider Family Network.
- Parents and family members should first be referred to the Red Raider Family Network to view or request access to their student's educational records. Any deeper conversations regarding the student's educational records should generally involve the student. If the student wishes to have a family member present during these discussions, the student should ensure they have granted FERPA authorization to the family member beforehand. Additionally, the faculty or staff member must also verify that the student has granted FERPA authorization to the family member prior to any conversations in which the family member is to be present.
- Always maintain professionalism, regardless of the interaction. Our Texas Tech System values of "people first" and "respect" reminds us to be compassionate as you acknowledge and respond to the needs of others while actively listening.
- Remember that providing appropriate resources (for example, a Texas Tech website), explaining general policies and procedures, or wishing a student well are not considered FERPA violations. For example, an appropriate email response might be something like, "Thank you for your message. Federal privacy regulations prevent me from communicating with intermediaries regarding the status or academic performance of a specific student. The Texas Tech Dean of Students website contains information regarding students of concern. Students may request disability-related accommodations through Student Disability Services. I hope this is helpful information and wish you the best."
- Make your supervisor or Chair/Director/Area Coordinator aware of the situation.

What if there is an extenuating circumstance?
There are some difficult circumstances, and parents/family members may not know how to help their student with emergency medical accommodations or tragic

circumstances. Please refer these situations to the Dean of Students office at 806-742-2984.

What if a student wants to bring a parent to a meeting with a faculty member?
Some students may feel pressured or want to have their parents or family members join them during face-to-face or virtual meetings with faculty members. If a student shows up to a meeting with a parent, or if the faculty member becomes aware of another individual present in a virtual meeting, it is reasonable to say, "Thank you for coming. Due to federal privacy regulations, I cannot discuss a student's performance with anyone except the student until a FERPA authorization has been completed" and end the meeting, or request that the other individual(s) leave the room. If a FERPA authorization is on file for the other individual(s), and the student wishes for them to be present during the meeting, the focus of the conversation should be between the student and the faculty member, rather than between the faculty member and the other individual(s).

Most interactions with our students and their family members are positive, but if you are concerned about how to handle a specific situation, please contact Dr. Elyn Palmer, Associate Dean of Students or Dr. Christine Self, Director, Family Outreach & Engagement, Parent & Family Relations.