What does FERPA mean to me?
Tip of the month from Internal Audit
Feb 26, 2008

February’s tip of the month from Ohio University’s Office of Internal Audit focuses on the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. The tips, which appear in Outlook the last Tuesday of each month, address common audit findings that are reported to the Board of Trustees.

Just because you don’t work in the Office of the Registrar or handle grades in an academic office, don’t think the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act -- or FERPA -- doesn’t affect you. FERPA affects everyone working in higher education.

How, you might ask. Here are some common violations of FERPA:

- Publishing a photograph of a student on your Web site without a signed release
- Allowing public access to a class roster on your Web site
- Writing a letter of recommendation that states a student's grade or GPA without a release
- Posting grades on your door using the last four digits of students’ PID numbers
- Inadvertently misdirecting e-mail containing student information
- Throwing DARS reports into regular trash or unsecured recycling

Even in this age when many students post all kinds of personal information on My Space and other social-networking sites, disclosure by the student does not eliminate or lessen our responsibility.

If you are in doubt, contact the Office of the Registrar or Legal Affairs for clarification before releasing information.

FERPA generally provides that students have a right to control the disclosure of their records, review their own records, request amendments to those records and file a complaint if they feel their rights have been violated.

The term "education record" is very broad. Only our defined "directory information" may be released in most circumstances without a signed release. Please visit the registrar’s Web site for a complete listing of the information Ohio University designates as directory information.