



The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act

Alma College students have rights under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, as amended. This act, as amended, is a federal law which states that (1) a written institutional policy must be established; and (2) a statement of adopted procedures covering the privacy rights of students be made available. The law provides that the institution will maintain the confidentiality of student education records.

Records Access Policy

Alma College accords all the rights under the law to students who are declared independent. No one outside the institution shall have access to, nor will the institution disclose any information from, students' education records without the written consent of students. The only exceptions to this accord are to (1) personnel within the institution, (2) officials of other institutions in which students seek to enroll, (3) persons or organizations providing students financial aid, (4) accrediting agencies carrying out their accreditation function, (5) persons in compliance with a judicial order, and (6) persons in an emergency in order to protect the health or safety of students or other persons. Within the Alma College Community, only those faculty, administrators or support staff who are acting in the students' educational interests are allowed access to student education records. All these exceptions are permitted under the Act.

Alma College looks to federal financial aid standards to determine the independent status of students. That status governs our treatment of student information. To ease the flow of information, students can provide releases to various offices across campus.

Disclosure Policy

At its discretion, Alma College may provide Directory Information in accordance with the provisions of the Act. This information includes (1) student name, address, telephone number, and date and place of birth; (2) e-mail address; (3) major field of study; (4) class schedule and class rosters; (5) identity of parents, guardians or next of kin; (6) dates of attendance, and degrees and awards received; (7) the most recent previous educational agency or institution attended by the student; (8) participation in officially recognized activities and sports; (9) photographs; and (10) weight and height of members of athletic teams. Social security numbers are not considered directory information. Typical use of directory information includes but is not limited to media releases, publications, event programs and lists for on-campus office use. As a general rule, Alma College does not release lists of directory information to off-campus vendors or agents unless required by law to do so.

Students may withhold directory information by filing the Non-Disclosure of Directory Information Form with the Director of Communication within two weeks of the first day of class of the Fall or Winter term. Requests for non-disclosure will be honored by the institution for only one academic year; therefore, authorization to withhold directory information must be filed annually in the Communication and Marketing Office. Forms are available in the Communication and Marketing and Registrar's offices.

Addendum, January 3, 2012. The U.S. Department of Education's FERPA regulations expand the circumstances under which your education records and personally identifiable information (PII) contained in such records — including your Social Security Number, grades or other private information — may be accessed without your consent. First, the U.S. Comptroller General, the U.S. Attorney General, the U.S. Secretary of Education, or state and local education authorities ("federal and state authorities") may allow access to your records and PII without your consent to any third party designated by a federal or state authority to evaluate a federal- or state-supported education program. The evaluation may relate to any program that is "principally engaged in the provision of education," such as early childhood education and job training, as well as any program that is administered by an education agency or institution. Second, federal and state authorities may allow access to your education records and PII without your consent to

researchers performing certain types of studies, in certain cases even when we object to or do not request such research. Federal and state authorities must obtain certain use-restriction and data security promises from the entities that they authorize to receive your PII, but the authorities need not maintain direct control over such entities. In addition, in connection with Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems, state authorities may collect, compile, permanently retain, and share without your consent PII from your education records, and they may track your participation in education and other programs by linking such PII to other personal information about you that they obtain from other federal or state data sources, including workforce development, unemployment insurance, child welfare, juvenile justice, military service and migrant student records systems.

Review Process

The law provides students with the right to (1) inspect and review information contained in their education records, (2) challenge the contents of their education records, (3) have a hearing if the outcome of the challenge is unsatisfactory, and (4) submit explanatory statements for inclusion in their files if the decision of the hearing panels are unacceptable. The Registrar at Alma College has been designated by the institution to coordinate inspection and review procedures for student education records. These records include admissions, student affairs, academic and financial files, and academic, cooperative education and placement records.

Students wishing to review their education records must make written request to the Registrar listing the item(s) of interest. Only records covered by the Act will be made available within 45 days of the request. Students may have copies made of their records with certain exceptions, (e.g., a copy of the academic record for which a financial "hold" exists, or a transcript of an original or source document which exists elsewhere). These copies will be made at the students' expense.

Education records do not include (1) records of instructional, administrative, and educational personnel, which are the sole possession of the maker and are not accessible or revealed to any individual except a temporary substitute; (2) records of the law enforcement unit; (3) student health records; (4) employment records; or (5) alumni records. Health records, however, may be reviewed by physicians of the students' choosing. The administrative offices at Alma College (Registrar, Financial Aid, Center for Student Opportunity, Communication and Marketing) maintain records of requests for personally identifiable information and permit students to review those records.

Restricted Information

Students may not inspect and review the following as outlined by the Act: (1) financial information submitted by their parents; (2) confidential letters and recommendations associated with admissions, employment or job placement, or honors to which they have waived their rights of inspection and review; or (3) education records containing information about more than one student, in which case the institution will permit access only to that part of the record which pertains to the inquiring student. The institution is not required to permit students to inspect and review confidential letters and recommendations placed in their files prior to January 1, 1975, provided those letters were collected under established policies of confidentiality and were used only for the purposes for which they were collected.

Challenge Procedures

A student who believes that the education records contain information that is inaccurate or misleading or is otherwise in violation of privacy or other rights, may discuss the problems informally with the office in question. If subsequent decisions are made that agree with the student's requests, the appropriate records will be amended. If not, the student will be notified within a reasonable period of time that the records will not be amended and will be informed by that office of the right to a formal hearing. Student requests for formal hearings must be made in writing to the Provost. This administrator will inform the student of the date, place and the time of the hearing within a reasonable period of time after receiving a request. A student may present evidence relevant to the issues raised and may be assisted or represented at the hearing by one or more persons of his/her choice, including attorneys, at the student's expense. The hearing panel, which will adjudicate such challenges, will be the Provost, the Vice President for Student Affairs and the Chief Operating Officer.

Decisions of the hearing panel will be final and will (1) be based solely on the evidence presented at the hearing, (2) consist of written statements summarizing the evidence and stating the reasons for the decisions, and (3) be delivered to all parties concerned. The education records will be corrected or amended in accordance with the decisions of the hearing panel, if the decisions are in favor of the student. If the decisions are unsatisfactory to the student, the student may place with the education records personal statements commenting on the information in the records, or statements setting forth any reasons for disagreeing with the decisions of the hearing panel. These statements will be placed in the education records, maintained as part of the student's records and released whenever the records in question are disclosed.

Students who believe that the adjudications of their challenges were unfair or not in keeping with the provisions of the Act may appeal in writing within 60 days to the President of the College. If the appeal proves to be unsatisfactory, the student may file a written complaint with the Family Policy Compliance Office, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20202-5920. Revisions and clarifications will be published as experience with the law and institution's policy warrants.