



October 2020

Dear Students and Families:

As we begin the new academic year, I would like to take the opportunity to address some of the more commonly asked questions we receive regarding Fairfield University's approach to communicating with the families of our students. What follows is not intended to be a complete recitation of related policies and procedures but rather a quick glimpse at some of the more frequently asked questions.

Fairfield University's official Parental Notification Policy as well as our Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act Annual Notice are in the [Student Handbook](#). I encourage students and families to read this information.

What is FERPA?

It is helpful to begin any discussion about student records and parental notification with a note regarding the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). FERPA is a federal law that applies to students attending college. In general, FERPA transfers the right of access to records from the parent(s)/guardian(s) to students once they attend college. What this essentially means is that college students have the right under FERPA to expect that their educational records, including grades and student conduct matters, will not be shared with anyone including parents and guardians without their consent.

There are exceptions to this right to privacy including, but not limited to, situations where the University determines that a health or safety emergency warrants communication without a student's consent. Additionally, students may always authorize access to their records by signing a written release. Information regarding written releases is set forth more fully below.

What if a student is hospitalized?

In general, Fairfield University will determine on a case-by-case basis whether to contact a parent or guardian in relation to an injury or medical condition requiring hospitalization. Fairfield University will always encourage students to contact parents or guardians themselves in the event of hospitalization. If the student's life is at risk, Fairfield University will make reasonable attempts to contact a parent or guardian.

What if the hospitalization involves intoxication?

In the specific instance when a student requires medical transportation to a hospital for alcohol or drug intoxication, Fairfield University will make a reasonable attempt to contact families as soon as it is feasible to do so. It is within the University's sole discretion to determine when to make the call following medical transport for intoxication but, in most instances, an attempt will be made to contact families within 24 hours.

The phone call will be limited to advising the student's family about transport by ambulance for apparent intoxication and providing contact information (i.e., the address and phone number) for the hospital. The professional staff member making the call is not a medical professional and will only be calling to relay information regarding the medical transportation. Families receiving

such a call are therefore encouraged to contact the student, then the hospital itself. Students will be expected to arrange for their own transportation from the hospital, although taxi vouchers are available at Saint Vincent's Medical Center and Bridgeport Hospital.

Are student grades or other academic records made available to families?

A student's grades are made available electronically and directly to the student through the my.Fairfield portal. Fairfield University operates on the presumption that a student's academic records, including grades, are not to be shared without the express written permission of the student. Exceptions include the student's academic advisor and select Fairfield University staff.

We understand families want to know how students are doing academically. We strongly encourage families to ask students directly for this information. This can be done in the broader context of a conversation about how the student is doing both in class and outside the classroom.

Alternatively, a student can fill out and sign a FERPA Release Form. FERPA Release Forms are available in the student's academic dean's office and in Academic Support and Retention in the DiMenna-Nyselius Library. Students can use the FERPA Release Form to designate what records they will allow to be disclosed and to whom they may be disclosed. This could include discussions regarding grades and academic progress.

Will I be notified about student conduct matters? Can I access student conduct records?

Similar to academic records, a student's conduct record is to be kept private; and as a general rule, the University does not release information related to a student conduct proceeding without the express permission of the student. Exceptions to this include communications to selected Fairfield University personnel. Exceptions also exist if a student is found responsible for a violation of the University's drug or alcohol policies or has to be hospitalized for intoxication. In those circumstances, families will be notified. Families will also be notified if a student is no longer in good standing. Fairfield University officials will actively encourage students to be in communication with families throughout the entire processing of any conduct matter.

Can parents/guardians access student medical records or counseling records?

Consistent with state and federal law, both the Student Health Center and Counseling & Psychological Services are prohibited from sharing a student's medical or counseling records with anyone absent the express written consent of the student. This prohibition includes even confirming that a student has visited the Student Health Center or Counseling & Psychological Services. Students may provide written authorization for the release of information, but releases are done on a per-incident basis.

Exceptions to rules regarding privacy exist and a University official or hospital professional will attempt to contact families when a student's life is at imminent risk either for medical or psychological reasons.

Additional questions regarding Fairfield University's notification procedures may be directed to the Office of the Dean of Students or to the specific office involved (e.g., the Student Health Center, Counseling & Psychological Services, the office of the student's academic dean).

Thank you for your attention to this topic. We understand the heightened concerns of students and families given the current issues permeating across the United States and around the globe. Please let us know if we can provide you with additional guidance or assistance.

Sincerely,

William H. Johnson, PhD
Dean of Students