January

**Communicating to You About Your Son or Daughter**

Dear Parents/Guardians:

I hope you had a restful winter break and your student had an enjoyable transition back to campus.

As we begin the new semester, I would like to re-address some of the more commonly asked questions we receive regarding Fairfield University’s approach to communicating with parents and guardians regarding their sons and daughters. What follows is not intended to be a complete recitation of our notification and confidentiality policies 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 (FERPA) Annual Notice, are in the *Student Handbook* and I encourage families to read them. They can be found on the Fairfield University website: [www.fairfield.edu/studenthandbook](http://www.fairfield.edu/studenthandbook).

**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), a federal law that applies to college students. In general, FERPA transfers the right of access to records from the parent to the son or daughter once the son or daughter attends college. What this essentially means is that your son or daughter, as a college student, has the right under FERPA to expect that his or her educational records, including grades and disciplinary matters, will be held in confidence and not shared with anyone—including his or her parents or guardians.

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

**What if my son or daughter 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. The University will always encourage students to contact parents or guardians themselves in the event of hospitalization. If the student’s life is at risk or, as described below, in the event of a medical transportation to a local hospital for alcohol intoxication, the University will make reasonable attempts to contact a parent or guardian.
What if the hospitalization involves alcohol intoxication?
In the specific instance when a student requires medical transportation to a hospital for alcohol intoxication, Fairfield University will attempt to contact a parent or guardian 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 a parent or guardian within 24 hours.

The phone call will be limited to advising the parent or guardian that their son or daughter was transported 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. Parents and guardians receiving such a call are therefore encouraged to first call their son or daughter, then the hospital itself. Students will be expected to arrange for their own transportation from the hospital.

May I see my son or daughter’s grades or other academic records?
A student’s grades are made available electronically and directly to the student through their my.Fairfield.edu account. 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 selected University staff.

Obviously, parents and guardians want to know how their sons and daughters are doing academically. We strongly encourage parents to ask their students directly for this information. This can be done in the broader context of a conversation about how their son or daughter 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 any dean’s office on campus, including the Office of Academic Support and Retention in the Kelley Center and the Office of the Dean of Students in the Barone Campus Center. 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.

May I see my daughter’s or son’s student conduct records?
Similar to academic records, a student’s disciplinary records are confidential, and as a general rule, Fairfield 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 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, a parent or guardian will be notified. A parent or guardian will also be notified if the student is placed on
disciplinary probation. Fairfield University officials will actively encourage students to be in communication with parents and guardians throughout the entire processing of any judicial matter.

**May I access my daughter’s or son’s medical records or counseling records?**
Consistent with state and federal law, both the 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 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 confidentiality exist and a University official or hospital professional will attempt to contact a parent or guardian 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 Office of the Registrar, the Health Center, Counseling & Psychological Services, the office of the student’s academic dean).

Thank you for your attention to this topic. We look forward to working with students and their families.

Sincerely,

Karen Donoghue
Dean of Students