

Student Requests for Access to Records under FERPA

Background

On January 16th there was a Buzzfeed article written by Stanford students regarding how they could request Admissions documents as allowed under FERPA so that they could see comments and numerical scores used in the Admissions decisions. Shortly after the article circulated students began to request access to review their records. The majority of the requests seem to be aimed at the Ivy League schools but other private schools have seen significant increases in the number of requests they are receiving. To date we are aware of one such request at Pitt. Stanford has the most with requests which have been cited as being around 2800. This is putting a burden on the schools with large numbers of requests and is resulting in high costs to comply.

Requirements under FERPA

- Institutions need to provide access to the records requested within 45 days of the written request.
- You do not need to provide copies of the files, Pitt's practice is to provide access for review and does not provide copies.
 - If the requester is not in the local area you can make arrangements to have the records sent to another institution or location for the review.
 - Students should not be left alone with the records, a staff person should remain in the review area.
 - You can tell students that they cannot make copies or photos of the records but can take notes. If desired you can ask them to leave phones and other electronic devices outside of the review area.
- You must provide all documentation related to the request, including e-mails if they exist.
- You do not need to provide personal notes that have not been shared with others, once shared they become part of the record.
- You do not need to provide reference letters if the student waived their rights to view them during the application process.
- You cannot purge anything from the student's file once a request for access has been received.
- You should have a retention policy for the records held in your area, this should include what information is retained and the length of time it is retained. Be sure to follow the policy that is established.
- FERPA does not protect applicants, it only protects matriculated students.

Recent Updates

Schools who have begun to set up interviews with requesters are finding that they don't all show up for the scheduled appointments. In addition, some of the student newspapers have had articles on the subject. Below are links to a few of these articles:

Harvard - <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2015/1/27/admissions-records-ferpa-stanford/>

Duke – <http://www.dukechronicle.com/articles/2015/02/23/ferpa-wisely#.VOueHNFOVjo>

Stanford - <http://www.stanforddaily.com/2015/03/09/first-students-gain-access-to-their-admissions-files-through-ferpa-provision/>

Resources

Student Privacy and FERPA workshop presented through HR, the next session is scheduled for Wednesday, April 22nd.

Contact Patti Mathay (Office of the Registrar) or Pam Connelly (Office of General Counsel)