

# Complying with FERPA in online courses

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) has been around for over 40 years. It is a federal privacy law that provides certain rights to post-secondary students and instills certain responsibilities on the institution to protect students' records and privacy. FERPA does not change whether enrollment is in a face-to-face or online course. The application of FERPA is just as important in the digital and cloud computing age as it is in the traditional classroom. It is always a good time to provide reminders of its role in online education.

## GRADES

Under FERPA, a student's entire academic record is protected. Most instructors can maintain grades within Blackboard or UAOnline as both are password-protected sites and don't violate FERPA. UA email accounts are also password-protected, but not as secure. Hence, notifying students of their grades via email or social media can be a violation as confidentiality and security cannot be guaranteed. When students request grades directly, instructors should always refer them to Blackboard or UAOnline.

## PROCTORED EXAMS

As online proctoring services grow, it is important for institutions to consider vendors that uphold student protections and authenticate student identity as all technology used in online proctoring fall under the FERPA umbrella. UAF eCampus has recently partnered with RPNow (Remote Proctoring Now) to offer authentication and virtual proctoring for online-based exams.

Why is having virtual proctoring important? After all, wouldn't it be more secure to have students take paper exams? Over the years of helping online students, we constantly hear, "I cannot take a proctored exam between 8-5. I chose online classes for a reason — I need the flexibility." With the implementation of RPNow, eCampus can offer both instructors and students an option that will not compromise the instructor's metrics or the student's privacy all while maintaining the flexibility students need. For a small fee, our new virtual proctoring service allows students to take online-based exams anytime, anywhere and still maintain the security of education records.

## PUBLIC DISCUSSIONS

Many instructors use various online services and platforms (blogs, social media, Wikis, etc.) as part of their course assignments. While there is a need for instructors to evaluate assignments, they also need to protect student records and identity from risks associated with using these educational tools. FERPA does not allow any kind of public disclosure of personally identifiable student information. One suggestion is including information in your syllabus that the platform students are using is public and could be accessed by anyone. Students should be given the opportunity to [create an alias](#) if they want to protect their identity. [UAF's Office of Information Technology has helpful information for all students and employees.](#)

Applying good FERPA practices isn't hard in online education. We always want to be aware of ways to protect students and their records no matter what educational tools we are using in course delivery. If you have questions, contact the UAF Registrar's Office or eCampus.

