

Security Awareness: FERPA

It's the beginning of the fall semester, class is back in session, and the campus is once again brimming with students. In other words, it's a perfect time to bring up FERPA (The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974). In the last few articles, we've talked about some ways that people might try to gain unauthorized access to confidential and sensitive information. We've mentioned phishing, and social engineering, and how information security is everyone's responsibility (to get copies of past articles, visit the Hofstra IT Security webpage at (http://www.hofstra.edu/StudentServ/CC/HITS/HITS_articles.cfm)). All that being said, exactly what information are you supposed to protect?

In an article earlier this year, we said confidential information includes Social Security Numbers, education records, financial information; essentially any information that, if obtained by unauthorized individuals, could cause harm to the owner of the information, Hofstra, or both.

It's important to understand FERPA, the Federal law that defines the information Hofstra has to protect. Fundamentally, the law states that no one outside the institution shall have access to students' education records, nor will the institution disclose any information from those records without the written consent of the students.

In general, all student information must be treated as confidential. Even the disclosure of public, or "directory information", is subject to restriction, at the discretion of the University. Any requests for the disclosure of information should be referred to the Office of Academic Records.

You can read and get familiar with Hofstra's FERPA policy, in the University's Undergraduate and Graduate Studies Bulletins and in the Guide to Pride. It contains important details and definitions. If you've already read it, take the time to read it again.

All employees who have access to confidential information should take precautions to prevent such information from being disclosed to unauthorized individuals. This includes properly disposing of confidential information through shredding, logging off of your computer after using it, and not leaving confidential information unattended.

If you have any questions concerning FERPA or what information you can or cannot release, please contact the Office of Academic Records at (516) 463-6680.

If you have any questions or concerns about computer security, please contact IT Security at ITSecurity@hofstra.edu.