

FERPA and E-mail

The US Department of Education has determined that, in general, communication between faculty and students over e-mail “is considered to be an insecure means of transmitting protected information under FERPA” unless some form of encryption is used (e-mail from US Department of Education to BYU). Under FERPA, unencrypted e-mail is treated the same way a postcard is—that is, the information conveyed in that medium is visible to third parties. The facility to encrypt e-mail at BYU is currently unavailable.

BYU is considering the creation of a student message center underneath the Route Y security. In the meantime, faculty in the College of Humanities should not use e-mail—including e-mail via Blackboard—to communicate any FERPA-protected information to any student, including when the student’s own information is to be communicated only to him/her.

This means that faculty should not send messages to students over e-mail that contain:

1. Any non-directory personal information.
2. Information concerning the grade they have received on any assignment or assessment, much less the course grade. Grade information, of course, may be communicated to students through Blackboard’s Grade Center software, or through comparable, BYU-approved software.
3. Anything that might indicate or suggest the student’s standing in the course.
4. Anything that might indicate or suggest that the student is suspected of plagiarizing or cheating in the course.