

Letter: Student privacy

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A recent article in The Post and Courier implied that MUSC officials have been wrongfully withholding information about our students' records. In fact, we are both professionally and legally obligated to protect the privacy rights of all our students when it comes to their academic performance.

A federal law, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA, enacted in 1974), protects the privacy of student education records, including grades and most disciplinary procedures.

FERPA demands that institutions of higher education not disclose certain information about student disciplinary proceedings without the consent of the student — with the rare exception of disciplinary action involving criminal allegations.

All matters that pertain to the MUSC Honor Code and Honor Council are confidential segments of a student's academic record under FERPA.

In addition, at the state level, South Carolina specifically exempts scholastic records from public records that must be produced under the Freedom of Information Act. Therefore, an individual's educational performance information, similar to an individual's medical information, is intended to be private and cannot be petitioned for disclosure under state law.

MUSC believes in the reliability and fairness of its Honor Code and Honor Council process. We apply the rules of this process equally to every student in every college and program. We also believe in the inherent value of FERPA as a necessary security measure to ensure students' rights as they matriculate through a system of higher education.

While MUSC respects the media's responsibility to ask questions, we must weigh that issue against our mandatory, legal obligation to adhere to state and federal rules that protect the privacy of every student's academic record. Abiding by the law and protecting our students will always supersede the media's putative right to access internal reports.

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