

FIPPA Training Guide for Administrative Assistants

Faculty of [Insert Faculty Name], University of Windsor

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1. Introduction: What is FIPPA?

The **Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA)** is provincial legislation that governs access to information and protection of personal privacy within Ontario's public institutions, including universities.

FIPPA provides: - The **right of access** to information held by institutions - Rules for the **collection, use, disclosure, and retention** of personal information

At the University of Windsor, all employees share a responsibility to comply with FIPPA. This guide is tailored for administrative assistants who are front-line communicators with students, families, faculty, and external organizations.

2. Why This Matters in a University Setting

In a post-secondary context, FIPPA applies to: - Student information (applications, grades, attendance, disciplinary records, etc.) - Employee records - Research data in certain cases - Institutional correspondence and administrative records

As the first point of contact for many inquiries, administrative staff must: - Know what can and cannot be disclosed - Understand when and how to escalate requests - Help maintain institutional compliance and protect student privacy

3. Key Definitions

Record: Any recorded information, regardless of format. Includes: - Emails, memos, meeting notes - Forms, reports, databases - Photos, audio recordings, texts

Personal Information: Any information about an identifiable individual, such as: - Name, student number, date of birth - Academic performance, disciplinary history - Contact information, health details

Disclosure: Releasing or making personal information available to someone other than the person the information is about.

4. Records Covered by FIPPA

The following are examples of records **subject to FIPPA**: - Academic files, class rosters - Email communications about students or staff - Zoom recordings with identifiable participants - Internal reports or correspondence

Records that are **not subject to access under FIPPA** include: - Teaching materials - Research data (in most cases)

5. Records Management & Retention

Retention rules are based on: - Type of record - Purpose - Legal obligations

General Guidelines: - Do **not** delete records unless you are certain they are eligible for destruction - Follow the **University of Windsor Records Retention Schedule** - Contact the **University Secretariat** for clarification or disposal approval

6. Access to Information: What to Do with Requests

If you receive a request for information (e.g., by phone, email, or in person):

DO: - Politely acknowledge the request - Explain that you are unable to release information without proper authorization - Refer them to the appropriate contact (e.g., Director of Legal Services)

DO NOT: - Confirm if someone is a student - Disclose any academic or personal information - Guess whether a disclosure is allowed

7. Handling Common Scenarios

Scenario	Can You Disclose?	What to Say
A parent calls asking if their child is enrolled	No	“Due to privacy legislation, I’m unable to confirm that.”
OPP calls asking about a student	No (unless formally requested)	“Please contact our FIPPA Coordinator through the University Secretariat.”
A spouse asks about attendance or grades	No	“We can only release that information with the student’s written consent.”

Scenario	Can You Disclose?	What to Say
An employer wants to verify a co-op student's performance	No	"That information is protected under FIPPA."
Someone asks about a graduate's degree	Maybe	"Let me confirm whether that's public. I'll get back to you."

8. Consent & Disclosure

To release student information, you must have: - A signed **Consent to Release Information** form from the student - Clearly specified permissions (what information, to whom, for how long)

Consent must be: - **Informed**: The individual understands what they are consenting to - **Voluntary**: Not coerced - **Documented**: Preferably in writing

9. What to Do When Asked for Records

If a staff member or the Secretariat requests records: - **Search carefully**: Use keywords, check folders, don't delete or alter content - **Include metadata**: Don't strip dates, sender info, or file history - **Keep the context**: Include entire conversation threads or background if relevant

10. When in Doubt, Escalate

For all privacy or records-related questions, contact:

Richard Taylor

Director of Legal Services

Assumption Hall Room 314

Telephone: 519-253-3000, Extension 4059

Email: Richard.Taylor@uwindsor.ca

You can also consult your supervisor or the Secretariat for complex situations.

11. Summary Checklist

- ☐ Never confirm a student's identity or enrollment without consent
- ☐ Do not release information to parents, spouses, police, or third parties
- ☐ Know what counts as a record and store/retain appropriately

- ☐ Refer all formal requests to the Secretariat
 - ☐ Ask when unsure — it's always better than risking a privacy breach
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End of Guide