

FERPA Compliance and Student Interaction in Merged Canvas Course Sections

Faculty may request to merge Canvas courses when they are teaching multiple sections of the same course in order to more efficiently share the same content across course sections, freeing up time for other instructional activity. This must be done prior to the start date of the course sections.

However, according to Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) regulations, **students cannot have access to student information (including the fact of their enrollment)** of students in course sections other than their own (with the exception noted below). Because of this requirement, students are not allowed to interact within a Canvas course with students from another course section.

Canvas limits the visibility of students from other sections in a merged Canvas course. However, this does not cover all Canvas tools, so if you request to merge Canvas courses, you'll need to take additional steps to protect your students' privacy, as outlined in this document.

NOTE: FERPA restrictions do not apply to a merged Canvas course if students physically meet in the same classroom at the same time (i.e. "true cross-listed courses"). Course sections that meet simultaneously typically are combined in Canvas by default, and this document is not relevant for those merged courses.

What Canvas Does for You

In Canvas courses merged upon faculty request, students are prevented from seeing students in sections other than their own in

- the full roster view of the **People** tool,
- and the **Inbox** (Conversations).

What You Must Do to Maintain FERPA Compliance

Click **Settings** in your course menu and:

- (1) Under the **Navigation** tab, be sure that the **Chat** and **Conferences** items are hidden from students. If they are active (appearing in the top grouping of navigation items), drag them to the lower grouping or click the gear icon at the right of each and click **Disable**. Be sure to scroll down and click **Save** at the bottom.
- (2) Under the **Course Details** tab, scroll down and click **more options**. Make sure that:
Let students create discussion topics is NOT checked
Let students organize their own groups is NOT checked
Disable comments on announcements IS checked

Click the **Update Course Details** button at bottom.

If/when you create Discussions

Ensure that each section has its own separate discussion:

- (1) For graded discussions, restrict each discussion to an individual section using the **Assign to** option. [See Canvas guide for details](#). See further details on section restriction under the What You May Do section below.
- (2) For ungraded discussions, use the **Post to** option (immediately below the discussion description) to select an individual section for the discussion.

- (3) Note – if you want each section to engage in discussions about the same topics, simply Duplicate the original discussion and modify it so it is available to a different section of students.

If/when you create **Groups**

Select the option to **Require group members to be in the same section** when creating a group set. [See Canvas guide for details.](#)

If/when you create **Collaborations**

Be sure to add students to Collaborations who are enrolled in the same course section. The Collaboration setup screen doesn't display section information for students, so you will need to refer to the People area.

If/when you send a Canvas **Inbox** message to students from multiple sections

Select the option to **Send an individual message to each recipient**. This will send a separate copy to each recipient and hide the names of the recipients in the message header. You may also compose messages addressed to all members of a specific course section.

If/when you offer synchronous (live) online sessions (e.g. use **Zoom**)

Hold separate synchronous meetings with each section. When you record a synchronous meeting, share the recording only with the section that participated in the meeting.

What You May Do: Setting Calendar Events and Assignment Due Dates by Section

Note: *This section is not required for FERPA compliance but may be helpful for managing a merged course if you would like to create differentiated events/activities for different sections.*

The following Canvas Guides will help you create Canvas activities/assignments specific to a particular section within a merged course:

- Assignments: [How do I create an Assignment for a specific section?](#)
- Calendar events: [How do I set a different Calendar event date for each section in my course?](#)
- Quizzes: [How do I create a Quiz for a specific section?](#)

(Discussions *must* be separated by section – see notes in the What You Must Do section above.)

Note that when creating events/activities that are differentiated by section, you will need to select the section name in the **Assign to** area, which displays only a few options and is not scrollable. If your desired section is not displayed as an option, you will need to type in the section name until it shows up as an option to select.

Section names can be seen if you click **Settings** in the Course Menu and then the **Sections** tab. You may also click **People** in the course menu to see which section each enrolled student is assigned to.

Sections with students have names ending in -SURF; to include your test student account in any differentiated activity in a merged course, you would also need to include one of the -OTHER sections available within the merged course.

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