# *The Ethical Professor*

## Posting Grades and Student Privacy

Now that classes are ending instructors may be thinking about posting grades for students. Both State (Family Education Rights and Privacy Act) and SMC (Board Policy 5251) policies require faculty to protect student information, including grades, ID numbers, phone numbers, and email addresses. With just an ID number and a birth-date unauthorized persons can gain access to the student's records or perhaps commit identity theft.

**How, then, is a professor to distribute grades to students?** A first step is to be aware - and make your students aware - that SMC provides an **on-line** portal for communication of this data. From the SMC web-site, the student clicks on *SMC On-line, Student Self-Service System*. After signing into the system using their ID and Password, the student clicks on *Student Records* followed by *Unofficial Transcripts*. The grades assigned on-line by the instructor will usually be in Student Records within 24 hours. (Of course, the ethical professor submits his grades in a timely fashion!)

**eCompanion** provides another safe way for students to get not just their final course grades, but all their scores throughout the term. Students may also get course grades **over the telephone**, at (310) 434-4333. One can also respond to emails from individual students (though one should take care to verify that the student is the sender).

Should you wish to **post your grades** elsewhere, such as outside your office door or in your classroom, there are methods which can be used without compromising private information. Assign the students random numbers or letter codes at the beginning of class, which can then be posted; or ask the students to make up their own code so that they can remember it (but watch for duplicates!).

While we are on the topic of privacy, note two related issues. First, care must be also be taken when returning any graded materials to students, some of whom may be especially sensitive to the judgment of others.  Second, when emailing students (with eCompanion or otherwise), use the "blind copy" button so that student email addresses are not publicized in the "To" list. Due diligence should always be taken to assure that private information is not revealed or left accessible to other persons.