



Policy SA015: Student Complaints

Recommended for Approval by:

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A. Intent

Policy #SA-015: Student Complaints should be utilized following exhaustion of all other processes. This includes contesting financial aid, release of housing, etc. Students submitting a complaint are required to include documentation of the attempted resolution including all outcome letters and appeal decisions.

In order to comply with federal laws and regulations and PASSHE BOG Procedure/Standard #2016-26, Pennsylvania Western University must have a process by which students may seek resolution to complaints regarding the university. To submit a formal complaint, a student must believe that he/she has been treated arbitrarily, unfairly or in ways which violate established university rules, policies, procedures, or consumer protection rights based on the legal precedents which impedes their ability to achieve fair use of their educational investments.

It is hoped that minor differences can be successfully resolved via an informal process without recourse to the process listed below. However, some situations require a formal student complaint process as described in this policy.

This policy is also designed to track, store, and periodically review complaint requests and resolutions to determine if "modifications and improvements to the institution" should occur "as a result of information obtained in the handling of student complaints."

A student who intends to file a formal complaint must follow the procedure in Section C.

B. Definition(s)

Advocate – An individual who may be present to support, but not speak for, a student throughout the student complaint process. The Advocate may be any person selected by the student. The Advocate may accompany the student they are supporting to any meeting they are attending. The student is responsible for coordinating and scheduling with their choice of Advocate.

Complaint Officer – The designated individuals who receive and coordinate distribution of student complaints. The Complaint Officers track and document resolutions of student complaints.

Informal Process – Many issues can be resolved through open and honest communication between the involved parties. Any student who experiences a problem should first try to resolve the issue informally with the individual(s) or office(s) most directly connected to the issue at hand.

Formal Complaint – If the problem is not resolved through an informal process, depending on the nature of the complaint, students should refer to the following to determine the appropriate steps for filing a formal complaint through existing policies.

First Level Officer – The individual with supervisory responsibility for the area named in the complaint (e.g., chairperson or director)

Second Level Officer – The individual who the First Level Officer reports to (e.g., College Dean or Assistant/Associate Vice President for non-academic area)

Third Level Officer – The individual who the Second Level Officer reports to (e.g., Provost or Vice President)

C. Procedure(s) for Formal Complaint(s)

Students may submit a formal complaint through the process provided below. Complaints submitted will be reviewed and categorized into three areas – Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and Other Administrative Units.

1. The complaint must be submitted through the [online form](#).
2. A student complaint officer will forward the complaint to the *first (lowest) potential level* of resolution (e.g., academic department chairperson or administrative service director), respond to the student with the name and contact information of the first level officer, and will file a copy of the complaint in a designated student complaint folder.
3. The *first level officer* (e.g., chairperson or director) will review the complaint and:
 - a. Consider relevant evidence, hold a conference with the student (and student advocate if requested) to discuss the complaint, and prepare a written record of the conference and resolution to be read and signed by the student. The first level officer keeps a copy and the student keeps a copy. The first level officer files a copy in a designated student complaint folder.
 - b. The First Level Officer will forward the resolution to the complaint to the Complaint Officer for documentation.

- c. If the appeal with the first level officer is unsatisfactory to the student, the student may appeal to the second level officer (e.g., college dean) in that division within ten (10) working days.
4. The second level officer will review the complaint and the first level officer's resolution, and:
 - a. Consider relevant evidence (including the conference record of the first level officer), meet with the student (and student advocate if requested) to discuss the complaint, and prepare a written record of the conference and resolution to be read and signed by the student and the second level officer. The student keeps a copy and the second-level officer keeps a copy. The second level officer files a copy in a designated student complaint folder.
 - b. The Second Level Officer will forward the resolution to the complaint to the Complaint Officer for documentation.
 - c. If the appeal to the second level officer is unsatisfactory to the student, the student may appeal to the third level officer in that division (e.g., provost, vice president) within ten (10) working days.
5. The third level officer will review the complaint and the first and second level officers' resolutions, and:
 - a. Consider relevant evidence (including the conference records of the first and second level officers), meet with the student (and student advocate if requested) to discuss the complaint, and prepare a written record of the conference and resolution to be read and signed by the student and the third level officer. The third level officer keeps a copy and the student keeps a copy. The third level officer (or designee) files a copy in a designated student complaint folder.
 - b. Third Level Officer will forward the resolution to the complaint to the Complaint Officer for documentation.
 - c. The third level officer (provost or other division vice president) is the final level of the appeal process.

D. Related Policies:

Academic Integrity: <https://files.pennwest.edu/policies/ac059-academic-integrity.pdf>

Anti-Hazing: <https://files.pennwest.edu/policies/sa002-anti-hazing.pdf>

Grade Appeal Policy: <https://files.pennwest.edu/policies/ac022-grade-appeal.pdf>

PASSHE Procedure/Standard Number 2016-26:

https://www.passhe.edu/bog/documents/policies/Policies_Procedures_Standards/Student%20Complaint%20Process%202016-26.pdf

Sexual Misconduct Policy: <https://files.pennwest.edu/policies/sexual-misconduct.pdf>

[Title IX Complaint Form](#)

Student Code of Conduct: <https://files.pennwest.edu/policies/sa003-student-conduct.pdf>

E. Contact Information

Dean of Students Office

F. Policy Review Schedule

Contact office responsible for dates.

All policies will be reviewed every two years or on an as needed basis if a change in BOG, PASSHE or Pennsylvania law would create the need for an immediate change.