

FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY 

# ACADEMIC AFFAIRS POLICY LETTER

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## Student Complaint Policy

March 25, 2011

Ferris State University is committed to assuring a supportive process that invites student feedback in a manner that promotes a positive learning environment. Students should follow established policies and procedures to resolve their complaints. College leaders are responsible for maintaining records of student complaints and providing an annual report to the Provost's Office (see section 5). If a complaint alleges discrimination or harassment, the student may follow other processes to have the situation resolved, including contacting Student Affairs or the Office of Equal Opportunity (see sections 1.2 through 1.4). This policy and the associated procedures apply to areas within Academic Affairs, including all of the Colleges, the Library, the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning, the Charter Schools Office, and the Center for International Education.

### Guide for Students to Resolve their Complaints Related to Academic Affairs

#### **1. Overview and Introduction**

This document outlines ways students may communicate complaints within the Division of Academic Affairs at Ferris State University.

##### **1.1 The Code of Student Community Standards**

This Code states that "each Ferris State University student has a right to initiate a complaint that may bring about an investigation and/or disciplinary action involving another member of the University academic community." This can be located at:

<http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/administration/StudentAffairs/Studenthandbook/>

##### **1.2 Documents and Policy**

If the student's complaint concerns another student or student services, such as transcripts, housing, or university recreation, the student should refer to the Student Affairs complaint policy and procedures here:

[http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/administration/StudentAffairs/judicial/OSC\\_student\\_complaint\\_policy.pdf](http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/administration/StudentAffairs/judicial/OSC_student_complaint_policy.pdf)

##### **1.3 Claims of Harassment or Discrimination**

If a student's complaint alleges discrimination or harassment, including sexual harassment, the student is encouraged to contact the Office of Student Conduct within Student Affairs, call (231) 591-3619, or email [theosc@ferris.edu](mailto:theosc@ferris.edu). If the complaint is about a student; or, if the concern relates to a Ferris employee or other campus visitor, the student should contact the Office of Equal Opportunity in McKessy House, the Office of the General Counsel of the University, on the Big Rapids Campus, telephone (231) 591-2152, or email [EqualOpportunity@ferris.edu](mailto:EqualOpportunity@ferris.edu).

##### **1.4 Grade Appeals**

Separate policies exist for appealing a grade. You will find the grade appeal process here:

<http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/administration/academicaffairs/policyLetters.html>

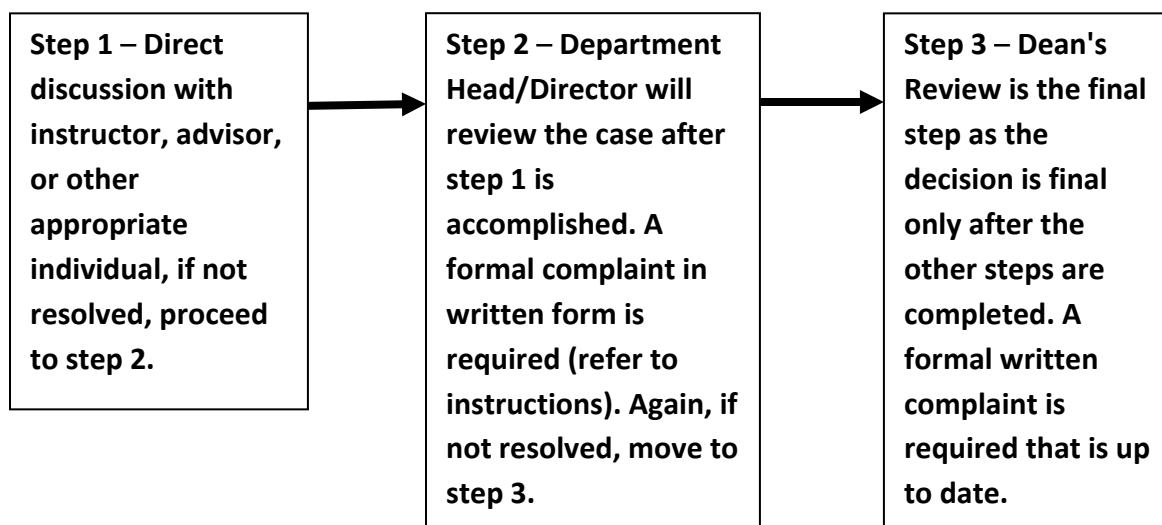
##### **1.5 General Procedure in Expressing Student Concerns**

Students should first express a concern to the individual closest to the problem who has the ability to remedy the situation. For example, if the concern relates to a course, the instructor is the appropriate first step. If the concern relates to advising, then the advisor should be contacted. If the student does not know who to contact, s/he may contact the Dean's office of the college to get guidance on where to express the concern. Contact information for each college will be found here: <http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/colleges/>. Each college will provide a "contact" link to the Dean's Office on their College's home page.

Suggestions that may help students approach faculty or advisors constructively are provided at the end of this document (see section 7).

Some colleges have additional information on their websites concerning the complaint process, so students are encouraged to look for this additional guidance. In addition, although ten (10) business days is allowed for action at each step in the process, all are encouraged to address student complaints as quickly as is feasible. Each academic college follows the following procedures:

## 2. Complaints Against Faculty or Advisors



**Note: Refer to the appropriate sections for the timelines.**

### 2.1 Step 1 – Direct discussion with instructor, advisor, or other appropriate individual

The first step is for the student to discuss the concern/complaint directly with the individual who is closest to the issue or with whom the student has a concern. Students are encouraged to talk with this person as early as possible. The complaint does not need to be in writing at this stage of the process. Many situations can be satisfactorily addressed, or misunderstandings clarified, at this level. When this occurs, no further action is required. The student is advised to record the date when s/he approached the individual with whom there is a concern to resolve the problem, as this information will be required at later stages of the process.

### 2.2 Step 2 – Department Head/Director Review

This step must involve the first level of administration above the individual against whom the complaint is filed, hereinafter referred to as the Department Representative. In the event that a concern/complaint cannot be adequately addressed through direct discussion at step 1, the student may take another step by

contacting the department head or director of the program area. At this step, the student must submit a written statement to the Department Representative. Whenever the complaint is received, the Department Representative is expected to assure that the student has made an effort to resolve the problem with the individual with whom s/he has a concern.

In cases where there is not a department head, or director, the complaint should be directed to an assistant or associate dean, or other designated individual. Students enrolled through other locations (not in Big Rapids) should express their complaints through the colleges where their major is located or the college or area where the concern exists.

**Student's Written Statement** The written statement should identify the student; instructor, advisor, or other party(ies) to the complaint; course (as appropriate); a factual description of the problem; and any other relevant information, such as past efforts to address the problem. Typically, the student will also meet with the department representative after the recipient of the complaint has had an opportunity to review the written statement. The written statement may be provided in electronic form, such as e-mail or fax. The student is encouraged to submit a written complaint as close to the time of the concern as possible. All complaints must be received within one calendar year.

The department representative will ask the individual against whom the complaint has been filed to review the written statement of complaint and to file a written response. The individual against whom the complaint has been filed will have ten (10) business days to respond. If the Department Representative does not receive a response from the individual within the 10-day time allotted, s/he should proceed to take appropriate action. The department representative may also meet with any involved individuals to discuss the situation and to review any relevant materials.

Following the department representative's review, s/he is authorized to undertake whatever action and/or discussion may be called for within the limitations of relevant University, College, and/or Program policies and procedures. That action may involve denying the complaint, working out a solution, referring the matter to another office, or some other appropriate action. The Department Representative should complete action within ten (10) business days of receiving the response from the individual against whom the complaint was filed.

If the department representative concludes that the student has engaged in dishonesty or other violation of Ferris's code of student responsibilities, the department representative may initiate action with student judicial services.

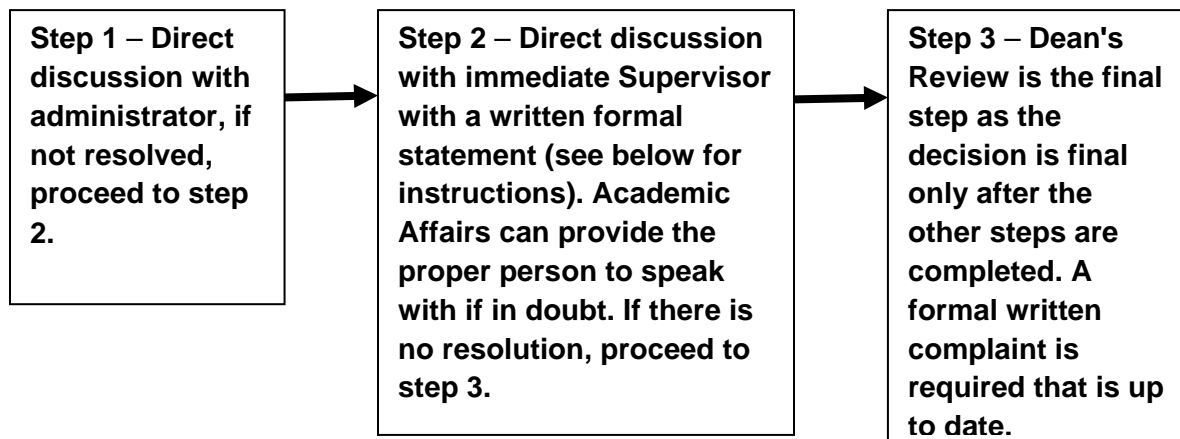
The department representative is not authorized to change the student's grade.

### **2.3 Step 3 – Dean's Review**

In the event that the student or the individual against whom the complaint was filed is dissatisfied with the resolution at the department representative's level, s/he may appeal that decision to the Dean's office of the College. A student wishing to pursue this level of appeal should submit a written statement to the dean or his/her designate. The dean should assure that the student's complaint has been through earlier steps in the process before taking any action, and records the dates when these steps were taken. The dean (or designee) will review the complaint and the record of review at the department level and will adjudicate the case. The Dean or his/her designate should complete any action within ten (10) business days. **The dean's decision is final and is not subject to further appeal.**

Any complaints that reach the dean's office are subject to the annual official student complaint reporting required of Academic Affairs units (see section 5). Thus, the annual report to the Provost's Office should include any written complaints that reached the Dean's Office for resolution or action.

### 3. Complaints Against Administrators (such as department heads, directors, etc.)



**Note: Refer to the appropriate sections for the timelines.**

#### 3.1 Step 1 – Direct discussion with administrator

The first step is for the student to discuss the concern/complaint directly with the individual who is closest to the issue or with whom the student has a concern. Students are encouraged to talk with this person as early as possible. The complaint does not need to be in writing at this stage of the process. Many situations can be satisfactorily addressed, or misunderstandings clarified, at this level. When this occurs, no further action is required. The student is advised to record the date when s/he approached the individual with whom there is a concern to resolve the problem, as this information will be required at later stages of the process.

#### 3.2 Step 2 – Supervisor Review

In the event that a concern/complaint cannot be adequately addressed through direct discussion at step 1, the student may take the next step by contacting the individual's immediate supervisor. The Dean's Office or the Office of Academic Affairs will be able to provide the name and contact information for this person if the complainant does not know who this individual is. (For example, typically a department head is supervised by a dean.) At this step, the student must submit a written statement to the Supervisor.

Students enrolled through other locations (not in Big Rapids) should express their complaints through the colleges where their major is located or the college or area where the concern exists.

**Student's Written Statement** The written statement should identify the student; administrator, or other party(ies) to the complaint; a factual description of the problem; and any other relevant information such as past efforts to address the problem. The written statement may be provided in electronic form, such as e-mail or fax. The student is encouraged to submit a written complaint as close to the time of the concern as possible. All complaints must be received within one calendar year.

The Supervisor will ask the individual against whom the complaint has been filed to review the written statement of complaint and to file a written response. The individual against whom the complaint has been filed will have ten (10) business days to respond. If the Supervisor does not receive a response from the individual within the 10-day time allotted, s/he should proceed to take appropriate action. The

Supervisor may also meet with any involved individuals to discuss the situation and to review any relevant materials.

Following the Supervisor's review, the Supervisor is authorized to undertake whatever action and/or discussion may be called for within the limitations of relevant University, College, and/or Program policies and procedures. That action may involve denying the complaint, working out a solution, referring the matter to another office, or some other appropriate action. The Supervisor should complete action within ten (10) business days of receiving the response from the individual against whom the complaint was filed.

If the supervisor determines that the student has engaged in dishonesty or other violation of Ferris's code of student responsibilities, the supervisor may initiate action with student judicial services.

### **3.3 Step 3 – Dean's Review**

In the event that the student or the individual against whom the complaint was filed is dissatisfied with the resolution at the supervisor level, s/he may appeal that decision to the Dean's office of the College. The Dean is responsible for assuring that earlier steps have been followed and records the dates when these steps were taken. A student wishing to pursue this level of appeal should submit a written statement to the dean or his/her designee. The dean (or designee) will review the complaint and the record of review at the department level and will adjudicate the case. The Dean or his/her designate should complete any action within ten (10) business days. **The dean's decision is final and is not subject to further appeal.**

Any complaints that reach the dean's office are subject to the annual official student complaint reporting required of Academic Affairs units (see section 5). Thus, the annual report to the Provost's Office should include any written complaints that reached the Dean's Office for resolution or action.

## **4. Complaints Against Deans**

If the student's complaint concerns the dean, the complainant is advised to initiate his concern orally with the Dean to seek a remedy to the concern. The student is advised to record the date when s/he approached the Dean to resolve the problem.

If the student is not satisfied with the Dean's decision on a matter that concerns the dean, the student is authorized to provide a written statement of the complaint to the Provost or his/her designee. Details of the situation and the efforts to remedy the problem must be included in the written statement. The provost's office will make its recommendations within ten (10) business days. **The decision of the Provost's Office is final and is not subject to further appeal.**

## **5. Reporting Guidelines for Colleges**

Annually, every academic college and unit (such as the International Center or FLITE) is required to submit a summary report to the Provost's Office regarding the types and number of complaints received during the academic year. These reports will be due June 30 each year and include a summary of the actions taken to resolve the complaints and to avoid similar ones in the future. Included in the summary should be the nature of the complaint, the date that each step of the process was completed, and the information about how the complaint was resolved. A template is provided on the Academic Affairs shared drive for this purpose. In addition, each College is required to maintain its student complaint log electronically for a minimum of 5 years so that the University may refer to these archived documents if necessary. Only complaints that reach the dean's level need to be included in the annual report.

## **6. Communications/Policy Information Sharing**

Each year the Provost's Office is encouraged to review the Student Complaint Procedures with the Deans' Council and the Academic Leadership Council, to assure that all current representatives in those groups are aware of this policy.

## **7. Advice on Approaching Others with Your Complaint**

Expressing a concern is never easy, but it is important both in the academic environment and in other settings. Problems are always best remedied directly with the person with whom you have the concern. You will benefit from developing your skills in the area. In the work context, your colleagues will appreciate knowing that you address your concerns directly with them rather than with their supervisors.

When you approach another, explain how the problem is affecting you and avoid accusing others. For example, you might say that "I felt diminished when you pointed out in class in front of my peers that my homework had been done wrong" or "Requiring me to work with a team that is not near has made it difficult for me to complete the required assignments." Avoid using "you" in sentences like: "You diminished me in front of my peers," or "You were unfair to assign me to a team that was not nearby." Instead, frame your complaint from the view of how it is impacting you . . . how it is impairing your ability to complete your assignments, how it made you feel, or other personalized approaches. In addition, be prepared to ask for the "remedy" that you desire. In the examples provided here, you may simply ask: "I would appreciate it if you would not point me out in class for things I have done wrong, as I am trying to do my best;" or "I was embarrassed that you pointed out my weaknesses in front of my colleagues." Or, "Would you allow me to work on this assignment independently, because it is not possible for me to coordinate a meeting schedule with these students?"

It is often also desirable to ask for the "remedy" you desire. For example, you may ask that the instructor review his assessment of your homework assignment; or give you another opportunity to correct the assignment, if you did not understand the requirements; etc.