

VIRGINIA STATE UNIVERSITY PROCEDURE FOR STUDENT COMPLAINTS

Student Complaint Policy Purpose: Virginia State University is committed to excellence in all its programs. Virginia State University exists for students and their learning. Consistent with its mission, Virginia State University welcomes opinions and feedback about our policies, programs, and services in order to make changes that contribute to success, development, and goal attainment. The University is accountable to its students, its other constituents, and its institutional accrediting body to provide a mechanism to ensure that students have access to appropriate procedures for registering complaints.

Procedure for Student Complaints: Virginia State University designates the Academic Center for Excellence as responsible for receiving, investigating and potentially resolving student complaints. When related to academic grade disputes, academic integrity issues, non-academic misconduct, financial need, disability, affirmative action, or sexual violence, harassment and discrimination, complaints will be referred to the appropriate University office(s) per Virginia State University policies and procedures. No retaliation of any kind shall be taken against a student who articulates a complaint.

Scope: This procedure applies to all University students regardless of school, or college, status, classification, type, or location.

Definitions:

- **Student:** An individual student, a group of students, or student governments.
- **Complaint:** A claim by a student alleging improper, unfair or arbitrary treatment. A complaint may address issues of institutional or program quality such as Virginia State University's compliance with the standards of the SACSCOC or other pertinent accrediting bodies.

Concerns or complaints about academic procedures or personnel must be filed with the appropriate unit. The academic units are as follows: College of Agriculture, College of Business, College of Education, College of Engineering and Technology, College of Health and Natural Sciences, Concerns or complaints about non-academic procedures or personnel must be filed with the appropriate unit: Administration, Athletics, Academic Center for Excellence, Disability Accommodations, Enrollment Management (Admissions & Financial Aid), Facilities Management, Finance, Information Technology, Libraries, Campus Ministries, Registrar, Residence Life, Student Activities, Student Health, Counseling Services, Student Activities, University Dining, University Relations, Military & Veterans Affairs, Other (Please specify the unit/department's name and initiate the complaint with the appropriate leader.) If it is unclear as to where to direct a concern or complaint, please contact the Academic Center for Excellence.

Exclusions to this procedure include complaints regarding academic grade disputes, academic integrity, non-academic misconduct, disability, affirmative action, sexual violence, harassment and discrimination. Such exclusions have specific policies and procedures that can be accessed in the following.

- **Academic grade disputes or academic integrity charges/appeals:** are processed by the respective academic unit's policies and procedures. Complaints about academic procedures or personnel must be filed with the appropriate college. Each academic unit's website (College of Agriculture, College of Business, College of Education, College of Engineering and Technology, College of Health and Natural Sciences) provides guidance for such complaints.

- Harassment, Discrimination and Grievances: In accord with its history, mission and credo, Virginia State University believes that each individual should be treated with respect and dignity and that any form of harassment and/or discrimination is a violation of human dignity. The University condemns harassment and discrimination and maintains a “zero-tolerance” for harassment and/or discrimination. Students, faculty, and staff have the right to work and learn free of harassment and discrimination. The University will take all reasonable efforts to prevent and promptly correct instances of harassment or discrimination. Additionally, students, faculty and staff have the right to a structured process for resolving problems, complaints or grievances relating to the execution of institutional policies. For more information please see the Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Misconduct, and Retaliation Policy at <http://www.vsu.edu/files/docs/policies/1000/prohibition%20of%20workplace%20harassment%20policy.pdf>

Procedures: Resolution of formal student complaints, other than the above referenced exclusions shall follow the process set forth below. The Academic Center for Excellence, located on the 2nd Floor of Johnston Memorial Library, serves as the coordinating unit for this function. Commencing in Spring 2018, semi-annually (March 1 and September 1), each senior vice president analyzes student complaints for each functional area and considers methods to address matters especially those presenting as a trend. Annually, the University analyzes all student complaints in conjunction with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness to inform our continuous improvement efforts. The first annual report will be due on June 30, 2019. The procedure for student complaints is circulated to VSU faculty, staff and students via email each semester.

Student Complaint Exists

Stage 1: Informal Resolution

Many complaints can be resolved through an informal process which includes:

- Begin by discussing the matter with the staff, faculty, or department personnel in which the issue originated.
- If the issue is not resolved, the next contact will be the supervisor, department chair, or associate/assistant dean to investigate the issue and allegations.
- If you do not know where to begin, begin by talking with the individual and his/her supervisor if necessary.

Basic steps in the informal process to begin an informal resolution:

The Academic Center for Excellence located on the 2nd Floor of Johnston Memorial Library will help you identify the appropriate office or individual. A student with a complaint that a policy or procedure has been incorrectly or unfairly applied, or a complaint against a person’s behavior, has recourse through this process. In most cases, complaints can be resolved informally.

Stage 2: Formal Complaint

If unresolved after following the appropriate informal complaint procedures, the student may choose to have the complaint "officially documented." The student completes the Trojan Care Form located at: <http://www.vsu.edu/ace>

The complaint must contain the following information:

- Complainant's name, V number, mailing address, email address and telephone number.
- A detailed description of the specific actions that constituted the complaint and the names and titles of those presumed to be responsible or at fault. It is necessary to demonstrate that one has already attempted to resolve the concern through the informal procedures.
- The date(s) of the alleged improper activities or the condition developed.
- A list of witnesses, if any, including their contact information and the facts known by each.
- Documentation that supports the complaint.
- Dated complaint form. Typically all communications between the Complainant and the Office of the Vice President for Student Success and Engagement will be directed to the student's official Virginia State University e-mail account.



Stage 3: Formal Complaint

Resolution Process Upon Submission:

The Academic Center for Excellence will investigate the complaint. Complaints may be referred to the appropriate college/division for investigation and proposed resolution. Where a complaint is referred to a college/division, the Office of the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs retains the right to approve any proposed resolution. The administrator will acknowledge receipt of the complaint to the complainant within 7 working days. Normally, complaints will be investigated and resolved within 30 working days. The Office of the Academic Center for Excellence will advise the complainant if that timeline will not be met. Once resolved, the student may appeal the resolution to the Vice President for Student Success and Engagement.



Stage 4: Appeal

Appeals to the Vice President for Student Success and Engagement must be received within 5 working days following communication to the Complainant of the resolution. The Vice President for Student Success and Engagement may request additional information from the complainant and any involved college/school/division. The Vice President for Student Success and Engagement will issue a written determination of the appeal which shall be provided to the complainant and the affected college/school/division or other individual. The Vice President for Student Success and Engagement's determination shall be final.

Resolution Options Outside of the University:

The University encourages any member of the University community who feels he or she has been subjected to harassment or discrimination to use the complaint procedure outlined in the Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Misconduct, and Retaliation Policy.

Additionally, an individual has the right to file a complaint with outside enforcement agencies.

Filing a Complaint with an Outside Agency

An individual also has the right to file a complaint with outside enforcement agencies including the United States Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), or state or local law enforcement or prosecution authorities.

Students located in Virginia may file a complaint with the State Council of Higher Education of Virginia (SCHEV) which are outlined in our Student Handbook. In the event a student located in any other state wishes to file a complaint with their state agency a listing of all state boards can be found by clicking on the link below that outlines complaint processes by state.

[Listing of State Agencies and Boards for Filing Complaints](#)

For additional information on resolution options outside of the University an individual may contact the Counseling Center. Additionally, individuals may file a civil law suit against the offending party.

Administration & Interpretation: Tracking of student complaints will be used to generate an annual report from the Academic Center for Excellence. The report will identify any areas of quality improvement and make appropriate recommendations to improve the overall student experience. Such improvement efforts and outcomes will be monitored and documented.

Amendments or Termination of Procedure: The University reserves the right to modify, amend or terminate this procedure at any time.

*Adapted from Creighton University

Last Revised Date: 1/30/18