

Policy and Procedure for Handling Student Complaints Concerning Faculty

Policy:

It is the policy of St. Cloud State University to address student complaints fairly and expeditiously. These complaints often are based upon misunderstanding between students and faculty. Thus, whenever possible, it is best to resolve them informally. It is important that anyone involved in a student complaint understands that this procedure is neither a judicial nor a disciplinary process.

Complaints concerning the assignment of grades are to be addressed using the university procedure for grade appeals. Complaints involving allegations of racial or sexual harassment or discrimination in violation of law or regulations of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) board should be brought to the attention of Nancy Jessee, Lead Investigator for Discrimination Complaints in AS 208. **Complaints about other university staff should be brought to the attention of the supervisor of that staff member.** All other complaints involving faculty are to be addressed as follows:

Procedure:

A complaint must be initiated during the semester or summer term when the concern arises or within two weeks of the first day of instruction of the next regular semester, regardless of the student's enrollment status. Time may be extended only by mutual agreement.

Step 1. Consultation with the faculty member.

When students have a concern, they are responsible for arranging a meeting with the faculty member to discuss it. Students should explain the nature of the concern. The faculty member may elect to respond at the meeting or at a later time, but within 10 duty days.

If a meeting cannot be arranged or if the faculty member's response is either not satisfactory to the student(s) or is not made within the required time, the student(s) may elect to proceed to Step 2.

Step 2. Mediation within the department.

If the matter is not resolved at Step 1, student(s) may request informal mediation assistance within the department by filing a complaint form ([download the student complaint form in PDF format](#) or obtain one from the Office of Academic Affairs, Deans' offices or departmental offices). The department will notify the faculty member through the department chair or another faculty member designated by the department that the complaint has moved to Step 2. If the student agrees, a copy of the complaint form will be given to the faculty member. Otherwise, the department chair or designated faculty member will summarize for the faculty member the general nature of the complaint prior to any mediation. This is neither a hearing nor a process within which a judgment as to error or wrongdoing is made. Its purpose is to utilize one or more third parties to reach understanding. The department may designate a mediator to handle all such complaints, or it may identify several mediators from which one or more individual(s) is(are) selected for a particular complaint. The department procedure must be in writing, simple and timely. A copy will be placed on file in the office of the Dean of the College.

If the department determines that this step is not appropriate in a particular case, it may refer the complaint to Step 3.

If an effort to mediate the complaint has not occurred within three weeks after receipt of the student complaint form by the department (exclusive of holidays, examination periods and time between semesters), the college dean must be notified and an explanation provided by the faculty member designated as responsible by the department. The dean will then determine whether the matter should continue at Step 2 or be taken to Step 3.

When student(s) or faculty members meet with department mediators, any individual of their choosing may accompany them. The participation of such persons shall be consistent with the process of informal mediation.

There will be no written or electronic record of the mediation effort except the student complaint form which is to be completed by the student(s) at the initiation of this step. Faculty who serve as mediators will not be called upon in any subsequent steps of this process or in related actions, except as agreed to by the parties and the faculty mediator.

If resolution is reached, a notation to that effect is made on the form and it is returned to the student. If mediation occurs but the matter is not resolved, the complaint form is to be returned to the student with a notation that mediation was not successful.

(NOTE: Departments will maintain a record of the number of complaints (without names of either party) received at Step 2, and whether complaints are resolved at that step. This information is solely to facilitate evaluation of the process.)

Step 3. Review by dean or designee

Students not satisfied with the outcome of Step 2 may request further review by delivering the student complaint form to the dean of the appropriate college within five working days of return of the form. Upon receiving the form, the dean (designee) will arrange to meet separately with the student(s) and the faculty member. Each may be accompanied by a person of her/his choosing. During these meetings, the dean will describe how the matter is to be reviewed and ask questions. The dean then may gather additional information, conduct other interviews, and may arrange for a joint meeting with the student(s) and the faculty member. Following this fact-finding process the dean will issue a written report. Both student(s) and the faculty member will be provided with a copy. The dean will complete this process within 30 days or will notify the parties as to the need for additional time.

If the dean determines that the complaint is without merit, the only record will be a copy of the student complaint form upon which such a notation has been made. The form will be placed on file with the student's permanent record for as long as may be necessary to permit response to potential legal actions. If the dean determines that the complaint is justified, an oral reprimand and/or other appropriate disciplinary action will be initiated, and the report will be placed in the official personnel file. The report will not by itself constitute discipline. Any disciplinary action arising out of a student complaint will be addressed in accordance with Article 24 of the agreement between the Inter-Faculty Organization (IFO) and the MnSCU board (or successor provisions regarding discipline).

Questions regarding this policy and related procedures should be directed to the Office of Academic Affairs. It is the intent of university administration that this policy and procedure be reviewed approximately every two years. Notwithstanding this intention, consideration will be given to suggestions for modification at any time.