

ADMINISTRATIVE GUIDELINE TYPE: Student Functions

ADMINISTRATIVE GUIDELINE TITLE: Student Complaint Policy

DEPARTMENT RESPONSIBLE: Student Affairs

I. Statement of Purpose

Southeastern Community College (SCC) is committed to treating students fairly and respectfully. Students have the right to pursue resolution to the problems they encounter in their interactions with the College or College employees, and/or during their education. SCC strives to assist students in the resolution of their problems with the College and will not tolerate any form of retaliation against students who file grievances. This policy complies with the standards for receiving and responding to complaints and grievances in a timely manner, record keeping, review, and analysis of complaints and grievances at regular intervals as required by the Higher Learning Commission and Iowa Department of Education.

II. Users Governed

This guideline applies to all prospective, current, and former students.

III. Contents

SECTION A – Types of Student Complaints or Grievances

Generally speaking, student complaints against the College, College employees, or third parties will fall into one of the categories listed below:

1. Unsatisfactory performance of a contractual obligation or a job responsibility (for example: failure to teach the class for which the student is registered).
2. Violations of College Board of Trustees policies.
3. Violations of College Administrative Guidelines.
4. Any other alleged violation or misconduct, which is not otherwise covered under a specific College policy or procedure. For example, student complaints of discrimination and harassment will be handled under the College's Equal Opportunity, Harassment, and Nondiscrimination Policy; student complaints regarding final course grades will be handled under the Grade Appeal policy, Section XI of the Judicial Code of Conduct & Student Rights; and allegations of student misconduct in alleged violation of the Judicial Code of Conduct & Student Rights are addressed through Sections I through VIII of the Judicial Code of Conduct & Student Rights. **For questions regarding the applicability of a policy or process, please contact the Vice President for Student Affairs.**

SECTION B – General Principles

These general principles apply in presenting, reviewing, and addressing student complaints under this policy:

1. **RESOLUTION AT THE LOWEST LEVEL**
Whenever feasible, the College seeks to resolve student complaints at the lowest administrative level and encourages participants to embrace this approach accordingly. Before filing a complaint, the student should first try to resolve the issue with the College employee, department, or individual involved. Many issues can be resolved if a student makes an appointment with the involved employee and communicates their concerns, as such informal resolution can be an effective means for prompt and effective resolution.

2. NONRETALIATION

Retaliation is defined as an activity that may dissuade a student from exercising their right to pursue resolution or file a complaint under this policy, and is prohibited. Individuals determined to have engaged in retaliation in violation of this policy may face disciplinary action by the College, up to and including termination.

3. DISCRETION

Discretion is important to candid discussion and effective resolution of complaints. The College will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that information is only disclosed to parties as necessary to resolve the complaint, and as required by College policies or State or Federal law.

4. TIMELINESS OF REPORTING

Timely and comprehensive reporting of the complaint generally results in more effective resolution. Students are encouraged to begin the procedure for filing a complaint (Section C) as soon as possible.

SECTION C – Procedure for Filing a Complaint

In most instances, the student can resolve their complaint or grievance informally. To resolve a complaint or grievance under this policy, the student should follow the following steps:

1. INITIAL MEETING (INFORMAL RESOLUTION)

The student should request to meet with the College employee, department, or individual involved and share their concerns. The involved parties are encouraged to engage in open, direct, and respectful communication. Such an informal meeting may result in:

- a. a mutually acceptable resolution of the issue with the student;
- b. a request for the assistance of other College resources to achieve an appropriate resolution;
- c. a referral of the student to another department; and/or
- d. a determination that the complaint is unfounded.

If possible and appropriate based on the circumstances, the outcome may be documented by an involved College employee in an email to the student and/or the employee's next level supervisor, and it should inform the student of the next step in the complaint process, if necessary.

2. UNRESOLVED ISSUE OR UNSATISFACTORY OUTCOME OF INITIAL MEETING/INFORMAL RESOLUTION

If the complaint is not resolved, if the student is not satisfied with the outcome, or if the student has concerns about meeting with an involved College employee or individual, the student may meet with the employee's next level supervisor. To initiate this step of the process, the student must complete an [online report](#) via the Maxient system. A student who believes they have reason to pursue a complaint should complete this report within **fifteen (15) calendar days** after notification of the outcome from step one, above as soon as reasonably possible from the unsatisfactory informal resolution or alleged basis for the complaint. When completing this report, the student should detail the previous steps they have taken to try to resolve their concern and the outcome of those efforts.

SECTION D – Investigation of Complaint and Determination

After a student complaint has been filed via the online report, it will be routed to the appropriate supervisor for review.

1. The contacted supervisor shall review the complaint and, if necessary, contact the student for additional information within five (5) working days. This may include:
 - a. Meeting with the student to hear their concerns and entering appropriate notations in the complaint file. Details such as date and time, location, specific quotes if remembered, and the names of any people who might have observed the incident may be important. The student should share any materials relevant to the situation.
 - b. Referring the student to speak with a College employee or individual with whom they have the concern, if the student has not already done so.
 - i. If the student expresses concern about meeting with the employee, the supervisor will attempt to mediate a discussion between the student and the employee to clarify the matter and suggest alternatives, if needed.
 - ii. If the student continues to express reluctance/resistance to meeting with the employee in question, the supervisor should try to respectfully ascertain the reason. In a situation of this nature, the supervisor may consult with Human Resources to determine the most appropriate course of action.
2. If unable to resolve the complaint to the mutual satisfaction of those involved, the supervisor will review the situation and reach a decision regarding the matter, including by engaging in the following steps as appropriate:
 - a. The supervisor can speak with the involved College employee(s). If discipline may be warranted for a College employee, that College employee is entitled to request representation during this interview. The supervisor will ask the same types of detail-focused questions as those which guided the interview with the student. It is important for the supervisor to remind the employee, while they might feel hurt or offended by the grievance, a power differential exists – whether real or perceived – which can lead the student to feel at a disadvantage in their professional relationship.
 - b. The supervisor can visit with any other individuals with direct knowledge of the situation who might be able to help the supervisor gain a more complete understanding of the situation. As was the case with the student and employee, the supervisor will ask questions designed to obtain the details necessary to make informed decisions.
 - c. The supervisor can request and review any materials from involved parties that may help clarify the situation.
 - d. The supervisor should carefully review and consider the information obtained from all involved sources in order to reach a fair and informed decision. The supervisor is not an advocate for either party in the situation.
3. The supervisor will then decide if the complaint is founded, unfounded, or undetermined. Based on that decision, the following actions may be taken:
 - a. dismiss the complaint if unfounded.
 - b. provide additional training as appropriate.

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- c. take additional non-disciplinary action to resolve the complaint.
 - d. take appropriate disciplinary action if warranted and confer with the Director of Human Resources and/or Vice President of Student Affairs, as may be necessary or required.
4. The supervisor shall notify the student and College employee(s) of their decision in writing, as applicable. Decision letters sent to students should always inform the student of their right to appeal, and how to access the appeal process. In the event they have determined employee disciplinary action is necessary, the supervisor will only tell the student the complaint was founded and that appropriate actions will be taken, explaining that personnel actions are confidential.
 5. Within **ten (10) working days** of resolving the formal written complaint, or as reasonably promptly thereafter, an update will be completed in the online system for the Vice President of Student Affairs and the appropriate senior administrator(s). The update will include the following information:
 - a. Date complaint was received;
 - b. Nature of the complaint;
 - c. Office receiving the complaint;
 - d. Person responding;
 - e. Disposition (completion date OR if incomplete at time of reporting, expected date of completion);
 - f. Name of student making complaint; and
 - g. A copy of the written complaint and any other written correspondence with the complaint.

SECTION E – Appeal of the Complaint Resolution

If the student does not agree with the final resolution to the complaint, and wishes to appeal the decision, a formal appeal must be submitted within **five (5) working days** of the resolution.

1. To submit an appeal, the student must provide a written request including their name, the date, the date of the original decision involving their complaint or grievance, and the reason they believe the decision should be changed or modified.
2. The next-level supervisor will make a determination on the appeal. They can make a decision from reviewing the Maxient notes. The next-level supervisor or designee shall respond within **ten (10) working days** of receipt of an appeal or longer as reasonably necessary; this decision is final and binding.

SECTION F – Time Limit Extensions

The appropriate Vice President (i.e. reporting line where complaint or grievance is being reviewed), Director of Human Resources, or designee may extend any of the time limits described in the above grievance procedures in the interest of fairness and for good cause. Reasonable efforts should be taken to inform the parties involved of extensions of time granted.

SECTION G – Complaint Reporting

The College will track each student complaint and will maintain a record that includes, at a minimum, the following information:

1. the date that the student complaint was received;
2. the student(s) identified with the complaint;

3. the nature of the student complaint, with a copy attached, to be retained for not less than two (2) years after its final disposition;
4. the College officials who were asked to address the complaint and the steps taken to resolve it;
5. the final resolution or disposition of the complaint;
6. any external actions taken by the student of which the College becomes aware.

The information tracked will be made available to regulatory agencies and accrediting bodies, including the Higher Learning Commission and the Iowa Department of Higher Education, as required in accordance with applicable laws, regulations and policies.