

10. Student Complaints

Student Complaints Standard 1: The program or institution makes available to students in writing procedures by which they may lodge formal complaints.

Section A Description of current operations to show how the standard is met.

The Student Handbook provides information regarding procedures, rights, and responsibilities by which students can lodge a complaint. It includes information on both formal and informal complaints. Student complaints are handled according to the nature of the complaint, such as:

1. Academic honesty and integrity: follow the policy and procedure outlines in the *Academic Honesty and Integrity* (SC-1-1) normally handled by the Director of IEP.
2. Code of Conduct: follow guidelines of *Student Code of Conduct* (SC-1-2) outlined in the Student Handbook, and normally handled by the Director of Student Life but can be handled by the Director of IEP.
3. Student complaints concerning faculty: follow the guidelines in the *Student Complaints Concerning Faculty* (SC-1-3), and are normally handled by the Director of IEP.
4. Grade Appeals: follow the guidelines of the *Grade Appeal* (SC-1-4) policy and procedure, and are normally handled by the Director of IEP.

All student complaints both formal and informal are taken sincerely and the IEP follows the procedures laid out in the Student Handbook by which students can lodge or appeal a complaint. The student is made aware that this procedure is neither a judicial nor a disciplinary process.

Student complaints about faculty are often based upon misunderstanding. Thus, whenever possible, the Director addresses and resolves the complaints informally. If the complaint involves allegations of misconduct by a faculty member-to-a student, student-to-student, and/or staff-to-student, a formal complaint may be filed by the student using a student complaint form (SC-1-5), an incident form (must include the complainant's name, the nature of the complaint, and resolution desired (SC-1-6)) or student complaint counseling form (completed by the director in an interview with the student (SC-1-7)). A determination is made as to the validity of the complaint through investigations and/or interviews with all participants. The complaint is either dismissed, or action is taken on behalf of the student. The resolution is documented and filed in the Student Complaint binder in the Director's office.

All serious behavioral violations of the student Code of Conduct are handled by Student Life and documentation of the incident is maintained by Student Life and the respective program, i.e. College of Arts and Sciences and the IEP.

Most academic integrity and honesty concerns filed by faculty alleging a student has cheated and/or plagiarized (SC-1-8) are handled by the Director of IEP.

Complaints involving allegations of racial or sexual harassment, discrimination, grades (SC-1-9), and faculty are addressed using the respective University policies and procedure and guidelines in the student handbook.

Students unwilling to work within the IEP are availed other resources by which they can address their issues. Informal complaints of students may be heard by the University Ombudsman (Director of Student Success). The role of the Ombudsman is to serve as an advocate for students' general issues and concerns. The Ombudsman guides students to

appropriate personnel and assist students with interpreting University Policies and Procedures. The Ombudsman informally advises the student of their options and works with appropriate parties in an effort to find a resolution. The Ombudsman works with the Director of the IEP as required. Students have the option of filing a formal complaint if they are not satisfied with the informal resolution of the complaint.

The formal complaint must be in writing and submitted to the appropriate University administrator. The complaint must include the student name, nature of the incident, offenders, date, witnesses if applicable, and desired resolution. Complainants may also complete an incident report form developed by the University that can be found on the University shared drive.

The appropriate administrator may attempt to resolve the situation or begin an investigation. Student/student and student/employee complaints require the involvement of the Dean of Student Affairs. The investigating University administrator may provide a reasonable resolution to the complainant and may also recommend or take disciplinary action against the alleged offender. Disciplinary action shall be taken in accordance with the Student Code of Conduct in the case of a student, or in accordance with the policies and procedures affecting the class of employee.

Section B 1) documents in the report

Academic Honesty and Integrity Policy (Operations Manual Appendix H Shared Policies and Procedures pp. 447-452)	SC-1-1
Student Code of Conduct (Operations Manual VI Students pp. 229-244) and (Student Handbook 2008-2009 pp. 182)	SC-1-2
Student Complaints Concerning Faculty Policy (Operations Manual Appendix H Shared Policies and Procedures pp. 492-494)	SC-1-3
Grade Appeals Policy (Operations Manual Appendix H Shared Policies and Procedures pp. 469-470)	SC-1-4
Student Complaint Concerning Faculty Form (Operations Manual Appendix H pp. 495-496)	SC-1-5
Incident Form (X:Drive/Division of Student Affairs/Forms)	SC-1-6
Student Complaint Counseling Form (Director's Drive)	SC-1-7
Report of Academic Dishonesty (Operations Manual Appendix H Shared Policies and Procedures pp. 4510-452)	SC-1-8
Grade Appeal Instructions and Form (www.auk.edu.kw)	SC-1-9

2) documents on site

Student Handbook 2008-2009 Grievance Policy pp. 204-205	Director's Office
Student Handbook 2008-2009 Non-Discrimination Policy pp. 193-195	Director's Office
Student Handbook 2008-2009 Sexual Harassment Policy pp. 195-196	Director's Office
Student Handbook 2008-2009 Disruptive Student Policy pp. 196-198	Director's Office

Section C Performance self -appraisal

Students have several channels through which to make complaints: they have access to the Director of the IEP, the University Ombudsman, and Assistant Dean of Student Affairs. The IEP is continually reviewing and revising these procedures to ensure our students' needs are met.

During the course of the self-study, we determined that the effectiveness of the grievance policy has not been measured. Anecdotally, it is known that students file complaints. It is

not known and documented as to whether they use the resources available to them and if they were satisfied with the processes through which their concerns can be addressed.

Section D Recommendations, plan of action, timeline, and persons responsible

For the next academic year, it must be determined if students are aware of the procedure and know how to access it. It must then be determined if changes to the procedures are appropriate. The Director of the Student Life in collaboration with the Director of Student Success, the University Ombudsman, Assistant Dean of Student Affairs and the Dean and the Director of IEP, will develop a survey system to determine the effectiveness of the grievance policy and student knowledge of the resources available to them if/when they have a complaint. The data collection period will encompass the 2008-2009 academic year. The data will be reviewed and adjustments made by the 2009-2010 academic year. Any new policies or procedures will be added to the Operations Manual.

Student Complaints Standard 2: The program or institution documents and maintains records of formal student complaints as well as the resolution of any such complaints.

Section A Description of current operations to show how the standard is met.

The policy and procedure for both formal and informal complaints outlined in the Student Handbook are communicated to students during new student orientations. To ensure students understand the policy and the procedure to voice a complaint, the faculty explains the policy and procedures to the students during the first week of instruction.

The IEP maintains records of student complaints in the Incident Binder in the Director's office for complaints handled by the department. Complaints within the IEP are discussed in administrative meetings and/or with the faculty/staff member involved, and then resolved by the appropriate person(s). Notes of the discussion, etc. are kept in the Incident Binder in the director's office. Complaints handled by Student Success Center (SSC) and/or Student Life are documented and maintained within their respective areas. Complaints are usually dealt with in a timely manner upon receipt. Minor complaints are normally resolved within 48 hours, whereas serious complaints may require investigation for a week or more.

Examples of Complaints and Resolutions

IEP Complaint and Resolution:

During the Summer 2008 semester, a student filed a complaint with the Director alleging an instructor had asked him to "shut-up," and called him "stupid." He requested a full refund of tuition (during 50% refund period) and to be dropped from the course. A Student Complaint Counseling form was completed by the Director and signed by the student. An interview with the instructor indicated the student had misunderstood an analogy used as an example of inappropriate behavior used within the classroom. The student was not satisfied with the instructor's explanation, resulting in the instructor becoming annoyed with the student's failure to comprehend the explanation. Based on the reaction of the instructor to the student's genuine misunderstanding, the Director approved the student's withdrawal from the course and a refund of the tuition.

Additionally, the instructor received a Letter of Direction outlining the various classroom management techniques that could be employed that would prevent this type of misunderstanding in the future. The instructor was directed to meet with the Director every other week for the remainder of the semester to discuss classroom management methods employed in the classroom and the result of the method used to prevent another occurrence.

Student Affairs Complaint and Resolution:

Student A came to the Office of Student Life to complain about a fellow student, Student B, enrolled in the IEP. The student complained that the actions of Student B were making him/her feel uncomfortable both inside and outside of the classroom. It was communicated that Student B was trying to distribute brochures and documents and influence those within the class to adhere to a specific program and belief system completely unrelated to the course or University program.

After discussing the general complaint by Student A, the Student Life staff member provided Student A with a University Incident Report form to complete. This document outlines the types of violations of University policy which students felt was applicable, requests particulars about the actions of Student B and a full description of the incident called into question, and requests other relevant information including the contact information of the individual completing the report and any witness information.

Following the completion and submission of the Incident Report form a member of the Student Life staff contacted the course instructor to discuss their perspective and first-hand knowledge of the incident. Furthermore, Student B was contacted to meet and discuss the behaviors and incident in question. Student B came to the Office of Student Life to discuss the matter in question privately with the Student Life staff member. Student B had the opportunity to explain his/her actions and provide his/her perspective on the incident.

Based on the dialogue with the Student B, the faculty member and the corroboration of these dialogues with the initial report, the Student Life administrator was able to make a decision and instruct Student B accordingly. Student B was given a formal warning, informed that further behavior would result in more strict administrative action, and was advised on the appropriateness of proper etiquette within an educational setting. Student B was also given instructions on how to receive approval to distribute such information, and when and where on campus it may be deemed appropriate. Following this discussion, the instructor was contacted by the Student Life staff member and informed of the decision as well as the communication made to Student B on the inappropriate behavior. The instructor and Student A were both contacted and advised to report any further inappropriate behaviors.

Section B 1) documents in the report

Student Code of Conduct (Operations Manual VI Students pp. 229-244) and (Student Handbook pp. 182)	SC-1-2
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2) documents on site

Student complaints binder	Director's Office
Student complaints files	Director of Student Life's Office
Student complaints files	Director of Student Success's Office
Documents providing evidence that changes were made as a follow up to student complaint	Director's Office
Student Handbook 2008-2009	Director's Office
Academic policies and procedures	X:Drive/Policies and Procedures/University Policies (approved)

Section C Performance self-appraisal

Records are maintained as per the records retention policy for non-instructional issues, and are located in the relevant department depending on the nature of the incident and complaint. The IEP has a central location for all student complaints in the Incident Report binder in the Director's office. However, centralization of some records is currently underway (discipline files, general incidents, medical incidents) in Student Affairs. Further clarifications as to how and whom some records should be maintained are necessary, especially in matters involving security personnel. Challenges include the limited language capacity of some staff to document things clearly in English, as well as the cultural challenge of willingness for many individuals to document issues correctly.

During the self-study, the IEP determined in University-wide assessment planning to include additional measure to determine the effectiveness of the student complaint process, policies, procedures, appeals, and maintenance of records.

Section D Recommendations, plan of action, timeline, and persons responsible

Further expansion of procedures to review grievances, and the ability of these measures to function well within the institution are needed. Support and collaboration is necessary from multiple areas which often assist in, oversee, or support formal proceedings to manage student complaints. In addition, more staff will be hired (some positions are currently being sought) and in a few instances more capable staff to address the disconnect either in the application of processes or the cooperation of those needed to allow it to function properly.

The IEP administration will devote meeting time to discuss the most effective way to maintain written records on how student complaints are resolved. They will design a new written statement of the procedures surrounding student complaints. The resulting decisions will be documented in the Operations Manual and put into practice during the Spring or Summer of 2009.