

## **Mississippi Valley State University Institutional Complaint Policy and Process**

A complaint is a criticism or protest. It may be academic (in content) or related to another area or service of the university.

- **Academic Complaints** include the following: academic conduct and discipline, academic standing (probation, suspension, and/or dismissal), and grade appeals.
- **Non-Academic Complaints** include the following: admission appeals and petitions for readmission, registrar appeals, discrimination, sexual harassment or sexual misconduct, financial aid and scholarships appeals, parking and traffic appeals, residency appeals, student conduct and judicial appeals, student housing appeals, and university police department appeals.
- **General Complaints** are used when a student cannot determine if the complaint is academic or nonacademic.

### **Student Complaints**

Students at the University have the right to complain, whether verbally or in writing, regarding any area of academic or student life without fear of coercion, harassment, intimidation, or reprisal from the University or its employees. Students also have the right to expect a timely response to any complaint. Defamatory or baseless charges may cause a student to be held responsible for violations of University policies or for action through the courts.

Student concerns should be resolved at the lowest possible University unit that has the authority to act as quickly as practicable. The exceptions to this procedure are the grade review procedure, appeals originating in the Office of Student Affairs, harassment, and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act as amended of 1974. Because no single process can serve the wide range of possible complaints, the University provides specific processes for responding to certain kinds of student complaints. Where University policy provides a specific complaint or complaint procedure, an aggrieved student should use that procedure. Otherwise, the general complaint procedure, which is outlined below, should be used.

### **General Complaint Procedure for Students**

Students may use the following procedure to formally question the application of any University regulation, rule, policy, requirement or procedure, **not otherwise covered by a more specific policy or procedure.**

#### **Step One:**

The student should meet with the University decision-maker concerned to discuss the complaint and to attempt to arrive at a solution. This meeting should occur no later than 30 calendar days after the action which resulted in the complaint.

#### **Step Two:**

If the student's complaint is not resolved at Step One, that student must, within 14 calendar days of the Step One meeting, submit a written complaint to the next level in the University's administrative structure (department chair, director or his/her designee in the administrative unit

within which the complaint originated). The complaint must be signed and dated by the student. The name and title of the person to whom the request should be addressed can be obtained from the employee in Step One.

If the student's issue cannot be resolved by the Step Two administrator by telephone call or email correspondence, he or she shall make a reasonable effort to arrange for a meeting with the student and the employee within 14 calendar days from the date that the request is received. If this timeframe cannot be met, the Step Two administrator will notify all parties in writing and determine a mutually agreeable time. The meeting should be informal, with a candid discussion of the problem in an attempt to find a solution. The Step Two administrator may give an oral decision at the close of the meeting, or he or she may choose to take the matter under advisement. Typically, the Step Two administrator will render a final decision within 14 calendar days, informing all parties of the decision in writing.

### **Step Three:**

If the student wishes to appeal the Step Two decision, he or she may appeal to the Vice President at the next level in the administrative structure of the University within 14 calendar days from the date of the Step Two written decision. The student may obtain from the employee in Step One or Step Two the name and title of the person to whom the request should be addressed.

The appeal must be in writing, using the appropriate complaint form signed and dated. Upon receiving this written appeal, the Step Three administrator will review all information concerning the complaint and appeal and render a written decision within 14 days from the date of receipt of the appeal. The Step Three administrator's decision is final.

In all cases, if the final decision requires any change to an official record of the University, the University employee must comply with all University regulations and procedures necessary to accomplish the change.

## **Complaint Appeal Procedures**

### **Informal Resolution of a Student Complaint**

Most types of dissatisfaction can be resolved through an informal face-to-face discussion between the people involved, and students should typically start with this strategy. If that discussion is not satisfactory, the student should next try to discuss the matter with that person's immediate supervisor (e.g., chair of an academic department, the director of a university service office, etc.). **For appropriate contacts, please refer to pages 85-86 of the Student Handbook ([https://www.mvsu.edu/sites/default/files/student\\_handbook\\_2017\\_-\\_2018\\_0.pdf](https://www.mvsu.edu/sites/default/files/student_handbook_2017_-_2018_0.pdf)).** If the concerns are more serious or are not resolved informally, students may exercise formal complaint and appeals process.

### **Formal Resolution of a Student Complaint**

Some situations always lead to a formal process: grade appeals, appeals originating in the Office of Student Affairs, harassment, sexual misconduct and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

These formal complaints always involve submission of a written complaint and various steps through the process. For these situations, students should follow the procedures included in the links below:

- Academic Affairs Policy  
<https://www.mvsu.edu/Academic-Forms>
- Human Resources Harassment Policy (p. 42 of the Employee Handbook)  
[https://www.mvsu.edu/sites/default/files/Employee\\_Handbook\\_01.04.16.pdf](https://www.mvsu.edu/sites/default/files/Employee_Handbook_01.04.16.pdf)
- Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act – FERPA (p. 37 of the Student Handbook)  
<https://www.mvsu.edu/Student-Handbook>
- Sexual Misconduct (p. 17 of the Student Handbook)  
<https://www.mvsu.edu/Student-Handbook>

### **Filing A Complaint Beyond the Institutional Policy and Process**

If students have a complaint about their educational experience at Mississippi Valley State University that is not resolved through internal, university procedures, they may contact the following agency for assistance:

Mississippi Commission on College Accreditation  
Attention: MCCA Student Complaints  
3825 Ridgewood Road  
Jackson, MS 39211  
601-432-6372  
[http://www.mississippi.edu/mcca/student\\_complaint\\_process.asp](http://www.mississippi.edu/mcca/student_complaint_process.asp)