

**William Paterson University Policy
University Policy**

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| SUBJECT: | Student Complaints | TITLE: | General Student Complaint Policy and Procedure | | |
| CATEGORY: Check One | Board of Trustees <input type="checkbox"/> | University <input type="checkbox"/> | Functional <input type="checkbox"/> | School/Unit <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Responsible Executive: | Vice President for Student Development | | Responsible Office: | Student Development | |
| CODING: | 02-40-10-00-01 | ADOPTED: | 2/10/16 | AMENDED: | 08/03/23 |
| LAST REVIEWED: xx/xx/xx | | | | | |

I. PURPOSE

William Paterson University is committed to providing students with a positive learning environment and to reviewing and responding to student complaints appropriately. The purpose of this Policy and associated procedures is to provide students with a clearly defined path for expressing their complaints and receiving responses, and to comply with federal regulations for receiving, responding to and tracking student complaints. This policy and related procedures are intended to help William Paterson University identify patterns of conduct or work processes that raise legitimate concerns with respect to the University’s operation and to address such concerns accordingly.

II. ACCOUNTABILITY

The Office of Student Development is responsible for enforcement of this policy.

III. DEFINITION(S)

Current Student: an individual who is currently enrolled full-time or part-time, or was enrolled at the institution within the previous two semesters (one academic year) when the underlying facts and circumstances of the complaint first occurred, and who has not been suspended or dismissed, or otherwise required to re-apply for admission.

Former Student: an individual who has not been enrolled full-time or part-time for the previous two semesters (one academic year), and who no longer has login access to WPCconnect.

Student Complaint: A complaint is an expression of discontent as a result of behavior or circumstances that the student believes are unjust, unsafe, inequitable, and inconsistent with University policies as stated in an official document, or create an unnecessary hardship, and which do not fall under one of the existing policies and/or procedures listed below as exceptions.

IV. POLICY

Scope

This Policy applies to all students who are enrolled at William Paterson University at the time that the complaint is filed in accordance with the Policy, or who were previously

enrolled (as defined above). Student complaints covered by this Policy are limited to those not already covered by other existing policies and procedures, and that meet the definition of a complaint, as outlined in this Policy. This Policy does not extend to parents, relatives, employers, agents, and other persons acting for or on behalf of a student.

Exceptions

The following types of complaints already have a prescribed process and therefore are excluded from this policy. Students with complaints that fall under any of the following categories are encouraged to click on the accompanying link, where these policies or procedures may be found, and follow that procedure. Many of these are also listed on our University Policies page, which is located at the following link:

<https://www.wpunj.edu/general-counsel/policies-and-legal-resources/>

Complaints about grades

Complaints from students regarding grades are addressed by the Procedure for Investigating Complaints about Grades or Student Academic Performance. The description of the policy/procedure for grade appeal is in the attached link:

<https://www.wpunj.edu/human-resources/policies-forms-contracts/handbooks-and-contracts/faculty-and-professional-staff-handbook/procedures-for-investigating-complaints-about-grade-or-student-academic-performance>

Appeals Regarding Academic Dismissals

Students who are academically dismissed from the University may appeal the decision. Upon dismissal, students receive a direct communication outlining the process for the appeal.

Resolution of Academic Integrity Policy Violations Decisions

Complaints about accusations of academic integrity violations should follow the process indicated in the Academic Integrity Policy:

<https://www.wpunj.edu/policies/docs/academic/academic-integrity-policy-for-students.pdf>

Resolution of sex-based harassment, misconduct and/or discrimination

Complaints alleging sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, sex/gender discrimination, or any type of discrimination under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (as amended), and/or New Jersey's Law Against Discrimination are excluded from this complaint, as they are governed under separate policies.

For these types of complaints, please refer to the Institutional Equity & Diversity's home page: <https://www.wpunj.edu/Institutional-Equity-and-Diversity/index.html> or WPU's Title IX webpage:

<https://www.wpunj.edu/Institutional-Equity-and-Diversity/title-ix/>

Please also see the Student Sexual Misconduct and Non-Discrimination Policy:

<https://www.wpunj.edu/Institutional-Equity-and-Diversity/assets/sexual-misconduct-and-non-discrimination-policy-08-14-2020.pdf>

WPU's Title IX Grievance Policy for Sexual Harassment Complaints:

<https://www.wpunj.edu/Institutional-Equity-and-Diversity/assets/TITLE-IX-GRIEVANCE-POLICY.pdf>

Resolution of discrimination based on a protected category by an employee

New Jersey State Policy Prohibiting Discrimination in the Workplace:

https://www.wpunj.edu/Institutional-Equity-and-Diversity/assets/NJ_State_Policy_Prohibiting_Discrimination.pdf

WPU'S Policy Prohibiting Discrimination in the Workforce and Educational

Environment: https://www.wpunj.edu/Institutional-Equity-and-Diversity/assets/Discrimination-in-the-Workforce-and-Educational-Environment-Policy.pdf?language_id=1

Resolution of Proposed Accommodations for Disabilities

As described below in the Procedure section, students are encouraged to attempt to resolve the issue with the Director of the Accessibility Resource Center or their supervisor. If the student is unable to resolve the matter in this manner or disagrees with the determination and/or proposed accommodation, they may contact the Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity at (973) 720-2851, for assistance in resolving the disagreement. Institutional Equity and Diversity is responsible for ensuring the University's compliance with its equal opportunity and non-discrimination obligations arising under federal, state and local laws and regulations. If necessary, Institutional Equity and Diversity will conduct an investigation.

Transfer Appeals Process

Students transferring from New Jersey county/community colleges with a completed A.A., A.S., or A.F.A. degree should be aware of the following provisions of the State-Wide Transfer Agreement. Students covered by the provisions of this agreement who believe that they have not received an accurate and complete evaluation of their credits with their letter of acceptance from William Paterson University should refer to the New Jersey Statewide Agreement Transfer Appeals Process Procedure page:

<https://www.wpunj.edu/admissions/undergraduate/transfer-students/transfer-appeals-process>

Student Conduct Appeals

The appeals processes for disciplinary cases may be found in the Student Code of Conduct at the following link: <http://www.wpunj.edu/student-conduct/student-handbook/the-student-code-of-conduct.dot>

Financial Aid Satisfactory Academic Progress appeals

For financial aid satisfactory academic progress appeals, please go to the following link and follow the specific guidelines and process articulated there: <https://www.wpunj.edu/financial-aid/satisfactory-academic-progress/>

Facilities Issues

Matters concerning facilities or facility complaints for residential students can be addressed through the work order system available in each residence hall office. Commuter students with complaints/concerns should send an email to PhysicalPlantOps@wpunj.edu or call 973-720-2142.

University Police Department

Individuals may file a complaint in-person, via telephone or via an anonymous complaint form on the University Police website. Allegations of serious misconduct should be filed in person with the police supervisor on duty. Following the State of New Jersey Attorney General's Guidelines, all complaints of serious misconduct are referred to a trained internal affairs investigator. Complaints of a criminal nature are referred to the Passaic County Prosecutor's Office. Individuals who provide their name and contact information are entitled to know the outcome of any investigation and will be informed at the conclusion of the investigation. Complaints regarding discrimination or harassment may be appealed to the Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity.

Location of University Police Department Headquarters: The first building on the left when using Entry One; Entry One is on Pompton Road near the Catholic Ministry Building.

Non-emergency University Police phone number: 973-720-2300

Anonymous Reporting Form: <https://secure.wpunj.edu/police/police.cfm/>

V. PROCEDURE(S)

Current Students

STEP 1

Students are encouraged to attempt to resolve a problem whenever possible by discussing it with the person with whom they are having the problem. Requesting an appointment with the staff or faculty member to discuss the matter in a calm and mature fashion is always the first step to trying to resolve a dispute. For example, if a student has concerns related to classroom situations or administrative actions, they should contact the faculty or staff member(s) with whom they have a conflict. It may be possible to resolve the concerns without the need for formal institutional action. However, if the problem is not resolved through this action, the student should then contact the faculty member's department chair, or the staff person's supervisor. If the problem is not resolved satisfactorily, or if it cannot be resolved by contacting the faculty/staff member(s) or their supervisor/administrator, or if the student decides for whatever reason that they are not able to resolve the situation in this manner, or if the student is unsure to whom the concern should be addressed, the student should proceed to STEP 2 to file a formal complaint.

STEP 2

The student should file a formal complaint through the Student Complaint Tracking System process. Current students may either log into WPCconnect and in the Students tab, under Campus Life, click on Student Complaint link, or go directly to the Student Complaint form at the following link: <https://wpconnect.wpunj.edu/students/complaints/>

Former students may download a PDF and mail the completed form to the Dean of Student Development, as described below under Complaint Procedure for Former Students. <https://wpconnect.wpunj.edu/students/complaints/StudentComplaintForm.pdf>

If the student or former student has additional questions about the complaint process, or would like to discuss their concerns first, they should contact the Dean of Students at (973) 720-3295.

Only formal, written complaints, submitted through the Student Complaint Tracking System will be accepted under the rules of this policy. Only complaints that are related to the academic, campus, or financial life of the student, and which are not already covered by an existing policy or procedure, will be accepted under the rules of this policy. Submitted complaints will be routed by the Dean of Students to the campus administrator responsible for the employee, office or department referenced in the complaint. The campus administrator will review the complaint and determine next steps, which may include identifying an appropriate designee to review and address the complaint. If a meeting is held as part of the review process, the student complainant may be accompanied by an advisor of their choosing, who shall not participate directly in the process but may advise the person who invited them. If a designee is named, the designee

will review the complaint and report findings to the campus administrator who assigned them the complaint. Within 10 business days of receipt of the complaint, the campus administrator to whom the complaint was assigned shall inform the complainant via their official William Paterson University e-mail address and if applicable, the affected employee(s) and/or department, of a decision. If the investigation of a particular complaint will take longer than ten days, the campus administrator will still respond on an interim basis, indicating the actions they are taking and the expected time-frame for the inquiry to be completed and a resolution issued in writing to the student. This response will support the student's proposed remedy, suggest an alternative remedy, or find the complaint without merit. Any disciplinary measures, if and when recommended, may not be implemented until the campus administrator conducting the investigation has consulted with the Office of Human Resources.

STEP 3

The decision may be appealed by the complainant if they have new information or evidence of procedural errors in the handling of the complaint that substantially impacted the outcome. Appeals are reviews of process, not a new examination of contested issues. Appeals must detail the grounds for appeal and identify a suggested remedy. Appeals must be filed using the appeal form within ten business days of the issuance of the complaint decision. The appeal will be routed to the supervisor of the administrator who handled the complaint. The administrator reviewing the appeal, or designee, may request a meeting or additional information, if needed. A written decision will be provided to all parties within 21 business days of receiving the appeal unless reasonable cause for delay exists. This decision is final.

HOW FORMER STUDENTS FILE A COMPLAINT

Former students, who no longer have access to WPCconnect, should file a complaint using the Complaint Form available in PDF form at the following link:

<https://wpconnect.wpunj.edu/students/complaints/StudentComplaintForm.pdf>

The form, once completed, should be signed and mailed to the Dean of Students at the address on the form. Complaints from former students are treated in the same manner as the one for current students, except communications are conducted by mail.

TRACKING COMPLAINTS

Formal complaints submitted by a student through the Student Complaint Tracking System will include:

- a) The date the complaint was first formally submitted.
- b) The nature of the complaint
- c) The steps taken to resolve the complaint and by whom.
- d) The responding administrator's final decision regarding the complaint and recommended resolution or remedy.
- e) Whether or not the decision was appealed, and if so, whether initial decision was upheld or overturned.

f) Any other external steps initiated by the student to resolve the complaint, if known by the University.

Complaints from former students received manually will be considered as a separate category but included in the annual complaint tracking report described below.

Once assigned, each complaint will also be reported to the highest-level administrator in the college or division so they are aware that the complaint is in progress.

ANNUAL COMPLAINT TRACKING REPORT

The annual report will contain the following information:

- a) The total number of complaints received
- b) The types of complaints received by generic category
- c) A summary record of each complaint received and the action taken by the University to resolve the issue.
- d) Total number of appeals and percentage of decisions which were either upheld or overturned.
- e) An analysis of any complaint trends noticed and any steps already taken or recommended courses of action to address these trends, including reporting findings to the Vice President of the Division(s) of the University identified in these trends.

The Annual Institutional Record of Student Complaints will not include names of any students or individuals involved in the facts of the complaints.

INSTITUTIONAL USE OF COMPLAINT TRACKING SYSTEM

The annual Institutional Record of Student Complaints will be presented to President's Cabinet in the fall term following the academic year of record. The Cabinet will use the information to develop any needed changes in institutional process and practices.

The complaints data will be available to the Middle States Commission reviewers during any visit to the University.

By Direction of the Vice President for Student Development

Date: 02/10/2016 Updated: 9/17/18, 8/19/22, 8/03/23