

# Northern State University

**SUBJECT: Non-Academic Complaint Policy**

**NUMBER: 3:2**

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## **1. Preamble**

Northern State University is committed to respecting all members of our university community and providing a quality educational experience for all students. The objective of the Non-Academic Complaint Policy is to ensure that the concerns and complaints of undergraduate or graduate students are addressed fairly and are resolved promptly. Complaints related to this policy are usually the result of behavior that the student feels is unjust, inequitable, or creates an unnecessary hardship.

There are three important complaint/grievance policies not governed by this document:

1) Incidents related to sexual, racial, and other harassment, hate crimes, or bias-related behaviors: If a complaint of this nature is against a faculty, student or staff member, the report should be filed with the Director of Human Resources:

<http://www.northern.edu/administration/pages/hr.aspx>

2) Student Academic Grievance Procedure: Students who feel that they have been aggrieved by a decision or action of a NSU faculty member relating to class absences, grades, or classroom behavior issues should refer to the Student Academic Grievance Procedure.

3) Academic Integrity Policy: Students who feel they have been aggrieved by a decision or action of a faculty member relating to academic integrity issues (e.g. cheating and plagiarism) should refer to the Academic Integrity Policy.

## **2. Definitions**

**Non-Academic Complaint:** For the purpose of the policy and procedures that follow, non-academic complaints refer to a substantial complaint of a serious nature. For any matter to give rise to such a complaint there must be clear and convincing evidence, which demonstrates either arbitrary or capricious action on the part of the individual faculty, administration, or staff member or action which is oppressive, fundamentally unfair, or which exceeds the limits of academic freedom. The evidence must also establish that such action was injurious. Students who wish to appeal or grieve non-academic complaints are to follow appropriate channels of communication in seeking resolution of differences.

### 3. Procedures

Whenever possible, students are encouraged to seek an informal resolution of the matter directly with the faculty or individual(s) involved. Often a complaint can be resolved in this way. However, if an informal approach is neither successful nor advisable, the student should use the formal approach.

A. Informal Phase: When a student feels he or she has been aggrieved by a non-academic decision or action related to his/her enrollment and successful progress at Northern State University, the student must contact the applicable faculty member, staff, or administrator within 10 working days of the alleged grievance to attempt to resolve the issue or incident. In those rare instances where the student believes that an informal approach might prejudice his/her standing, he or she may report the problem directly to the supervisor who oversees the area. The Informal Phase shall last no longer than two weeks from the date the grievance was initiated.

B. Formal Phase:

1. Level 1.

- a. After an attempt at an informal resolution between the student and the applicable faculty member, staff, or administrator, any student with a non-academic complaint shall first file a written complaint by completing the complaint form (found online at <https://www3.northern.edu/HLC/complaint.aspx>) and schedule a meeting with the appropriate department chair or area supervisor within two weeks of the attempted informal resolution.
- b. The department chair/supervisor may discuss the matter with the student and any involved faculty/staff separately or together.
  - i. If the situation warrants, the department chair/supervisor may solicit the views and opinions of other faculty members, staff, administrators, and/or students on the matter.
  - ii. A written decision must be rendered to all parties involved within 10 working days from the date the Level I formal phase was initiated.

2. Level 2.

- a. If the department chair/supervisor's decision at Level 1 does not satisfactorily resolve the complaint within 10 working days of the receipt of the decision, the student may file a written complaint with the appropriate vice president to request relief.
- b. In attempting to reach a clarification and resolution of the grievance, the vice president may request that the discussion of the complaint include all parties and a meeting shall be held within 10 working days.

- c. Prior to this meeting the vice president shall request written documentation from all involved persons stating the issues and describing the decisions reached in previous meetings.
  - d. At the meeting with the vice president, new evidence relevant to the case may be submitted.
  - e. The Vice President shall render a decision within 10 working days following the meeting.
3. Level 3.
- a. If the complaint is still unresolved, the student may forward a written appeal to the university president within 10 days after receiving the vice president's decision. The president renders the final institutional decision based upon a review of the record and the documents provided:
    - i. Affirm the vice president's decision;
    - ii. Conduct such further investigation or hearing as the president deems necessary in order to make a decision; or
    - iii. Reverse or modify the recommendation of the vice president.
  - b. The president shall notify the parties involved by written decision within 10 days.

#### **4. Documentation**

A record of all complaints and their resolution will be documented and the records will be kept in the Vice President for Student Affairs office.

#### **5. South Dakota Board of Regents System Procedure for Handling Complaints**

The complaint process will be most effective when individuals work through the respective campus channels prior to contacting the South Dakota Board of Regents. Complaints regarding any SDBOR institution not resolved at the campus level may follow this link to view procedures:

<http://www.sdbor.edu/policy/1-Governance/documents/1-18.pdf>