POLICY

Any student who believes he or she has been harmed by the interpretation, application or violation of college policies and/or procedures may file a complaint. Staff of the Office of the Vice President of Student Affairs will monitor timing of responses, activity, and prepare reports on activity and any trends in student formal complaints.

The complaint shall be handled in accordance with appropriate procedure approved by the President.

ADOPTED: September 27, 1976
Revised: April 22, 1996
Revised: February 28, 2000
Revised: November 20, 2000
Revised: December 1, 2008
Revised: January 27, 2022

PROCEDURE

Overview

A formal complaint is a request for the resolution of a problem, conflict, concern, or issue that negatively impacts a student(s). Student formal complaints may include (but are not limited to) issues regarding college policies, procedures, services, offices, and staff/faculty behavior and discrimination on the basis of marital status, race, color, creed, national origin, ancestry, age, disability and Veteran status. Formal complaints should be filed using OCC's online complaint form.

Complaints that pertain to incidents that involve discrimination on the basis of gender and gender identity, including sexual harassment/sexual assault and rape, are addressed under OCC's Title IX policy and procedures and are handled separately from the processes described herein. Students who wish to report a Title IX related incident must contact OCC's Title IX Coordinator in the OCC Human Resources Office or utilize OCC's online reporting form. More information about Title IX is available at https://www.ocean.edu/title-ix/.

Note:

- Formal complaints involving grades where the final course grade is disputed and/or the student believes that the final grade is not indicative of the student's academic performance are addressed by Policy #5154 and are handled separately from the processes described below.

  Formal complaints regarding Code of Conduct violations are addressed by the student conduct process which is described in detail in the Student Handbook and are handled separately from the processes described below.

- Academic Integrity (Policy #5180), Tuition Refund appeals (Policy #5144), and F to W appeals (Policy #5142) are addressed through their own specific processes.

Anonymous formal complaints are not accepted since doing so may limit the College's ability to investigate and respond to the formal complaint.

Information concerning the nature, scope, evaluation and resolution of formal complaints shall be confidential to the greatest extent possible and will be shared only with those persons who need to know.

Ocean County College encourages resolution of formal complaints in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Any form of retaliation for bringing forward a formal complaint will not be tolerated; students who retaliate against anyone related to a formal complaint or the formal complaint process will be subject to sanction via the student Code of Conduct (see Policy #5247). The formal complaint process applies to all students and should be followed in all cases when informal resolution is not sufficient to resolve the issue.

Formal Complaint Process

The steps in the formal complaint process are:

1. Informal Resolution
2. Formal Complaint
3. Appeal

Students must complete each step in the process before proceeding to the next step.

Assistance for students in understanding and navigating the formal complaint process is available from the staff of the Office of Student Life. Contact information for the Office of Student Life is available on the Ocean County College Website.

Prompt reporting of all formal complaints is critical and necessary as it is often difficult to trace the facts of an incident or incidents long after they have occurred. Students are advised that a formal complaint will be most effectively addressed if the formal complaint is brought forward within sixty (60) College business days of the alleged incident.

Step 1. Informal Resolution

Students must attempt to resolve any concern through a discussion with the Ocean County College employee who is most directly connected with the issue, behavior, procedure or service. In the case of a concern related to the delivery of service, the informal step requires discussion with the individual who delivers that service (e.g., faculty member, staff member, etc). Should the student be unable to resolve the issue/concern informally, they may choose to file a formal complaint.

Step 2: Filing a formal complaint

Formal complaints must be filed using OCC's online complaint form. Formal complaints will be forwarded to the appropriate administrator responsible for the individual, process, or department involved. Documentation of the formal complaint should include:

- A detailed description of the issue and any negative impact(s) that resulted.
- The date, time, and place of the event(s) pertaining to the formal complaint.
- The name and contact information for any witnesses with knowledge of the formal complaint or subject of the formal complaint.
- Specific details regarding the instance(s) of non-compliance with the policy or procedure applicable.
- The results of any previous discussion resulting from attempting an informal resolution.
- All appropriate evidence and documentation related to the complaint.
- A proposed resolution or action.

Following the formal complaint online form submission by a student, formal complaints are forwarded to the departmental leader governing the area for which the complaint is submitted. This may be a department director, a Dean, or other administrator. The departmental leader will conduct an impartial and thorough investigation of the incident and respond to the student in writing with findings and a resolution (if applicable) within 15 college business days. Responses are delivered via the student's Ocean County College email address.

Step 3: Appeal/Due Process

Should the student be dissatisfied with the resolution of the formal complaint by the departmental leader, he/she may appeal to the appropriate divisional Vice President (or designee). This appeal must be submitted in writing to the office of the divisional Vice President who is responsible for the area that pertains to the formal complaint within seven (7) College business days of the departmental leader's notification to the student of the findings and resolution of the formal complaint. The resolution letter will contain directions to guide the student should he/she wish to pursue an appeal of the decision.

In the written appeal the student must address the grounds for an appeal and provide support for any facts that relate to his/her point of view.

The divisional Vice President (or designee) will review all documentation of the incident, the formal complaint, and the resolution by the department leader and respond to the student in writing with findings and a decision within 15 business days.

Responses are delivered via the student's Ocean County College email address.

The formal complaint process ends with the response to the appeal from the divisional Vice President (or designee); no other opportunity for pursuing the complaint is available. Formal complaints that are duplicates of a previously addressed complaint will not be considered.

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