



# CEHD POLICY & PROCEDURES

## Responding to Student Academic Complaints

Responding to and resolving a student's academic complaint should always begin at the lowest unit level (e.g., the student's academic department) and proceed through the following processes, as necessary:

- 1) The complaint is reviewed at the lowest unit level with the goal of reaching a mutually agreeable informal resolution.
- 2) If an informal resolution is not reached, the student may request a formal hearing wherein a College Hearing Panel reviews the student's complaint and submits their recommendations to the Dean, who then renders a decision.
- 3) If any party is not satisfied with the Dean's decision, they may submit a written appeal to the Provost, whose decision is final.

The goal of this procedure is to provide a simple and fair process that allows for both informal and formal resolution of conflicts. This document provides a detailed summary the nuanced steps, timelines, and potential outcomes of each process, as well as current personnel responsible for engaging the complaint resolution process.

## Scope of Policy and Definition of Academic Complaints

While the College of Education and Human Development takes students' complaints seriously and is committed to responding to each in an appropriate, fair, respectful, and timely manner, not all complaints fall within the scope of this policy. The procedure described herein applies to "student academic complaints," which are complaints brought by students regarding the University's provision of education and academic services affecting their role as students and are based on a claimed or perceived violation of a University rule, policy, or established practice. Examples of complaints that are and are not covered by this policy are listed below.

### Examples of Complaints Covered

This procedure applies to student complaints regarding:

- deviations from policies established in a course syllabus
- major changes to course requirements
- limited access to instructor feedback about course work
- insufficient office hours

### Complaints Not Covered

This procedure does not apply to student complaints regarding:

- University employment
- disciplinary action under Board of Regents Policy: [Student Conduct Code](#)
- grades
- applicant complaints regarding University admission decisions



**Note:** *If alleging discrimination in the University-student relationship, such complaints may be filed under this policy or with the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, but not both.*

## Relief Available

Resolution of complaints under this procedure may include student reinstatement or other corrective action for the benefit of the student, including refunds, but may not award monetary damages or take disciplinary action against any employee of the University.

This policy does not limit the University's right to change rules, policies, or practices.

This section contains guidelines and processes for CEHD's implementation of the Board of Regents Policy, "[Conflict Resolution Process for Student Academic Complaints](#)," and guides CEHD faculty, staff, and students in seeking resolution of student academic complaints.

The informal resolution process outlined below conforms to the University of Minnesota Administrative Policy, "[Addressing Student Academic Complaints](#)," and the associated administrative procedure, "[Conflict Resolution Process for Student Academic Complaints: Twin Cities](#)."

## Informal Resolution of Student Academic Complaints

The first step of any resolution should be at the lowest unit level, between the parties involved or the parties and an appropriate third party (e.g., other faculty, department chair, director of graduate studies, administrator). Students may wish to consult the [Student Conflict Resolution Center](#) for advice and possible mediation. If no informal resolution is reached at the lowest unit level, a student may seek informal resolution at the collegiate level with the other party and by contacting the CEHD Dean's Office. The Dean may ask the graduate or undergraduate Associate Dean (as co-chairs of the CEHD Student Scholastic Standing Committee (SSSC)) to meet with the parties and recommend a solution. If the issue is not resolved informally at this point, the student may seek formal resolution.

During the informal resolution process, the parties and the Associate Dean should proceed in accord with a mutually agreed upon time-line. The informal process should conclude with one of the following:

- 1) a mutually agreeable resolution, or
- 2) the conclusion of informal efforts without resolution, or
- 3) the withdrawal of the complaint.

If the student is not satisfied with the informal resolution process, she or he may request a formal hearing in writing, normally within ten business days of the completion of the informal conflict resolution process. *Figure 1* summarizes the steps involved in and potential outcomes of the informal resolution process.

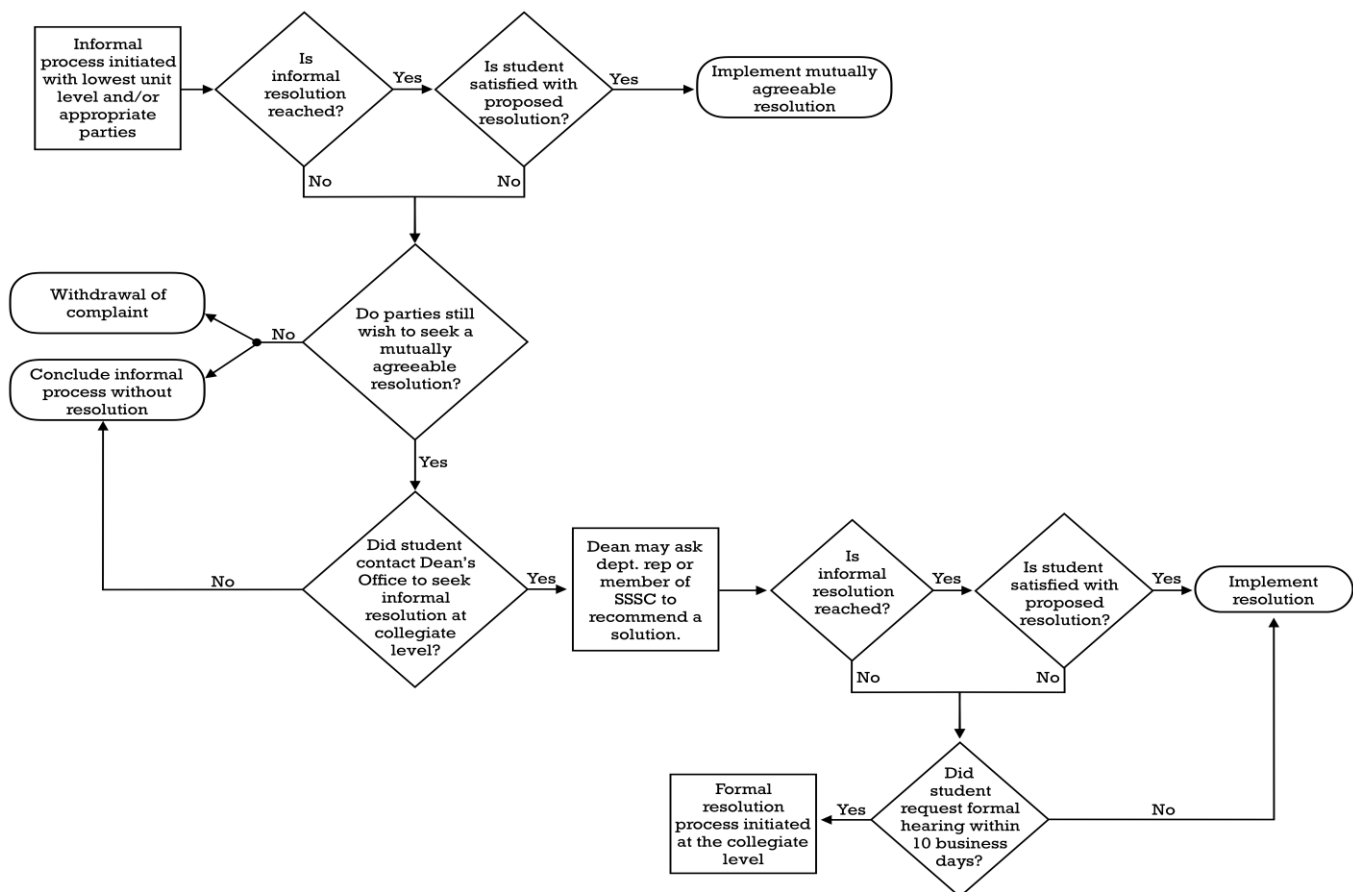


Figure 1. Outline of informal resolution process

## Formal Resolution to Student Academic Complaints

**(If formal resolution is not reached or proposed resolution is not satisfactory)**

1. **The Student Files a Complaint.** Student should contact the Student Conflict Resolution Center if they haven't already done so for consultation and mediation on the complaint. A student must submit a completed complaint form to the appropriate collegiate unit within 30 calendar days from the occurrence or notice of the action being challenged. The complaint must identify the student, the respondent, the individuals involved, the incident, the rule/policy/established practice alleged to have been violated, and a brief statement of the remedy the student is seeking. In the case of graduate student academic complaints, the Student Conflict Resolution Center may work with the Graduate School to work toward resolution as needed.
2. **The College Appoints an Academic Complaint Officer.** The CEHD graduate or undergraduate Associate Dean (depending on the students program) will appoint a CEHD Academic Complaint Officer when a formal resolution process is needed. The Officer appointed will be a faculty member and will preside in the formal academic complaints process and will not have a direct interest in the dispute.



### College-Level Hearing Process

The formal resolution hearing process outlined below was adapted from the Provost Office document, "[Guidelines for Colleges: Hearings Under the Conflict Resolution Process for Student Academic Complaints: Twin Cities.](#)"

Colleges and administrative units will provide a review process appropriate to the issue raised by the student academic complaint, as described below. Recourse beyond this collegiate formal resolution process is an appeal to the Provost, who will determine if due process within the college has been followed. The steps for a formal resolution process are summarized in this section.

**3. *The Academic Complaint Officer Receives and Attempts to Resolve the Complaint.*** The college Academic Complaint Officer will review the complaint. The Academic Complaint Officer will meet with the student and the respondent or other individuals involved to try to reach a satisfactory, mutually acceptable resolution.

**4. *The Academic Complaint Officer Determines Whether the Complaint Falls Within the Scope of the Formal Resolution Procedure.*** If the Academic Complaint Officer is unable to resolve the academic complaint, they must determine whether or not the complaint falls within the scope of the formal resolution procedure. If the Academic Complaint Officer determines that a complaint is not a "student academic complaint" subject to the formal procedure, the Officer will notify the student of that decision in writing. The student may appeal that decision to the senior academic administrator, following paragraph 10 below.

**5. *The Respondent Provides a Written Response.*** If the Officer concludes that the complaint falls within the scope of the formal procedure, the Officer will require the respondent to provide a written response to the complaint. The response is due within 15 calendar days after notice that a response is required, unless there are compelling reasons for delay.

**6. *The Academic Complaint Officer Arranges for a Hearing.*** The Academic Complaint Officer will be responsible for scheduling a hearing and establishing the College Hearing Panel. Preparation

for the hearing may include a prehearing conference to address such questions as the issues at stake, the witnesses expected to testify, the documents to be reviewed and exchanged between the parties, and other matters that will help the hearing proceed in a focused and efficient manner.

**7. *A College Hearing Panel is Set.*** A College Hearing Panel will be established to hear the complaint. Members of the panel will be drawn from the Curriculum Council, faculty, students, and academic staff. The chair of the hearing panel will be the Academic Complaint Officer or another appointed faculty member. The College Hearing Panel will have a minimum of three and a maximum of five members. On a panel of three, one will be a student. If membership exceeds three, it may include more than one student. In the case of graduate/professional school complaints, the student members will be graduate/professional school students. In the case of undergraduate complaints, the student members will be undergraduates. Parties must be notified of the College Hearing Panel membership and given an opportunity to object to members who they allege have a bias or unfair interest in the case. Disputes about the membership of the panel will be decided by the Dean.

Panelists will serve as neutrals, not advocates, and none will have a direct interest in the dispute. Panelists will give the student and the respondent's cases open-minded, fair



consideration. Panelists will not have private conversations about the complaint with the parties, their advisors, or attorneys.

- 8. *The College Hearing Panel Hears the Complaint and Issues Recommendations.*** The College Hearing Panel will provide a fair opportunity for the student and the respondent to present their views and information. (A detailed process for the panel hearing is detailed below.)
- 9. *The College Hearing Panel will Review the Complaint and the Response, and will Review Information and Hear Testimony Where Appropriate.*** Panel hearings are not court cases, and the rules of evidence do not apply, but the panel will exercise reasonable judgment in deciding the information to permit and to rely on in making a decision. Each party is responsible for presenting its own information and arguments and obtaining the appearance of its own witnesses. A party presenting documents must bring a sufficient number for each party and panel member. Witnesses are present only during their own testimony. Parties may be present throughout the hearing. Students may bring or be represented by an advocate or lawyer. In the event the student is represented by a lawyer, the respondent will be represented by the Office of General Counsel.  
  
The burden of proof is on the student to show that it is more likely than not that the action complained of violated a University rule, policy, or established practice.
- 10. *The College Hearing Panel Submits Recommendations to the CEHD Dean's Office.*** Following the conclusion of the hearing, the panel will prepare a written report, recommending findings and a resolution of the matter. The panel must submit its report within 15 calendar days of the close of the hearing, unless there are compelling reasons for delay. The chair will send the report with all accompanying documents from both sides in electronic form to the CEHD Dean, who will distribute the report to the parties. If the complaint challenged an action personally engaged in by the Dean, the Provost will appoint another administrator to fulfill the Dean's role under this procedure.
- 11. *Decision by the Dean.*** The Dean will review the panel's report and may review any other parts of the hearing record. The Dean has full discretion to accept, modify, or reject the panel recommendations. Within 15 calendar days of receipt of the panel report, the Dean will issue his or her decision to the parties, unless there are compelling reasons for delay. The Dean must inform the student of his or her right to appeal an adverse decision.
- 12. *Appeal.*** If any party is not satisfied with the Dean's decision, the party may appeal to the Provost. The purpose of the appeal is to determine whether the parties have been afforded due process. The party must file a written appeal to the Provost within 10 calendar days of receipt of the decision by the Dean. The party must explain the basis for the appeal. The Provost has the discretion to decide how to process the appeal. The appeal may be handled by written submissions or oral presentations to the Provost or delegate, or the Provost may set up an appellate hearing panel to hear the appeal and provide a recommendation before making a decision. In any case, the Provost will provide a written decision to the parties within 30 calendar days of the filing of the appeal, unless there are compelling reasons for delay.

This same process applies to appeals from a college's Academic Complaint Officer finding that a complaint falls outside the scope of this procedure under step four above. The Provost may reverse



the Officer's decision and return the complaint to the college for a hearing, or the Provost may affirm the decision by the Officer that the complaint is outside the scope of this procedure.

***The decision of the senior academic administrator is final and cannot be appealed further within the University.<sup>1</sup>***

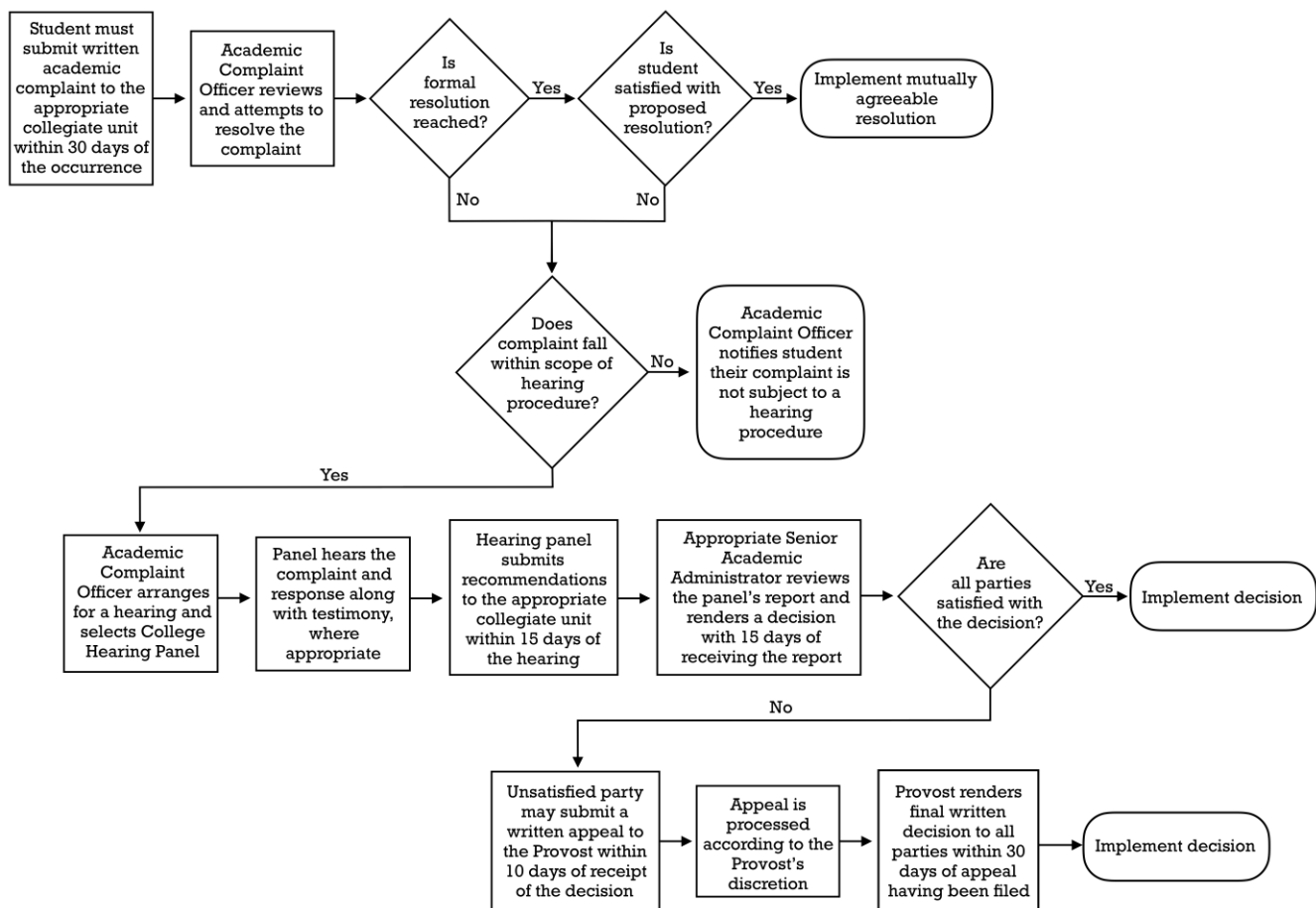


Figure 2. Outline of formal resolution process

<sup>1</sup> ***For students in the Teaching Licensure Programs:*** In compliance with MN Statute 122A.09, subp. 4(c), students in teacher licensure programs have a right to approach the Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) if a student's complaint is not resolved through the formal or informal processes. The MN PELSB, upon the request of a postsecondary student preparing for teacher licensure or a licensed graduate of a teacher preparation program, shall assist in resolving a dispute between the person and a postsecondary institution providing a teacher preparation program when the dispute involves an institution's recommendation for licensure affecting the person or the person's credentials.

See the [CEHD Office of Teacher Education Teaching Handbook](#) for more information.



## Charges of Personnel in Academic Complaint Resolution Process

**CEHD Dean Jean Quam:** Appoints the Associate Deans to preside as co-chairs of the Student Scholastic Standing Committee. Makes final CEHD decision in the formal resolution hearing process.

**Associate Dean of Graduate Education, Deborah Dillon:** Associate Dean Dillon will receive complaints from graduate students when an informal resolution within the department has not been reached, and will attempt to reach resolution with the parties. If informal resolution is still not reached, Associate Dean Dillon will appoint an Academic Complaint Officer to proceed to a hearing.

**Associate Dean of Undergraduate Education, Michael Rodriguez:** Associate Dean Rodriguez will receive complaints from undergraduate students when an informal resolution within the department has not been reached, and will attempt to reach resolution with the parties. If informal resolution is still not reached, Associate Dean Rodriguez will appoint an Academic Complaint Officer to proceed to a hearing.

**Academic Complaint Officer:** Faculty member appointed by the Associate Deans as needed when informal resolution is not reached. The Academic Complaint Officer will set the hearing panel and preside as Chair of the panel.

**Hearing Panel:** Chaired by the Academic Complaint Officer. Panel members will be selected by the Academic Complaint Officer from the Curriculum Council, and/or other faculty, staff, and students.