



## Official Policy

Division or Sector:	Academic
Responsibility:	Academic Dean
Policy Number:	7210-8

Title: Student Academic Complaints

**PURPOSE:** To provide a fair and expeditious hearing for students' academic complaints. To encourage a student to seek mediation of an academic complaint through the appropriate mediation committee as this is most likely to effect a solution satisfactory to both parties.

**NOTE:** This policy in no way limits the College's right to act in situations where immediate intervention is necessary in a manner consistent with the rights and protection accorded to faculty members under the collective agreement.

**DEFINITION:** Complaints may relate to any and all academic concerns about the teaching and learning experience. Typical complaints covered by this policy may include (but are not limited to) the following:

1. Teacher behaviour that does not encourage a positive teaching-learning environment.
2. Course outlines not being followed throughout the course.

**Not covered by this policy** are complaints relating to Discrimination and Harassment, Zero Tolerance, Grades Review, or breaches of a teachers contractual obligations, which should be reported to the Faculty Deans.

### STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES:

1. Students have the right to a fair and expeditious hearing of their academic complaints.
2. Students are encouraged to approach the teacher with whom they have the problem, before seeking help from any outside persons or bodies. Wherever possible, this discussion between teacher and student should always be the first step.
3. Mediation is an effective means to address many academic complaints and interpersonal concerns. encouraged to attempt mediation to resolve their academic complaints.
4. Mediation Committees are available to all students. The College provides for the existence of two types of Mediation Committees: Departmental and Faculty. Departments are encouraged to establish their own department mediation committee. Faculty-based mediation

Revised  New

Date Effective: June 21, 2002

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committees will be established by the Deans in consultation with the Faculty to mediate where there is no departmental mediation committee, and for departments who choose to use the Faculty committees. The composition of any Student-Faculty Mediation Committee (SFMC) is two teachers and two students. The SFMC is chaired by a teacher. For the purposes of courses in Continuing Education, the day-time Department or Faculty Mediation Committees will be used as much as possible: the Academic Coordinator of Continuing Education is responsible for ensuring that there is a Faculty Mediation Committee available during Summer School.

5. The teacher against whom the complaint is made has the choice to participate in the mediation process. The teacher who agrees to participate in the mediation process has the choice of having the complaint heard by the Department mediation committee (if it exists) or by the Faculty mediation committee.
6. The confidentiality of both parties must be respected by all individuals involved in the resolution of the complaint. Confidentiality must be distinguished from anonymity. One of the requirements of natural justice is that an individual accused of an offense be informed of the allegations and the identity of the individual who is making the allegations.
7. For the purposes of this policy, the Academic Coordinator of Continuing Education and of Summer School shall be considered equivalent to Faculty Deans.

#### **PROCEDURES:**

##### **1. A. INFORMAL PROCEDURE:**

- 1.1. A student should identify his/her problem to the teacher, and there should be an attempt to resolve the problem informally between them.
- 1.2. In cases where a student approaches someone other than his/her teacher (for instance the department coordinator, the student advocate, or Faculty Dean) then that person will emphasize the importance of #1.1. and inform the student how to contact a member of the SFMC.
- 1.3. If the student has seen his/her teacher or is unwilling to do so, then the student may approach any member of the SFMC.
- 1.4. The student should be informed at this point that (s)he can request informal mediation from any member of the SFMC or formal mediation.

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- 1.5. The committee member must inform the chairperson of the SFMC that informal mediation is taking place.
- 1.6. During this informal mediation the student should be willing to be identified to the teacher.
- 1.7. If an informal resolution is reached to the satisfaction of both parties, a formal SFMC meeting will not be called.

## 2. B. FORMAL MEDIATION

- 2.1. If an informal resolution is not reached, a complainant may request formal mediation. The request for formal mediation can be made to any member of the Mediation Committee and must be in writing, signed, dated and specifically outlining the nature of the problem. The member will pass the request to the chairperson of the committee.
- 2.2. Complaints are normally resolved in the semester in which they occur (For AEC and Summer School courses, the dates will be determined according to the start and end days).
  - a. Complaints must be made before the mid-term date of the semester following the problem, and
  - b. if a student wishes to have a complaint from the winter semester processed before the start of summer holidays for faculty, the complaint must be received by June 1st of that calendar year.
- 2.3. The acting Chairperson shall select a time and place for the first meeting and notify in writing all parties involved at least 48 hours in advance. This notice should inform both parties of their rights.
- 2.4. This first meeting will be held within 10 school days of the submission of the complaint.
- 2.5. Any member of the committee who has a personal interest is required to step down from the meeting. At such time, an alternate will be requested from the faculty.
- 2.6. The meeting must be held in a neutral place (e.g., a classroom).  
Both parties have the right to bring someone from within the College community to help them present their case and, if need be, speak on their behalf.  
Both parties have the right to present any witness and/or written material that they feel supports their case. Witnesses will be called one at a time and be asked to wait outside the hearing until called by the Committee.

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Both parties have the right to be present when information is being presented about the problem. If the complaint is made by more than two individuals then the group appoints one or two individuals as spokesperson(s) on their behalf.

3. The committee shall determine the extent and nature of the problem and the validity of the complaint. If the majority of the SFMC considers that there is a successful resolution to the problem, then they will make verbal recommendations only to the concerned parties and the case will be considered closed. Such recommendations will be made within 10 school days of the first meeting. Specific reports will be kept within the committee and destroyed after the end of the year.
4. In cases where:
  - the SFMC does not follow procedure
  - the SFMC cannot resolve the problem
  - one of the parties does not accept the recommendations of the SFMC
  - the same problem which was resolved by the SFMC reoccurs within the same semester, the student may then make a formal complaint to the appropriate Faculty Dean.
5. The Faculty Dean will investigate formal complaints including, as part of the investigation, discussion with both parties, the Department Coordinator, and the Chair of the mediation committee. The Faculty Dean will attempt to ascertain, among other things, the following:
  - whether a successful resolution to the problem has been reached as determined by the SFMC and accepted by the parties concerned;
  - whether the nature of the problem presented to the Dean was the same as the one heard by the SFMC;
  - whether there was a recurrence within the semester of the same problem originally resolved by the SFMC.

The Faculty Dean will then take appropriate action. The parties will be informed in writing of the outcome of the investigation within 10 school days.

6. At the end of each academic year the SFMC will submit to the Coordinator an annual report listing the number of cases handled.
7. All mediation committees must be struck by September 15 (by June 15 for the purposes of Summer School). The Faculty Deans will forward the composition of the departmental and



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Faculty committees to the Academic Dean, Student Services, the Student Advocate, the VCTA and the Academic Officer of the VCSA.

### **APPEAL:**

The student may appeal the actions of the Faculty Dean. Such an appeal is made in writing to the Academic Dean. Appeals must be submitted to the Academic Dean within 10 working days of the Faculty Dean's decision.

### **PUBLICITY:**

It is the responsibility of the Academic Dean to inform the students of this policy. It is the department 's/Dean 's responsibility to ensure that a list of the names of the Department/ Faculty SFMC members are posted in areas that are readily accessible to students.

**Note:** For the purposes of this procedure, a school day is any non-holiday, within the period of teacher availability.