

ROCKINGHAM COMMUNITY COLLEGE

STUDENT GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

What is the Student Grievance Procedure?

The Student Grievance Procedure is made available to all students who seek to resolve various academic and/or non-academic written grievances or complaints against College faculty, staff, other students, or other employees. On occasion, a student's complaint is such that it may be resolved informally without the use of the procedure. However, if resolution cannot be achieved informally, and a student seeks a formal resolution, the procedure requires the student to confirm the complaint or grievance in writing as a means of seeking resolution. Formal complaints or grievance require that the issue be addressed in writing.

Where Is Information Located About the Student Grievance Procedure?

The procedure is provided in detail in the College's Student Handbook. The procedure is referenced in the College's Catalog. Information is also found on the College's web site, which may be accessed at www.rockinghamcc.edu. The document you are now reading is also available in printed form in the Student Development Division offices in the Whitcomb Student Center.

What If I'm Not Sure About Using the Procedure?

Students are welcomed and invited to seek assistance regarding the procedure by speaking with the Vice President for Student Development or a member of the Counseling Services staff. These persons will be happy to review the procedure with you and help you determine the best approach for seeking a resolution to your issue.

What Does This Document Include?

The attached document explains in complete detail the procedure to be followed for academic and non-academic complaints or grievances. There is also included a form that is to be completed for each type of grievance. Be sure that you complete the form that is most appropriate for the type of issue you seek to address. This form, and a letter that must be attached to it, are to be submitted to the Vice President for Student Development, whose office initiates the administrative process for your concern to be reviewed.

You will note that the procedures for academic and non-academic grievances each have a set of increasing levels of review, depending upon your desire to move the process to higher levels based upon the outcome of a lower level of appeal and review. Each procedure also has a specified time period within which you must initiate an appeal if you seek to have a complaint or grievance formally reviewed.

Please review the procedures carefully and ask questions as needed to be sure you understand the process.

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The purpose of the Student Grievance Procedure is to provide a means by which students may seek to resolve academic and non-academic complaints against College faculty, staff, or other employees. Procedures for both categories of grievances appear below.

Procedure for Academic Grievances

An academic grievance is a dispute related to an academic matter within a learning activity, course, or program of study pertaining to both credit and non-credit courses or programs. For example, an academic grievance may pertain to procedures such as instructor-initiated withdrawals for violations of course policies or requirements as contained in the instructor's course syllabus, a dispute of academic dishonesty, instructor's requirements, or academic requirements of specific programs of study.

A student seeking to appeal a final course grade must follow the grade appeal policy that appears in the current edition of the *RCC Catalog*.

The academic grievance procedure is based on the premise that informal resolution initiated by the student is the preferred outcome. If such resolution cannot be attained or if the student feels that an initial informal meeting with the instructor is not possible due to the nature of the concern, then the procedure will begin at Step 1 of the appeal procedure as outlined below.

In the following procedures, 'class days' are understood to follow a Monday through Friday sequence.

Grievance Procedure

A student seeking to appeal an academic matter related to a program of study (such as dismissal from an academic program) begins the process with at Step 1 of the appeal procedure (with the dean of the division in which the program is offered).

In the case of a grievance related to a course, the student must contact the instructor who made the decision and request a face-to-face meeting to discuss the concern. The student will initiate the contact in person, by telephone, or through the College email system within three (3) class days of the date on which the alleged issue occurred or was brought to the student's attention by the instructor.

The instructor must arrange a meeting with the student to be held within five (5) class days of the receipt of the student's request. The instructor will listen to the entirety of the student's concern and consider if a change of decision is warranted.

Within two (2) class days of reaching a decision, the instructor will communicate the decision to the student in writing and provide a copy to the dean of the instructor's division.

If there is no resolution of the grievance with the instructor, the student may initiate the appeal procedure at Step 1.

Appeal Procedure

Step 1 - Appeal to the Division Dean

If the concern was not resolved by the instructor (or, if the student was dismissed from a program of study), and the student seeks to pursue the matter further, the student must appeal the matter to the dean of the division.

The student will complete the Student Grievance Appeal Form available from the Office of Student Development and the academic division offices, attaching a letter that clearly addresses:

- The student's specific concerns
- The date on which the student met with the instructor to seek resolution of the issue (if the student did not meet with the instructor, the student must explain the circumstances in the letter)
- The result of the discussion with the instructor
- The outcome that the student seeks

The student must submit the original Student Grievance Appeal Form and letter to the Vice President for Student Development within three (3) class days of the date on which the student learned of the instructor's decision or the decision regarding dismissal from a program of study. The form and letter will be processed and delivered immediately to the respective division dean by the Student Development Office.

The dean will contact the student immediately to establish a meeting with the student, to be held no later than five (5) class days after contacting the student. At this meeting, the dean will discuss with the student the concerns related to the appeal. The dean will have access to all information involved in the previous step of the procedure.

The dean will communicate a decision to the student, in writing, within two (2) class days of the date of the meeting. A copy of the communication will be provided to the instructor (as applicable) and Vice President for Academic Affairs.

Step 2 - Appeal to the Vice President for Academic Affairs

If the concern is not resolved by the dean of the division, the student may appeal to the Vice President for Academic Affairs. The student must submit a copy of the original Student Grievance Appeal Form and letter, along with a cover letter describing the process that has occurred to date, within three (3) class days of the date on which the student learned of the dean's decision. The form and letter must be submitted to the Vice President for Student Development within the time frame noted. The form and letter will be processed and delivered immediately to the Vice President for Academic Affairs by the Student Development Office.

The Vice President for Academic Affairs will contact the student immediately to establish a meeting with the student. The meeting will be held no later than five (5) class days after contacting the student. At this meeting, the Vice President will discuss with the student the concerns related to the appeal. The Vice President will have access to all information involved in the prior steps of the procedure and may invite other persons who participated in the prior steps to attend the meeting with the student.

The Vice President will communicate a decision to the student, in writing, within two (2) class days of the date of the meeting. A copy of the communication will be provided to the instructor (as applicable) and dean of the division.

The decision of the Vice President for Academic Affairs is final.

Procedure for Non-Academic Grievances

A non-academic grievance is one that normally does not specifically pertain to academic issues. Examples of non-academic grievances include complaints by students that they have been treated unfairly in violation of students' rights that are listed in the *College Catalog* and *Student Handbook*; discrimination on the basis of age, sex, race, ethnicity, religious belief, national origin, disability, or other conditions or preferences; claims of sexual harassment by another student or College employee; or claims that a sanction or decision imposed as a result of a disciplinary infraction is unreasonable, unfair, excessive, or not in keeping with the sanctions prescribed in the Code of Conduct.

Similar to the procedure for academic grievances, the procedure for non-academic grievances is based on the premise that informal resolution of a grievance initiated by the student is the preferred outcome. If such resolution cannot be attained in this way, or if the student feels that an initial informal meeting with the person against whom the grievance is filed is not possible due to the nature of the concern, then student will follow the Grievance Procedure listed below.

A student seeking to appeal a sanction or similar decision related to a disciplinary matter begins the process at Step 1 of the appeal procedure for non-academic grievances.

If the grievance pertains to a claim of sexual harassment, the student may first contact the Vice President for Student Development rather than the offending person, to begin the Grievance Procedure.

The time periods shown for each phase of the process acknowledge the desire to provide ample time for the student to respond as well as the fact that timing of students' and others' weekly schedules will vary. In some cases at higher levels of appeal, personal schedules may necessitate an adjustment in the time frame for hearings and notifications, with the understanding that every effort will be made administratively to expedite the process.. In the following procedures, 'class days' are understood to follow a Monday through Friday sequence.

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In the case of a non-academic grievance toward another student or College employee, if the matter cannot be resolved informally as initiated by the student, the student filing the grievance must contact the Vice President for Student Development within five (5) class days of the date on which the alleged issue occurred that resulted in the student's concern. This contact may be initiated in person, by telephone, or through the College email system. The student will then complete the Student Grievance Appeal Form, available from the Office of Student Development office, attaching a letter that clearly addresses:

- The student's specific concerns and date on which the incident giving rise to the grievance occurred,
- The date on which the student sought to resolve the issue (if the student did not meet with the offending student or College employee, the student must explain the circumstances in the letter), and
- The outcome that the student seeks.

The Student Grievance Appeal Form and letter must be submitted to the Vice President for Student Development within the time period noted above.

The Vice President for Student Development will arrange a meeting with the student to be held within five (5) class days of the receipt of the student's grievance appeal form. The Vice President will endeavor to arrange this meeting as quickly as possible and will listen to the entirety of the student's concern and determine the course of action to be taken in resolving the matter. In seeking a satisfactory resolution of the grievance, the Vice President for Student Development may include in this meeting the individual against whom the grievance was filed. Within three (3) class days of this meeting, the Vice President for Student Development will communicate a decision to the student in writing.

Appeal Procedure

Step 1 - Appeal to the College Appeals Committee

A. For a Concern Not Resolved in the Grievance Procedure

If the concern was not resolved by the Vice President for Student Development and the student seeks to pursue the matter further, the student may request a hearing before the College Appeals Committee.

The student must submit a copy of the original Student Grievance Appeal Form, along with a letter that describes the process that has occurred to date and that clearly addresses:

- The student's specific concerns related to the decision, and
- The outcome that the student seeks.

The student must submit the Student Grievance Appeal Form and letter to the Vice President for Student Development within three (3) class days of the date on which the student learned of the Vice President's decision.

B. For an Appeal of a Sanction or Decision Related to a Disciplinary Matter

A student seeking to appeal a sanction or similar decision related to a disciplinary matter may request a hearing before the College Appeals Committee.

The student must complete the Student Grievance Appeal Form available from the Office of Student Development office, attaching a letter that clearly addresses:

- The student's specific concerns related to the disciplinary sanction or decision, and
- The outcome that the student seeks.

The student must submit the original Student Grievance Appeal Form and letter to the Vice President for Student Development within three (3) class days of the date on which the sanction or decision was imposed upon the student.

(For either A or B above: The student's appeal is submitted to the Vice President for Student Development, who then forwards the appeal to Appeals Committee for its consideration.)

The Appeals Committee will be comprised of five persons appointed annually by the President of the College. These are two faculty members; two staff members; and the President of the Student Government Association. If the President of the Student Government Association is unavailable due to timing of the appeal at any point during the year, the President may appoint either another student or a member of the College faculty or staff. Any member of the Appeals Committee who has a conflict of interest in the student's appeal, or is unable to participate for any reason in a hearing, will be excused and a substitute appointed by the President.

The Appeals Committee will endeavor to review within five (5) class days of receipt of the student's grievance the student's letter and all information pertinent to this matter, and determine a meeting date and time for a hearing with the student. The Committee chairperson will notify the Vice President for Student Development, who will then inform the student who filed the grievance appeal of the date, time, and location of the hearing. The student will also be provided with the procedures to be used during the hearing. The Appeals Committee may invite may invite other persons who participated in the prior steps to attend the meeting with the student.

Upon completing the hearing, the Appeals Committee must render a decision within five (5) class days of the hearing. A copy of the Committee's decision will be provided in writing to the student and the Vice President for Student Development.

Step 2 -Appeal to the President of the College

The student may appeal the decision of the Appeals Committee to the President of the College. The student must submit a copy of the original Student Grievance Appeal Form, along with a letter describing the process that has occurred to date, and that clearly addresses:

- The student's specific concerns related to the disciplinary sanction or decision, and
- The student's disagreement with the Appeals Committee's decision, and
- The outcome that the student seeks.

This letter must be delivered to the President's office within three (3) class days of the date on which the student learned of the Appeals Committee's decision.

The President will endeavor to review within five (5) class days of receipt of the student's grievance the student's letter and all information pertinent to this matter. The President will have access to the information related to all prior levels of review and appeal. The President at his or her discretion may execute either of the following actions:

- *Hold a hearing with the student*, and may invite other persons who participated in the prior review process to attend the hearing. If the President elects to hold a hearing, the President will contact the student and others to be involved in the hearing no later than three (3) class days from the date of decision to hold the hearing. The hearing must be held within five (5) class days of notification to the various parties.
- *Remand the case to the College Appeals Committee for review and/or re-hearing* if the President determined that procedural errors occurred at any level of previous review so as to affect the process of review; or if information deemed pertinent to the case was erroneously or incorrectly excluded from consideration; or if new information not available at prior levels of review is now available so as to merit consideration. If the case is remanded to the College Appeals Committee, the Committee shall schedule another review and hearing as quickly as possible after notification by the President, and shall render a decision based upon the factors leading to remand of the case to the Committee. An appeal of the Committee's decision in a second hearing or review may be appealed to the President following the procedure for appeal of an Appeals Committee decision

After a complete review of the matter (with or without a hearing), the President may uphold or overturn the decision of the College Appeals Committee. The President will communicate a decision to the student, in writing, within five (5) class days of the President's completion of review. A copy of the communication will be provided to the Vice President for Student Development and chairperson of the College Appeals Committee.

The appeal process concludes at the President's level (unless the President remands the case to the Appeals Committee and the Committee renders a subsequent decision).

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Non-Ac Orig 07/28/10; Rev 08/2012

*Title Change in Academic Grievance Procedure:
VP for Instruction changed to VP for Academic Affairs 07/2012*

*Clarification in Non-Academic Grievance Procedure:
Clarification on Membership of College Appeals Committee 12/2013*

*Modification to language in the procedure for Academic Grievances:
Approved by President's Cabinet 02/2014*