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**POLICY TITLE:**

**Student Complaints**

**APPLIES TO:**

**Students**

**ADMINISTRATIVE AUTHORITY:**

**Office of the Vice Provost of Student Affairs**

**APPROVED BY:**

**Kentucky State University Board of Regents**

**EFFECTIVE DATE:**

**August 8, 2025**

**NEXT REVIEW DATE:**

**August 8, 2028**

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**POLICY STATEMENT:**

Kentucky State University (KSU) is committed to providing a high-quality educational experience and a supporting campus environment for all students. KSU recognizes that students may occasionally have complaints or grievances regarding aspects of their university experience. This policy provides a clear, fair, and timely process for students to voice and seek resolution for such complaints.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Establish a transparent and accessible system for submitting and addressing student complaints.
- Ensure that complaints are handled respectfully, impartially, and in a timely manner.
- Provide a formal process when informal resolution is not possible or appropriate.
- Protect students from retaliation for filing a complaint in good faith.

- Utilize feedback from complaints to contribute to the continuous improvement of KSU programs, services, and processes.

## SCOPE:

This policy applies to a broad range of student complaints concerning KSU academic and non-academic services, programs, administrative actions, or interactions with KSU employees (faculty and staff acting within the scope of their KSU employment).

Examples of complaints that may be covered under this policy include, but are not limited to:

- Dissatisfaction with KSU services or facilities.
- Concerns about administrative processes or decisions not covered by other specific policies.
- Alleged unprofessional conduct by a KSU employee not rising to the level of discrimination or harassment (which have specific policies).
- Concerns related to academic matters not covered by a formal grade appeal or academic integrity policy (e.g., perceived unfair treatment by an instructor unrelated to a grade, issues with course delivery, or resources not meeting stated descriptions after attempts at direct resolution with the instructor/department have been made).

This policy does NOT apply to the following types of complaints, which may be addressed under separate, specific KSU policies and procedures:

- Grade appeals.
- Academic integrity violations.
- Discrimination, harassment, or retaliation based on protected status.
- Sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, and other Title IX-related concerns.
- Student conduct violations.
- Disability accommodations.
- Financial aid appeals.
- Admissions decisions.
- Traffic and parking citations.

- Complaints against other KSU students.
- Complaints regarding external entities or individuals not employed by KSU (unless related to a KSU-affiliated program or activity).

Students are encouraged to consult with the Office of Student Affairs if they are unsure which policy or procedure applies to their specific concern.

## **DEFINITIONS:**

### **Business Days**

Days when KSU is open for official business, excluding weekends and official KSU holidays.

### **Complainant**

A KSU student who files a complaint under this policy.

### **Complaint**

A written expression of dissatisfaction or concern by a student regarding KSU services, facilities, administrative actions, or the conduct of KSU employees, for which a remedy is sought and which falls under the scope of this policy.

### **Complaint Facilitator/Administrator**

A KSU official within Student Affairs responsible for receiving formal complaints, guiding students, through the process, ensuring adherence to policy timelines, and maintaining records.

### **Formal Complaint**

A written complaint submitted in accordance with the procedures outlined in this policy when informal resolution is unsuccessful, inappropriate, or the complainant chooses to proceed formally.

### **Informal Resolution**

A voluntary process of discussing a complaint with the individual(s) or office(s) directly involved to reach a mutually agreeable solution without initiating a formal complaint.

### **Preponderance of the Evidence**

The standard of proof used in resolving complaints. It means that it is “more likely than not” that the alleged conduct or issue occurred or that the facts support a particular finding.

### **Retaliation**

Any adverse action taken against an individual for making a complaint in good faith, testifying, assisting, or participating in any manner in an investigation or resolution of a complaint under this policy.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES:**

- **Fairness and Impartiality.** All complaints will be reviewed and addressed in an objective, fair, and impartial

manner. Complainants and respondents will have an opportunity to present their perspectives.

- **Timeliness.** KSU will strive to address and resolve complaints within the timelines established in this policy, recognizing that complex cases may require additional time. All parties will be kept apprised of the progress and any delays.
- **Confidentiality and Privacy.** Information related to a complaint will be handled with discretion and shared only with those who have a legitimate need to know in order to investigate and resolve the complaint, or as required by law (e.g., FERPA).
- **Non-Retaliation.** KSU strictly prohibits retaliation against any student who files a complaint in good faith or participates in the complaint resolution process. Allegations of retaliation will be investigated separately and may result in disciplinary action.
- **Accessibility.** Information about this policy and the complaint process will be readily available to all students. Accommodations will be provided for students with disabilities to ensure equal access to the complaint process.
- **Constructive Approach.** The process is intended to be constructive, seeking resolutions that are fair and, where appropriate, contribute to institutional improvement.

## STUDENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

### Rights of Students:

- To be treated with respect and courtesy by KSU officials.
- To receive clear information about the complaint procedures and timeliness.
- To file a complaint without fear of retaliation.
- To receive a timely response to their complaint.
- To be informed of the outcome of their complaint and the basis for the decision.
- To appeal a decision in accordance with the appeals process outlined in this policy.
- To be accompanied by an advisor (e.g., a fellow student, faculty member, or staff member not acting in a legal capacity) during formal complaint meetings, if desired. The advisor's role is to support the student, not to speak on their behalf or to disrupt proceedings.

### Responsibilities of Students:

- To make a good-faith effort to resolve concerns informally, where appropriate.

- To submit formal complaints in writing with as much specific information and supporting documentation as possible.
- To provide accurate and truthful information.
- To participate cooperatively in the complaint process.
- To adhere to the timelines and procedures outlined in this policy.
- To maintain appropriate confidentiality throughout the process.

## **PROCESS:**

### **Informal Resolutions (Strongly Encouraged)**

- Students are strongly encouraged to first attempt to resolve their complaint informally by directly communicating with the individual(s) involved (e.g., faculty member, staff member, department head) or the office/department where the issue arose.
- This direct communication should occur as soon as possible after the event or issue giving rise to the complaint.
- Students may seek advice from a trusted faculty member, advisor, or the complaint facilitator/administrator on how to approach informal resolution.
- If a mutually satisfactory resolution is reached, the matter is considered closed. Documentation of informal resolution is advisable for personal records but not typically submitted formally unless required by a specific department.
- If informal resolution is unsuccessful, inappropriate (e.g., due to fear of reprisal, seriousness of the issue), or the student is uncomfortable with this approach, the student may proceed to file a formal complaint.

### **Formal Complaint Process**

#### **Submission of Formal Complaint:**

- If informal resolution is not achieved or is deemed inappropriate, a student may file a formal written complaint.
- Formal complaints should be submitted to the Vice Provost for Student Affairs or designee. The Vice Provost or designee will assign an appropriate complaint facilitator/administrator.
- The complaint should be filed as soon as possible after the event giving rise to the complaint, and generally no later than fifteen (15) business days after the incident or after conclusion of attempts at informal resolution. Exceptions to this timeframe may be granted by the complaint facilitator/administrator for good cause.

- The written complaint should include, at a minimum:
  - Complainant's name, student ID number, and contact information.
  - Date of submission.
  - A clear and concise statement of the complaint, including specific facts, dates, times, and locations.
  - Name(s) of the individual(s) (if applicable) and their department/role.
  - Any supporting documentation (e.g., emails, photographs).
  - A description of any steps already taken to resolve the issue informally and the outcome.
  - The specific resolution or remedy sought by the student.
  - The complainant's signature (or electronic equivalent).

#### **Acknowledgement and Initial Review:**

- The complaint facilitator/administrator will acknowledge receipt of the formal complaint in writing (typically via KSU email) within five (5) business days.
- The complaint facilitator/administrator will conduct an initial review to:
  - Determine if the complaint falls within the scope of this policy.
  - Identify if it should be redirected to another office or policy. If redirected, the student will be notified.
  - Assess if the complaint contains all necessary information; further information may be requested from the complainant.
  - Assign the complaint to an appropriate KSU official or committee for investigation and/or resolution. This will often be the supervisor of the employee/unit involved, or a higher-level administrator if the complaint is against a department head.

#### **Investigation and Fact-Finding:**

- The investigating official/body will conduct a fair and impartial investigation of the complaint. This may involve:
  - Interviewing the complainant.
  - Notifying the respondent(s) of the complaint (providing a summary or copy, as appropriate) and providing them an opportunity to respond in writing and/or verbally.
  - Interviewing the respondent(s).

- Interviewing relevant witnesses, if any.
- Reviewing relevant documents and KSU policies.
- The investigation should typically be completed within thirty (30) business days from the date the complaint was assigned for investigation. Complex cases may require more time, and the complainant and respondent will be notified of any extensions.
- A record of the investigation will be maintained.

#### **Decision and Notification of Outcome:**

- Following the investigation (or review of information if a full investigation is not required), the investigating official/body (or a designated decision-maker based on the investigation report) will make a determination based on a preponderance of the evidence.
- A written decision, including the findings, rationale, and any corrective actions or remedies, will be issued to the complainant and, where appropriate, to the respondent(s) within ten (10) business days of the completion of the investigation.
- The notification will also outline the process and timeline for appealing the decision, if applicable.

#### **Specific Complaint Categories and Routing:**

- **Academic Complaints (non-grade, non-integrity)**
  - **Informal Resolution (Recommended First Steps).** Students should first attempt to resolve concerns regarding classroom instruction, course management, academic advising, or perceived unfair treatment by an instructor (unrelated to a grade) by communicating directly with the instructor. If unresolved, the student should then approach the relevant Department Chair, followed by the Dean of the College if the matter remains unresolved.
  - **Formal Complaint Routing.** If a formal complaint is filed with the Vice Provost for Student Affairs, the complaint facilitator/administrator, after initial review, will typically assign the complaint for investigation and resolution to:
    - The appropriate Department Chair (if the complaint involves an instructor and has not been reviewed at this level).
    - The Dean of the relevant college (if the complaint involves a Department Chair, or if it was not resolved at the Chair level).
    - The Office of the Provost (if the complaint involves a Dean, or if it was not resolved at the Dean level).
- **Administrative and University Service Complaints**

- **Informal Resolution (Recommended First Steps).** Students should first attempt to resolve complaints about a specific non-academic department or KSU service (e.g., Registrar, Bursar, Housing, IT, Library, Campus Safety) by communicating directly with the staff or management of that office or department.
- **Formal Complaint Routing.** If a formal complaint is filed with the Vice Provost of Student Affairs, the complaint facilitator/administrator, after initial review, will typically assign the complaint for investigation and resolution to:
  - The Director or Head of the specific department/unit providing the service.
  - The Vice President or other senior administrator overseeing that department/unit if the complaint involves the Director/Head or was not resolved at that level.
- **Complaints Regarding KSU Employee Conduct (Not Covered by Discrimination or Harassment Policies)**
  - **Informal Resolution (Recommended First Steps).** For complaints regarding alleged unprofessional conduct of a KSU staff or faculty member (acting in their KSU capacity and not related to discrimination or harassment), students are encouraged to discuss the concern directly with the employee, if comfortable doing so. If not, or if unresolved, the student should approach the employee's direct supervisor or Department Chair/Unit Director.
  - **Formal Complaint Routing.** If a formal complaint is filed with the Vice Provost of Student Affairs, the complaint facilitator/administrator, after initial review, will typically assign the complaint for investigation and resolution to:
    - The employee's direct supervisor or Department Chair/Unit Director.
    - A higher-level administrator or the Department of Human Resources (HR), if the complaint involves the direct supervisor/Department Chair/Unit Director and was not resolved at that level.

#### **Important Considerations for Routing:**

- The complaint facilitator/administrator will determine the most appropriate investigating official/body based on the nature of the complaint and KSU's organizational structure.
- In all cases, efforts will be made to ensure that the investigating official/body is impartial and that no conflict of interest exists.
- The routing process aims to address the complaint at the most appropriate administrative level capable of providing a thorough review and effective remedy.

#### **Appeals Process**

##### **Grounds for Appeal:**

The complainant or respondent (if directly affected by the outcome) may appeal the decision of a formal complaint under this policy only on the following grounds:



- Significant procedural error that demonstrably affected the outcome of the decision.
- New and substantial evidence that was not reasonably available at the time of the original investigation/decision and that could demonstrably affect the outcome.
- The sanctions or remedy imposed are substantially disproportionate to the findings. Disagreement with the findings or outcome alone is not a sufficient basis for appeal.

#### **Submission of Appeal:**

- A written appeal must be submitted to the President within five (5) business days of receiving the written decision.
- The appeal must state the specific grounds for appeal and provide supporting arguments and documentation.

#### **Appeal Review and Decision:**

- The President or their designee will review the appeal, the original complaint, the investigation record, and the decision. The review will focus solely on the stated grounds for appeal. The President or their designee does not typically re-investigate the complaint but may seek clarification. If the President decides to designate someone to conduct the appeal process, the designee must not have been involved in the original resolution process and must not possess a conflict of interest.
- The President or their designee may:
  - Uphold the original decision.
  - Overturn or modify the original decision.
  - Remand the case back to the original decision-maker or a new decision-maker for further review or action, with specific instructions.
- A written decision on the appeal will be issued to the party filing the appeal and the other party (complainant/respondent, as appropriate) within fifteen (15) business days of receiving the appeal.
- The decision of the President or their designee is final, and no further appeals are available within KSU under this policy.

#### **Record-Keeping and Reporting**

- The complaint facilitator/administrator's office will maintain confidential records of all formal complaints, investigations, resolutions, and appeals in accordance with KSU record retention policies and applicable laws (e.g., FERPA, Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives' State University Model Records Retention Schedule).
- Records will be maintained in a secure manner. Access to these records will be limited to KSU officials with a legitimate educational or administrative need to know.

- The complaint facilitator/administrator may prepare an annual anonymized summary report of complaint activity (types of complaints, resolutions, trends) for KSU leadership to identify systemic issues and opportunities for institutional improvement.

### **Protection Against Retaliation**

KSU strictly prohibits retaliation against any individual who, in good faith, files a complaint, provides information for an investigation, or otherwise participates in the complaint process under this policy. Any student who believes they have been subjected to retaliation should immediately report it to HR and/or the Office of General Counsel. Reports of retaliation will be investigated promptly, and appropriate action will be taken if retaliation is found to have occurred.

### **External Complaint Options**

Students are encouraged to exhaust all KSU complaint and appeal procedures before seeking external resolution. However, students have the right to file complaints with external agencies.

- **Accrediting Body.** Kentucky State University is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). Information on their complaint process against member institutions can be found on the SACSCOC website. Complaints to SACSCOC should relate to alleged non-compliance with accreditation standards.
- **State Authorizing Agency.** The Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) is the state agency responsible for coordinating higher education in Kentucky and has a process for addressing student complaints against public and private institutions.
- **U.S. Department of Education.** Students may contact the Department of Education for issues related to federal financial aid or civil rights.

## **REFERENCES AND RELATED MATERIALS:**

- KSU Academic Policies
- KSU Student Affairs Policies

## **CONTACTS:**

Subject	Office	Telephone	E-mail
Policy Questions	Student Affairs	(502) 597-6283	<a href="mailto:Stephanie.Mayberry@ksu.edu">Stephanie.Mayberry@ksu.edu</a>

## **HISTORY:**

Revision Type	Date of Issuance/Revision	Drafter(s)/Editor(s)
Issued (New Policy)	June 2025	Zach Atwell