

STUDENT COMPLAINTS AND GRIEVANCES

POLICY

Ridgewater College (hereinafter “the College”) acknowledges and adheres to the definitions and processes described in [Minnesota State Board Policy 3.8 - Student Complaints and Grievances](#) and [Minnesota State Procedure 3.8.1 - Student Complaints and Grievances](#).

These documents address a student’s right to seek a remedy for a dispute or disagreement through a designated complaint, grievance, or appeal process when no other designated process applies to the situation. The College encourages students to use available informal means to have decisions reconsidered before filing a complaint or grievance. No retaliation of any kind shall be taken against a student for participation or refusal to participate in a complaint or grievance. Complaints and grievance procedures are protected under data privacy rights.

History:
05.19.09 Adopted
01.19.2023 Proposed, Reviewed for Equity Compliance
05.14.2024 Revised

STUDENT COMPLAINTS AND GRIEVANCES**PROCEDURES**

DEFINITIONS:

Appeal: A request for reconsideration of a grievance decision under Policy 3.8 and Procedure 3.81.

Complaint: An oral or written claim concerning a college issue brought by a student alleging improper, unfair, or arbitrary treatment.

Grievance: A written claim raised by a student alleging improper, unfair, or arbitrary action by an employee involving the application of a specific provision of a college rule/regulation or a board policy or procedure. This policy does not apply to those college rules or regulations or to board policies or procedures that include an appeal or grievance process.

Retaliation: Retribution of any kind taken against a student for participating or refusing to participate in a complaint or grievance.

Student: An individual who is enrolled at the College, a group of such individuals, or the campus student government.

Working Days: Working days exclude Saturdays, Sundays, holidays and breaks in the academic calendar.

This policy/procedure does not apply to those college rules or regulations or to board policies or procedures that include an appeal or grievance process. Separate but complementary policies, procedures, and practices are used for other circumstances, such as:

1. Academic Petition – Used when a student wishes to petition for exception to academic standards or program requirements.
2. Discrimination and Harassment ([Minnesota State Board Policy 1B.1](#)) – Used when action that is of a discrimination or harassment nature is directed toward a member of a protected class as identified by law.
3. Grade Appeal ([Grade Appeal Policy](#)) – Used when a student wishes to appeal a final grade assigned by an individual faculty member.
4. Satisfactory Academic Progress – Used when a student wishes to appeal probation or suspension status.
5. Student Code of Conduct – Used when a student is alleged to have violated acceptable modes of academic and/or social conduct.

The College is part of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System of public two and four-year institutions of higher education designated by Minnesota Statutes Chapter 136F and governed by the Board of Trustees of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. The College is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). To file a complaint about the College with the HLC, contact the following:

Higher Learning Commission | 230 S. LaSalle Street, Suite 7-500 | Chicago, IL 60604-1413

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88 For a complaint or grievance involving a Board Policy, system procedure, the actions of the College
89 President, an issue of institutional or program quality such as the College's compliance with the standards
90 of an accrediting or licensing agency, or a claim of consumer fraud or deceptive trade practices, an appeal
91 may be made to the Office of the Chancellor pursuant to [Minnesota State Board Policy 3.8 - Student](#)
92 [Complaints and Grievances](#) and [Minnesota State Procedure 3.8.1 - Student Complaints and Grievances](#).
93 The decision of the Chancellor is final and binding. Contact information for the Office of the Chancellor is:

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95 Academic and Student Affairs
96 Office of the Chancellor
97 Wells Fargo Place
98 30 7th Street East, Suite 350
99 St. Paul, MN 55101-7804

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Complaints

101 To make or resolve a complaint:

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- 104 1. In an attempt to resolve a complaint, the student should first contact the faculty or staff member
105 with whom the complaint exists. For complaints in which it would be inappropriate to ask the
106 student to take this step, an alternate process must be made available.
- 107 2. Although it is not required that a complaint be written, the student is encouraged to put the
108 following in writing before arranging a meeting with the appropriate individual to discuss the
109 complaint: a) the reason for the complaint; b) factual summary of the complaint; and c) the remedy
110 sought.
- 111 3. If there is no agreement or resolution during the initial complaint process, the student may
112 schedule a time to discuss the complaint with the faculty or staff member's direct supervisor. If the
113 supervisor is not a dean or administrator, and the complaint was not resolved by the supervisor,
114 the student may bring the complaint to the appropriate dean or administrator. At this level, the
115 college may ask the student to submit a complaint and its detail in writing for purposes of follow-up
116 and required college recordkeeping.
- 117 4. The direct supervisor will review previous resolution steps, discuss the complaint with the student,
118 the faculty or staff member involved, and other appropriate individuals, and communicate an
119 answer to the student.
- 120 5. If there is no agreement or resolution during the meeting with the direct supervisor, the student
121 may seek resolution using the grievance process.

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Formal Complaint

123 To file or resolve a grievance:

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- 126 1. If a complaint is not satisfactorily resolved during the complaint process, and/or if the complaint
127 addresses a violation of a specific policy, procedure, or practice of the College or the Minnesota
128 State system, the student may file a written grievance to the appropriate Vice President

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- 131 2. College employees identified in the grievance shall receive copies of the grievance and any
132 supporting documentation. College employees may submit a written response to the grievance.
133 3. The appropriate Vice President will review the material submitted by the student to see if the
134 material constitutes a grievance. If the material does not constitute a grievance, the Vice President
135 will communicate in writing to the student and the involved college employees.
136 4. If the material does constitute a grievance, the Vice President shall conduct a thorough review and
137 provide a written statement of finding to the student and the involved college employees. The
138 response will include notification to the student of the opportunity for appeal to the College
139 President.
140 5. Any grievance that reaches this level will be considered a formal complaint.
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Appeal

142 A student may appeal the decision of a Vice President to the College President. The decision of the
143 College President is final and binding. The response of the College President will be in writing and sent to
144 the grievant. This is the final step in the appeal process.
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Time Limits for Complaints and Grievances

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- 147 • The initial complaint or grievance must be presented within twenty (20) working days after the
148 occurrence of the event giving rise to the complaint or grievance, or twenty (20) working days after
149 the student, through use of reasonable diligence, should have obtained knowledge of the
150 occurrence of the event giving rise to the complaint or grievance.
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 - 152 • All subsequent time limits (written response, appeal, final resolution, etc.) are limited to twenty (20)
153 working days.
 - 154 • By mutual agreement of the student and college personnel, time limits may be extended due to
155 extenuating circumstances approved by the appropriate dean or vice president. If a complaint or
156 grievance is not presented within the established limits, it shall be considered waived.
 - 157 • If a complaint or grievance is not appealed to the next step within the established time limits, it shall
158 be considered settled on the basis of the last answer.
 - 159 • If, after presentation at any step, a college staff member does not discuss and/or answer the
160 complaint or grievance with the student within the established time limits, the student may treat the
161 complaint or grievance as denied at that step and may appeal the complaint or grievance to the
162 next step.
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Retaliation

164 No retaliation of any kind shall be taken against a student for participating, or refusing to participate, in a
165 complaint or grievance process. Retaliation may be subject to action under appropriate student or
166 employee policies.
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Documentation and Review

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169 All formal complaints and their outcomes will be documented in the complaints summary spreadsheet
170 maintained by the Executive Assistant to the President. The Executive Team will lead reviews of
171 aggregated data and complaint themes at least annually for the purpose of systematic quality improvement.
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175 Miscellaneous

- 176 • Any student unsure of how to proceed or needing some guidance through this process is
177 encouraged to visit a college counselor located in the student service area on campus.
178 • Any student wanting to use an official college form for a written complaint can obtain a Student
179 Petition form in the student service area on campus or from the “student forms” section of the
180 college website.

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183 *History:*
184 *05.19.09 Adopted*
185 *01.24.12 Revised*
186 *01.19.2023 Proposed, Reviewed for Equity Compliance*
187 *05.14.2024 Revised*