

POLICY**STUDENT COMPLAINTS AND GRIEVANCES**

Ridgewater College acknowledges and adheres to the definitions and processes described in [MnSCU Board Policy 3.8 - Student Complaints and Grievances](#) and [MnSCU 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 or grievance procedure. Ridgewater 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 in a complaint or grievance. Complaints and grievance procedures are protected under data privacy rights.

History:

05.19.09 Adopted

PROCEDURES**STUDENT COMPLAINTS AND GRIEVANCES**

The complaint and grievance procedure is available for use if a student is alleging improper, unfair or arbitrary treatment by a Ridgewater College faculty or staff member. 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:

- Academic Petition – Used when a student wishes to petition for exception to academic standards or program requirements.
- Discrimination and Harassment (MnSCU 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.
- Grade Appeal – Used when a student wishes to appeal a grade received by an individual faculty member.
- Satisfactory Academic Progress – Used when a student wishes to appeal probation or suspension status.
- Student Code of Conduct – Used when a student is alleged to have violated acceptable modes of academic and/or social conduct.

Ridgewater College is part of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) 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. Ridgewater College is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (HLC). To file a complaint about Ridgewater College with the HLC, contact the following:

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

For a complaint or grievance involving a Board Policy, the actions of the College President, an issue of institutional or program quality such as the college's compliance with the standards of an accrediting or licensing agency, or a claim of consumer fraud or deceptive trade practices, an appeal may be made to the Office of the Chancellor pursuant to [MnSCU Board Policy 3.8 - Student Complaints and Grievances](#) and [MnSCU Procedure 3.8.1 - Student Complaints and Grievances](#). Contact information for the Office of the Chancellor is:

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

PROCEDURES**STUDENT COMPLAINTS AND GRIEVANCES, continued**Complaints

A complaint is an oral or written claim concerning a college issue brought by a student alleging improper, unfair or arbitrary treatment. Disagreement with an administrative decision or the outcome of an appeal of that decision is not a complaint unless it alleges improper, unfair or arbitrary treatment.

To make or resolve a complaint:

1. In an attempt to resolve a complaint, the student should first contact the faculty or staff member with whom the complaint exists.
2. Although it is not required that a complaint be written, the student is encouraged to put the following in writing before arranging a meeting with the appropriate individual to discuss the complaint: a) the reason for the complaint; b) factual summary of the complaint; and c) the remedy sought.
3. If there is no agreement or resolution during the initial complaint process, the student may schedule a time to discuss the complaint with the faculty or staff member's direct supervisor. At this level, the College may ask the student to submit a complaint and its detail in writing for purposes of follow-up and required College recordkeeping.
4. The direct supervisor will review previous resolution steps, discuss the complaint with the student, the faculty or staff member involved and other appropriate individuals, and communicate an answer to the student.
5. If there is no agreement or resolution during the meeting with the direct supervisor, the student may seek resolution using the grievance process.

Grievances

A grievance is 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 Ridgewater College or MnSCU policy or procedure. Disagreement with an administrative decision or the outcome of an appeal of that decision is not a grievance unless it alleges improper, unfair or arbitrary action.

To file or resolve a grievance:

1. If a complaint is not satisfactorily resolved during the complaint process, and/or if the complaint addresses a violation of a specific policy, procedure or practice of Ridgewater College or the MnSCU System, the student may file a written grievance through four steps, if necessary:
 - a) To the employee being grieved;
 - b) To the administrator to whom the employee reports; and
 - c) If the grievance involves a college policy or practice, to the College President. The decision of the President is final and binding.
 - d) If the grievance involves a board policy or the actions of the College President, a student may further appeal the college decision through the Office of the Chancellor. The decision of the Chancellor is final and binding.

PROCEDURES**STUDENT COMPLAINTS AND GRIEVANCES, continued**

2. Faculty and staff identified in the grievance shall receive copies of the grievance and any supporting documentation. Faculty and staff may submit a written response to the grievance.
3. The appropriate administrator will review the material submitted by the student to see if the material constitutes a grievance. If the material does not constitute a grievance, the administrator will communicate in writing to the student and the involved faculty or staff member.
4. If the material does constitute a grievance, the administrator shall conduct a thorough review and provide a written statement of finding to the student and the involved faculty or staff member.
5. If the grievance process does not resolve the grievance, the student may consider filing an appeal through the four steps listed above, if necessary.

Time Limits for Complaints and Grievances

- The initial complaint or grievance must be presented within twenty (20) business days after the first occurrence of the event giving rise to the complaint or grievance, or twenty (20) business days after the student, through use of reasonable diligence, should have obtained knowledge of the first occurrence of the event giving rise to the complaint or grievance.
- All subsequent time limits (written response, appeal, final resolution, etc.) are limited to ten (10) business days.
- By mutual agreement of the student and college personnel, time limits may be extended due to extenuating circumstances approved by the appropriate dean or vice president. If a complaint or grievance is not presented within the established limits, it shall be considered waived.
- If a complaint or grievance is not appealed to the next step within the established time limits, it shall be considered settled on the basis of the last answer.
- If, after presentation at any step, a college staff member does not discuss and/or answer the complaint or grievance with the student within the established time limits, the student may treat the complaint or grievance as denied at that step and may appeal the complaint or grievance to the next step.

Miscellaneous

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

History:

05.19.09 Adopted

01.24.12 Revised