

## 4.5

### Student complaints

The institution has adequate procedures for addressing written student complaints and is responsible for demonstrating that it follows those procedures when resolving student complaints. (See Commission policy "Complaint Procedures for the Commission or its Accredited Institutions.")

### Judgment

Compliant    Non-Compliant    Not Applicable

### Narrative

*Note: Text for all linked documents below can be increased/decreased for ease of reading by pressing your keyboard's Ctrl key while rotating the mouse wheel.*

Angelo State University (ASU) maintains a reasonable and well publicized set of policies and procedures for addressing complaints and appeals submitted by students. These policies and procedures are consistently followed and fairly administered when resolving student complaints, and ASU maintains a record of complaints received, as summarized below.

### **POLICIES AND PROCEDURES GOVERNING STUDENT COMPLAINTS**

ASU publishes policies governing various types of student grievances in the Student Handbook 2011–2012, which is available through the institutional website on the Student Life page or via the Quick Search box on the ASU home page.

### **General Student Grievance and Appeal Procedures**

ASU has established general student grievance and appeal procedures that are followed when students have complaints in areas that are not covered by other published policies, rules, and regulations of the university. Applicants for admission are also covered by this basic grievance process, which is a tiered process that allows for appeals. The grievance process begins with a discussion between the student and faculty member or employee involved in the action or condition giving rise to the grievance. If an agreeable solution is not found at this level, the student may appeal, working up the chain of command through the appropriate vice presidential division. The process ends with the university president, whose decision is final and binding on all parties (Student Handbook 2011–2012, pp. 44–46, see especially sections 4.5 and 5.1).

### **Grade Grievance Procedures**

Most often, grade grievances are resolved between the student and the faculty member. If, however, no resolution is reached at this level, the student may appeal the decision in accordance with the grade grievance procedures, which require the student to present a written statement and provide compelling evidence demonstrating why the grade should be changed. The Grade Grievance Procedures are defined in ASU OP 10.03, Grade Grievance and published in the Student Handbook 2011–2012 (pp. 8-9) and in the

ASU Undergraduate Catalog 2011–2012 (p. 323); all of these publications are available on the ASU website.

Grade grievances that are formalized as written complaints are maintained in the departmental or deans' offices, depending on where the complaint is received and resolved. An example of a resolved grade grievance accompanies this narrative.

### **Procedures Regarding Sexual or Racial Harassment**

The university does not tolerate incidents of racial or sexual harassment, and any student having complaints concerning perceived harassment is guided by the Procedures Regarding Sexual or Racial Harassment outlined in the Student Handbook 2011–2012 (p. 43).

### **Academic Honor Code and Disciplinary Procedures for Academic Dishonesty**

ASU has established an Academic Honor Code to describe expected academic behavior of both faculty and students. The code consists of an agreement between the student and the academic community to foster academic integrity, to value student educational goals, and to maintain the positive academic reputation of ASU. The Academic Honor Code includes definitions related to academic integrity and outlines disciplinary procedures for academic dishonesty (Student Handbook 2011–2012, pp. 23–28).

### **Code of Student Conduct and Campus Disciplinary Procedures**

As stated in the ASU Code of Student Conduct, each student is expected to act in a manner consistent with the university's functions as an educational institution. The code describes specific examples of misconduct or attempted misconduct for which students may be subject to disciplinary action (Student Handbook 2011–2012, pp. 29–32), and ASU has established campus disciplinary procedures, including disciplinary appeals procedures (Student Handbook 2011–2012, pp. 32–37), which are followed in cases of student misconduct.

### **Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures in the Residence Halls**

In addition, the office of Residential Programs has defined expectations for student conduct in the residence halls and outlined disciplinary procedures for incidents of student misconduct. These expectations and procedures are published in the Residence Hall Handbook (pp. 14–17), which is available on the Residential Programs page of the institutional website.

### **Distance Education and Complaints**

Students enrolled via Distance Education have the same access and responsibilities regarding complaints as students attending face to face classes at ASU, and the same policies and procedures apply.

## **RECORDS OF WRITTEN STUDENT COMPLAINTS**

Records concerning written student complaints and the outcomes of any appeals are generally maintained by the office responsible for resolving the complaint, as defined in the policies identified above. In addition, the Student Life Office maintains records of disciplinary proceedings and appeals, including those related to violations of academic integrity.

The Student Life Office also provides advice regarding the fair administration of university grievance procedures, and the Executive Director of Student Life has primary authority and responsibility for implementing student disciplinary procedures. The office handles a variety of student complaints and inquiries and is often a first point of contact for students who are upset about a university policy or about the behavior of a faculty or staff member. The office handles many inquiries via telephone or e-mail, and in-person meetings with the Executive Director are also scheduled based on student request. Often, the student is referred to the appropriate university office for final resolution. If the student's concern warrants following a formal university process, such as filing a grievance or a harassment complaint, the Executive Director explains to the student the particular procedures that will need to be followed. According to the ASU general student grievance policy, a formal grievance is filed only when "the student believes that there has been discrimination or an infraction, breach, or misinterpretation of applicable university policies, rules, and regulations" (Student Handbook 2011–2012, p. 45, Section 3.1). Following is a summary of the formal grievances and complaints received in the Student Life Office since 2004:

- **2011**—During the 2011 spring semester, a student filed a complaint about the manner in which his remedial English class was being taught. The student was the victim of a traumatic brain injury during the 2010 fall semester and had special needs upon his return to college. A resolution was reached with the student that allowed him to withdraw from the course without academic penalty. This was a satisfactory resolution for both the student and the faculty member.
- **2010–2011**—Late in the 2010 fall semester, a student filed a complaint with the Student Life Office alleging that she had been the victim of racial discrimination committed by an ASU faculty member. The Executive Director of Student Life led an investigation with the faculty member, the department head, the dean of the college, and other students in the class. Following an extensive review of all the available evidence, the Executive Director concluded that there was no evidence of racial discrimination on the part of the faculty member, and the student was informed of this decision in January 2011.
- **2010–2011**—Late in the 2010 fall semester, a student was accused of academic dishonesty in an accounting class. In the intervening time between the accusation and the case going to the academic integrity committee, issues arose which led the Executive Director of Student Life to consult directly with the academic department. A satisfactory resolution was reached, which imposed an academic penalty on the student but did not require the case to be heard by the academic integrity committee. All parties involved found this to be an acceptable and satisfactory outcome. The final resolution of this case occurred during the 2011 spring semester.
- **2009**—In 2009, a female student came to the Student Life Office to file a complaint alleging that she had been sexually assaulted by a current ASU student in Austin, Texas. The Executive Director of Student Life worked with the student and her family in the initial stages of the investigation and involved members from the ASU Police Department and counseling services. The Executive Director conducted interviews with associates of the individuals involved and with the alleged offender to

obtain as much information as possible. When the Executive Director confronted the complaining student about information that had been obtained that cast doubt on her version of events, she became very defensive and walked out of the meeting. Another meeting was scheduled for which she failed to appear. Subsequently, the Executive Director sent her a notice giving her a deadline for continuing discussions. She did not respond to the letter and the Executive Director concluded that she had abandoned her complaint.

- **2008**—No formal grievances received.
- **2007**—In 2007, three students filed a sexual harassment complaint against a member of the faculty. Statements were taken from all three students. Each student was interviewed and found to be credible. After all three reports were compiled, a meeting was held among the Associate Dean for Student Services (now Executive Director of Student Life), the accused faculty member, the academic department head, and the dean of the academic college. The accused faculty member was informed of the nature of the meeting, provided a summary of the allegations against him, and told that there would be another meeting to discuss the specific allegations and to give him an opportunity to respond to the allegations. Subsequent to the initial meeting and before the next meeting, the faculty member resigned from the university. The students were informed of the resignation and were relieved with the outcome.
- **2007**—A student filed a complaint against a faculty member and sought a refund of his tuition for the course. The student did not follow any of the formal university procedures, and the basis for his complaint was not fully clear. Nonetheless, the Dean of Student Life tried to mediate the case and involved the academic department head, the vice president for finance and administration, the provost and vice president for academic and student affairs, and the executive assistant to the president. The student's request for a refund of his tuition was denied at all levels.
- **2006**—In 2006, the Dean of Student Life received a complaint from a student regarding her dismissal from the nursing program. Although this was a purely academic matter, the student came to the Dean of Student Life for assistance, and the dean served as a contact point between the student and the nursing faculty. After considerable correspondence on both sides, the student's dismissal from the program was validated by convincing documented deficiencies.
- **2005**—No formal grievances received.
- **2004**—No formal grievances received.

Records of the above complaints are maintained in the Student Life Office.