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## 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

Angelo State University (ASU) is in compliance with Federal Requirement 4.5.

Angelo State University maintains a thorough and well publicized set of policies and procedures for addressing complaints and appeals submitted by students. The university can easily demonstrate compliance through the availability and use of these policies and procedures.

The basic procedure for handling student complaints and grievances is outlined in Appendix I ("Grievance and Appeal Procedures") of the [Student Handbook 2008\\_2009 \(Page 45\)](#). The process is a basic hierarchy that allows for appeals. It begins with a session between the student and faculty member or employee. If an agreeable solution is not possible, the student may appeal up the chain of command through the appropriate vice presidential division. The process ends with the university president.

Any student wishing to appeal a grade may do so following the "Grade Grievance Procedures." The process is outlined in Appendix II of the [Student Handbook 2008\\_2009 \(Page 48\)](#) and in the *Angelo State University Operating Policies & Procedures* [OP\\_10.03\\_Grade\\_Grievance](#).

Because the process starts and often ends with individual faculty members, it is difficult to get a total of grade grievances for the university. However, the following were interviewed by the director of Institutional Research and Assessment by phone. The provost's assistant reported, on average, getting no grievances a year. At the college level, the deans' assistants reported 0, between 0-5, 1-5, and 1-10 on average for a year. The head of Psychology, Sociology, and Social Work stated that he perhaps gets one grievance a year and estimated that his faculty get one each a year.

The university does not tolerate incidents of racial or sexual harassment. Any student having complaints concerning these perceived actions are guided by procedures outlined in sections 3.34 and 3.4 of the [Student Handbook 2008\\_2009 \(Page 44\)](#). Appendix III provides more details concerning procedures to address perceived incidents of sexual harassment [Student Handbook 2008\\_2009 \(Page 49\)](#).

Alleged violations of and student appeals concerning the University Honor Code and procedures for the disciplinary process are found in both the [Student Handbook 2008\\_2009 \(Page 29\)](#) and in *Angelo State University Operating Policies & Procedures* [OP\\_10.11\\_Grading\\_Procedures](#) sections 4 and 5.

Alleged violations of and student appeals concerning student conduct may be found in the [Student Handbook 2008\\_2009 \(Page 39\)](#). The specific appeals and review procedures are covered in sections 5.9 to 5.12.

The office of Residential Programs (housing) maintains its own disciplinary and appeals process for incidents of student misconduct in the residence halls. The policies and procedures are outlined and available in the [Residence\\_Hall\\_Handbook\\_2008-09](#).

All of the documents cited above are made available to all students through the university's web site. All files concerning student complaints and the outcomes of any appeals may be found in the appropriate offices overseeing jurisdiction of the nature of the complaint.

The executive director of Student Life provided the following synopsis of procedures:

"The Student Life Office handles a variety of student complaints and inquiries during the year. Our office is often a first point of contact for students who are upset about some policy or some faculty/staff behavior and they don't know where else to start. Many times these inquiries are made via telephone or e-mail. If the student so requests, I will meet with the student, hear the issues, and then refer him/her to the appropriate office for final resolution. If it appears that the student needs to follow a formal university process, such as filing a grievance or an harassment complaint, I explain to them the particular procedures that they will need to follow in presenting their case. If the meeting results in merely a referral to another office for resolution of the issue, I generally do not keep a tally of such visits. With regard to grievances at ASU, our Grievance Policy as written requires the complaining party to claim that there has been 'discrimination or an infraction, breach, or misinterpretation of applicable university policies, rules, and regulations' In other words, the student must allege that a rule has been violated. Most of the cases we see where the student wishes to file a grievance are actually situations where the student wants a rule **not** to be followed – they are wanting an exception to the rule in their case. Thus, it is not a "grievance" under our definition."

### **Recap of Formal Grievances and Complaints in the Student Life Office**

2008: None

2007: Sexual Harassment Complaint Handled by Nolen Mears, Associate Dean for Student Services

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 the reports were compiled, a meeting was held between Nolen Mears, 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 meeting but before the next meeting was held, the faculty member resigned from the university. The students were informed of the resignation and were relieved with the outcome.

2007: Complaint Against a Faculty Member Handled by Dr. Deborah Hebert, Dean of Student Life

A student filed a complaint against a faculty member and sought a refund of his tuition for the course. The student never followed any of the formal procedures and the basis for his complaint was not fully clear. Nonetheless, Dr. Hebert tried to mediate the situation 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 ssistant to the president. The student's request for a refund of his tuition was denied at all levels.

2006: Complaint by a Student Regarding Her Dismissal from the Nursing Program

Although this was a purely academic matter, the student came to Dr. Deborah Hebert, Dean of Student Life, for assistance and Dr. Hebert 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: None

2004: None

The Provost's Office reported only one complaint in FY 07, 12 in FY 08, and so far in FY 09 none. Please see the

following four cases for examples of completing the complaint process: [Case 2](#), [Case 3](#), [Case 4](#), and [Refund of tuition due to medical](#).

One additional example is included from the files of the Dean of the College of Sciences: [Case 1](#).

## Sources



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