

**Office of the Chancellor
Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education
Procedures and Standards for University Operations**

**Procedure/Standard Number 2016-26
Student Complaint Process**

Approved by: _____

Chancellor

Date: _____

4/30/16

History: For an institution to participate in federal student aid programs authorized under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, the state must have a process to review and act on complaints concerning the institution, including enforcement of applicable state and federal laws.

Additional History:

Related Policies, Procedures or Standards: Federal Student Aid Handbook

Key Words/Categories: Financial Aid, Distance Education, Student

Additional References: United States (U.S.) Federal Register, 34 CFR 600.9 and 75 FR 66866; U.S. Department of Education Dear Colleague Letters (DCL) ID: GEN-14-04, State Authorization Regulations—Student Complaint Process, issued February 27, 2014; and DCL ID: GEN-11-05, Implementation of Program Integrity Regulations, issued March 17, 2011

I. Background: Federal Requirements for Student Complaint Process

- A. In order to be compliant with federal laws and regulations, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania must have a process that is independent of any university by which students may seek resolution to complaints regarding a university. The U.S. Department of Education's guidance allows for this requirement to be satisfied by a governing board or central office of a statewide system of public institutions if the state has made the determination that the governing board or central office is sufficiently independent to provide successful oversight of complaints for the institutions in that system, ensuring a complainant has access to a process that is independent of any institution.

Pennsylvania's Department of Education has determined that the Office of the Chancellor is sufficiently independent to provide successful oversight of complaints for the member universities of Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education (State System).

- B. In compliance with federal laws and regulations, State System universities offering distance education must "provide its students or prospective students with contact information for filing complaints with its accreditor and with its state approval or licensing entity and any other relevant state official or agency that would appropriately handle a student's complaint."

II. State System's Complaint Process

State System universities shall display on their websites the complaint process available to all current, former, and prospective students, regardless of their residency, to include the following:

- A. Grievances, complaints, or concerns (hereinafter "complaints") must first be submitted directly to the university in accordance with university procedures and policies as outlined, for example, in undergraduate and graduate catalogs. Complaints should be described as specifically as possible.
- B. If a student believes that the issue was not resolved by the university, the student may file a complaint with the State System's Office of the Chancellor.
 - 1. All complaints must be submitted by the student using the System's official complaint form, available at <http://www.passhe.edu/StudentComplaints>, and as attached.
 - 2. The completed form must be signed by the student and mailed or emailed to Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education, at the physical address provided on the official website at www.passhe.edu or to studentcomplaints@passhe.edu.
 - 3. The complaint must identify specific fundamental elements, policies, or procedures that have been allegedly violated. The complainant should identify all steps already taken to resolve the complaint within the process provided for by the university.
 - 4. Complaints may be assigned to a staff member for substantive review. The State System recognizes the importance of resolution of complaints as promptly as is feasible, consistent with fairness to the complainant and the university.
- C. To the extent possible, all complaints will be held confidential between the student and the State System. However, the Office of the Chancellor cannot proceed with its review unless the university is permitted to see the complaint and to respond to specific charges.
- D. If a student believes that the issue cannot be resolved by the Office of the Chancellor, a complaint may be filed with the university's accreditor, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 3624 Market Street, 2nd Floor West, Philadelphia, PA 19104; 267-284-5000; www.msche.org.
- E. Students located outside Pennsylvania while attending the university may also choose to contact the appropriate higher education entity in their state. The State Higher Education Executive Officers (sheeo.org) maintains a [Directory of State Authorization Agencies and Lead Contacts](#).

System universities will also provide additional information on their websites for online students outside of Pennsylvania who have exhausted all efforts to resolve a complaint through the university or the State System, and who may seek further guidance from their home state.

III. Implementation: Immediately

Student Complaint Form
Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education
Sign and email to: studentcomplaints@passhe.edu

Grievances, complaints, or concerns must first be addressed directly with the university. If a student believes that the issue cannot be resolved by the university, a complaint may be filed with Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education (State System) using this form, which must be completed in its entirety. For a complaint to be reviewed, please email or mail the completed form and supporting documentation to the above address.

Student Name _____ **State of Residency** _____

Current Mailing Address _____

Email Address _____ **Phone Number** _____

University Attended _____

Program of Study _____

Level of Study:

☐ Undergraduate ☐ Master's ☐ Doctorate ☐ Other

Dates of Attendance _____ **Student ID Number** _____

Did you follow the university's procedures to resolve your complaint?

☐ Yes ☐ No If no, please explain. _____

How did you contact the university? Please specify who was contacted and on what date(s).

☐ Phone Call _____
☐ In Person _____
☐ Letter _____
☐ Email _____
☐ Other _____

What outcome did you seek from the university?

Have you contacted an agency or organization external to the university about this matter?

☐ Yes ☐ No If yes, please give the name of the office. _____

Have you contacted an attorney?

☐ Yes ☐ No If yes, please give the name of the attorney. _____

Describe your complaint in detail on a separate page. Specify dates, persons with whom you dealt, etc. Attach documentation that will help describe the problem and substantiate your complaints. Do not submit original documents as they will not be returned.

Signature. By signing this form, the student acknowledges that the State System and university may share the complainant's information in order to investigate the complaint.

I authorize the university to release my educational records to and/or discuss my educational records with the State System for the purpose of completing this investigation. This document is an acknowledgement of my voluntary consent and desire to release this information in compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), 20 U.S.C.A. § 1232g.

Student Signature (or Guardian if student is a minor) _____ **Date** _____