

# STUDENT GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

## I. University Guidelines

Columbia University is an academic community committed to fostering intellectual inquiry in a climate of academic freedom and integrity. Its members - students and faculty alike - are expected to uphold these principles and exhibit tolerance and respect for others.

The University Statutes and the general policies of the University describe the roles and responsibilities of faculty in their teaching and research. The rights, duties, and obligations of the faculty can be found in the Faculty Handbook at <https://facultyhandbook.columbia.edu/content/policies-and-rules>. Faculty have a right to expect freedom in the classroom to discuss their subjects and not to be penalized for their private opinions. Faculty do, however, have special obligations arising from their position in the academic community. Chapter 7 of the Faculty Handbook reads in pertinent parts:

The University's commitment to the principle of academic freedom is defined in Section 70a of the University Statutes. That commitment assures officers of the freedom to determine the content of what they teach and the manner in which it is taught and the freedom to choose the subjects of their research and publish their results. It also guarantees that they will not be penalized for expressions of opinion or association in their private or civic capacity.

In conducting their classes, faculty should make every effort to be accurate and should show respect for the rights of others to hold opinions differing from their own. They should confine their classes to the subject matter covered by the courses and not use them to advocate any cause.

Due to the size and diverse nature of the University's scholarly community, each school maintains its own processes for addressing a variety of student life issues, including students' concerns about experiences in the classroom or with faculty at their school. Experience has shown that most student concerns are best resolved collaboratively at the school level, starting with the staff of the Student Affairs Office, as explained below in section III. The Ombuds Office is an additional and alternative source available to students to advise on various areas of redress and can mediate a dispute if both parties agree. Ombuds Officers do not have the authority to adjudicate any complaint. Further information on the Ombuds Office may be found in Appendix D below or at <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/ombuds/>.

The procedures in Section III of this document are part of a process to ensure that student concerns about experiences in the classroom or with faculty are addressed in an informed and appropriate manner. For all complaints except grade disputes, there is a provision for a final appeal to the University Provost.

## II. Types of Grievances

The University and SIPA have established policies and procedures for various types of misconduct. A student's first step is determining which office to approach for consultation. In all cases, any Associate or Assistant Dean in the SIPA Student Affairs Office can provide guidance in that determination.

1. **Discrimination, harassment, or gender-based misconduct** must be reported to Columbia University's Office of Institutional Equity (OIE). See the appendices below for an excerpt from the University's policy statement on discrimination and harassment.
2. **Professional misconduct or fraud in research** on the part of a faculty member should be brought to the attention of the Dean of SIPA according to the procedure outlined in Appendix C of The Faculty Handbook.
3. **Professional misconduct or fraud in research or academic work** on the part of students should be brought to the attention of the Senior Associate Dean of Student Affairs at SIPA according to the procedures outlined in the Code of Academic and Professional Conduct. View the Code and related policies.
4. **Grade disputes:** Responsibility for the academic assessment of students resides with the faculty. Grievances relating to academic evaluation involving accusations of discrimination, harassment, or gender-based misconduct must be reported to Columbia University's Office of Institutional Equity (OIE) (see above). In other cases, SIPA will only ensure that the assessment was made impartially and according to procedures applicable to all students as published in the course syllabus. After attempting to resolve grade disputes informally, the Senior Assistant Dean for Curriculum and Instruction will conduct an initial investigation to determine whether there is a plausible case that the assessment was not made in an impartial manner or according to procedures established in the course syllabus. See Section III-A below for details.
5. **Issues about the conduct of SIPA faculty:** In fulfilling their instructional responsibilities, faculty of the School of International and Public Affairs are expected to treat students with civility and respect. Conduct that is subject to grievance procedures includes failure to show appropriate respect in an instructional setting for the rights of others to hold opinions differing from their own; misuse of faculty authority in an instructional setting to pressure students to support a political or social cause; and conduct in the classroom or another instructional setting that adversely affects the learning environment. Students seeking a resolution for this type of grievance should follow the procedures in section III B below.
6. **Issues about the conduct of faculty or students from other schools:** If a grievance involving a member of the faculty appointed in a department or division of the university outside SIPA cannot be resolved informally, and if the grievant wishes to file a formal written grievance, it must be addressed to the appropriate dean, department chair, or vice president. SIPA's Senior Assistant Dean for Curriculum and Instruction will advise the student with whom the grievance should be filed. Formal grievances filed against administrators and/or students of Schools or administrative units other than SIPA must be filed with the dean of that School or the Vice President to whom the administrator in question ultimately reports.
7. **Conduct on the part of SIPA faculty or SIPA students not covered above:** Students are encouraged to discuss problems, questions, and grievances with any Associate or Assistant Dean in the Student Affairs office. They may also discuss them with the University Ombuds officer, a neutral complaint-handler who seeks fair and equitable solutions to problems. Grievances may be brought against individuals subject to the authority of the Dean, including administrators, faculty members, or fellow graduate students. If the grievance in question does not fall into the areas of responsibility of another university office, an Assistant Dean may advise the student on SIPA's grievance procedures. If a resolution is not reached through

informal procedures, a written grievance may be submitted. Both the informal and written grievance procedures are outlined below.

### III. Procedures for SIPA Grievances

#### A. Procedures for Grade Disputes Involving SIPA Courses: Informal Resolution

*Any informal or formal inquiry or grievance about a grade must be initiated within one semester of the completion of the course.* The student should discuss the matter with the responsible faculty member if possible. If no resolution results from the conversation, students should consult with SIPA's Senior Assistant Dean for Curriculum and Instruction. Every effort should be made to resolve the matter at an informal level without escalating the complaint to the status of a formal grievance. Discussions aimed at informal resolution remain confidential and generally should last for no more than 30 working days.

#### Formal Resolution

If no informal resolution occurs, the Senior Assistant Dean for Curriculum and Instruction will conduct an initial investigation to determine whether there is a plausible case that the assessment was not made impartial or according to procedures established in the course syllabus. If the Senior Assistant Dean determines there is a plausible case, the student will be requested to compose a written statement documenting the misconduct causing the complaint, its adverse consequences, the informal efforts at resolution made to date, and a description of the remedy sought (see attached guidelines for a grievance). The written grievance should be submitted to the Senior Assistant Dean for Curriculum and Instruction in a timely fashion, usually within 30 working days of the end of the semester in which the misconduct occurred.

#### Initial Review of the Grievance

After receiving the grievance, the Senior Assistant Dean for Curriculum and Instruction will convene a committee consisting of the director of the relevant degree or curricular program, one other full-time faculty member selected by the Senior Assistant Dean, and the elected student representatives of the SIPA Committee on Instruction. If one of these people is named in the grievance, has a conflict of interest, as determined by the Senior Assistant Dean, or is unable to participate because of other obligations, the Senior Assistant Dean will appoint a replacement. Faculty will be replaced with faculty, and students will be replaced with students. If the Senior Assistant Dean is unable to serve on the committee for one of the preceding reasons, the Senior Associate Dean of Academic Affairs will replace them.

The Senior Assistant Dean chairs the meeting. The committee will independently interview the grievant and the faculty member in question. Each may select a faculty member, graduate student, or SIPA administrator to attend the meeting and serve as their advocate. The advocate may not pose questions or intervene in the proceedings but may consult with the grievant. If the grievant or faculty member chooses not to attend, they will be informed that the committee will proceed to a decision. The merits of the grievance are evaluated within the context of University and SIPA policy; a resolution is reached by a majority vote, and, when appropriate, a remedy is recommended. In the case of a tie vote, the Senior Assistant Dean will cast the deciding vote.

The Committee responds with a written decision in a timely fashion, within one week of the conclusion of the grievance hearing, unless there are extenuating circumstances. If the grievant or the faculty member wants to dispute the committee decision, they may appeal in writing to the Dean. This appeal must be submitted within thirty working days of the

decision and should clearly indicate procedural or substantive grounds for the appeal. In the case of grade disputes, the Dean's decision is final and cannot be appealed.

#### B. Procedures for Concerns about Faculty Conduct:

Students who feel that members of the SIPA faculty have violated their instructional responsibilities as outlined in Section II. 5. above may take the following steps (the procedure below also applies to complaints against instructional and administrative staff):

#### Informal Resolution

Students are encouraged to seek a resolution to their complaints about faculty misconduct by talking directly with the faculty member. If they feel uncomfortable handling the situation in this manner, they may ask for assistance from the SIPA Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, who will assist students with complaints about faculty members and other academic personnel. If students have complaints about administrators, they should speak with the Chief Operating Officer of SIPA. The Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs or Chief Operating Officer tries to resolve any issue through informal meetings with the student and others, including faculty, as deemed appropriate. The Vice Dean for Academic Affairs will review the Senior Associate Dean's or Chief Operating Officer's recommendation and seek to resolve the student's complaint informally. Students who are dissatisfied with the outcome may request a meeting with the Dean of SIPA.

Students may bring their concerns to the University's Ombuds Officer, who serves as an informal, confidential resource for assisting members of the University with conflict resolution. The Ombuds Officer provides information, counseling, and referrals to appropriate University offices and will mediate conflicts if both parties agree. The Ombuds Officer does not have the authority to adjudicate disputes and does not participate in any formal University grievance proceedings.

#### Formal Resolution

Students may seek a grievance hearing if informal mediation fails. The grievance procedures students should follow will depend upon the school within which the faculty member is appointed and the nature of the alleged misconduct. If the faculty member holds an appointment in SIPA, the student will use the procedures described below. If the faculty member belongs to another school, students must use the procedure of that school. They may, however, ask for assistance from the SIPA Senior Associate Dean of Academic Affairs.

If the informal mediation mentioned above failed, the student should compose and submit a written statement documenting the grievance to the SIPA Vice Dean for Academic Affairs, including a description of the remedy sought. This should be done no later than 30 working days after the end of the semester in which the grievance occurred.

The Vice Dean will review the complaint to determine if a grievance hearing is warranted. If so, the Vice Dean will convene an ad hoc committee consisting of the SIPA Associate Dean for Student Affairs, a faculty member chosen by the Vice Dean, and one of the elected student representatives on the SIPA Committee on Instruction.

The faculty member is given the student's letter of complaint and invited to submit a written response. The Committee reviews both statements and is given access to any other written documents relevant to the complaint. It will typically interview both the grievant and the faculty member and may, at its discretion, ask others to provide testimony. Both the grievant and the faculty member involved in the case may

be accompanied by a supporter of their choice from the Columbia community who, however, may not participate in the proceedings. The merits of the grievance are evaluated within the context of University and SIPA school policy.

The investigative committee serves in an advisory capacity to the Dean of SIPA. It is expected to complete its investigation in a timely manner and submit a written report to the Dean, who may accept or modify its findings and any recommendations it may have made to remedy the student's complaint. The Dean will inform both the student and the faculty member of his decision in writing.

The committee ordinarily convenes within ten working days of receiving the complaint from the Vice Dean and ordinarily completes its investigation and sends the Dean its report within 30 working days of convening. Copies of the committee's written report should be sent to both the grievant and the faculty member. The report should state whether there is merit to the complaint and why. If the committee finds the complaint valid, it should also recommend remedies. The Dean typically issues their decision within 30 working days of receiving the committee's report.

The Dean may discipline faculty members who are found to have committed professional misconduct. Any sanctions will be imposed in a manner consistent with the University's policies and procedures on faculty discipline. In particular, if the Dean believes that the offense is sufficiently serious to merit dismissal, they can initiate the procedures in Section 75 of the University Statutes for terminating tenured appointments and nontenured appointments before the end of their stated term, for cause.

Either the student or the faculty member may appeal the decision of the Dean to the Provost. Findings of fact, remedies given to the student, and penalties imposed on the faculty member are all subject to appeal. A written appeal must be submitted to the Provost within 15 working days of the date of the letter informing them of the Dean's decision. Typically, the Provost will take no longer than 30 working days to evaluate an appeal. The Provost usually confines their review to the written record but reserves the right to collect information in any manner that will help to make their decision on the appeal. The Provost will inform both the student and the faculty member of their decision in writing. If the Provost decides that the faculty member should be dismissed for cause, the case is subject to further review according to the procedures in Section 75 of the University Statutes, as noted above. Otherwise, the decision of the Provost is final and not subject to further appeal.

All aspects of an investigation of a student grievance are confidential. The proceedings of the grievance committee are not open to the public. Only the student grievant and the faculty member accused of misconduct receive copies of the decisions of the Dean and the Provost. Everyone who is involved with the investigation of a grievance is expected to respect the confidentiality of the process. Students who believe that they are able to demonstrate that the Dean did not ensure that proper procedures were followed in addressing their complaint about faculty misconduct in an instructional setting may petition the Provost to review the case. The Provost only reviews appeals of cases already decided by the Dean.

## Appendices Related University-wide Procedures, Policies & Resources

### A. Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action

The Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action (EOAA) prevents and responds to discrimination, harassment, and retaliation at Columbia. Our office develops and implements policies and procedures that address prohibited conduct in accordance with relevant anti-discrimination laws.

EOAA responds to allegations of policy violations and provides education and consultations for departments, programs, and individuals to prevent discrimination and harassment. EOAA also assists departments in advancing affirmative action through their hiring practices. In addition, our office houses HERC, the Metro New York and Southern Connecticut division of the Higher Education Recruitment Consortium.

At Columbia schools, when an EOAA-related issue arises, Deans, departmental leadership, as well as human resources staff work closely with this office.

#### Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action

103 Low Memorial Library

Website: <https://eoaa.columbia.edu/>

E-mail: [eoaa@columbia.edu](mailto:eoaa@columbia.edu) | Phone: (212) 854-5511

### B. Gender-Based Misconduct & Interim Title IX Policy

Columbia University, Barnard College, and Teachers College are committed to fostering an environment that is free from gender-based discrimination and harassment, including sexual assault and all other forms of gender-based misconduct.

The University recognizes its responsibility to increase awareness of and diligently investigate reports of such misconduct, prevent its occurrence, support students and others who experience gender-based misconduct, and respond fairly and firmly when students who violate University policy.

Within the Gender-Based Misconduct Policy and accompanying Procedures, the University defines gender-based misconduct and sets procedures for addressing gender-based misconduct involving students. The Policy and Procedures are designed to reflect the University's commitment to a safe and non-discriminatory educational environment, consistent with federal and state law.

#### Office of Gender-Based Misconduct

800 Watson Hall

Website: <https://genderbasedmisconduct.columbia.edu/content/gender-based-misconduct-interim-title-ix-policy>

E-mail: [GBMO@columbia.edu](mailto:GBMO@columbia.edu) | Phone: (212) 854-1717

### C. Ethical Conduct and Compliance Hotline (Excerpt from the Faculty Handbook)

As one of the premier academic and research institutions in the world, the University sets expectations of the highest standards of ethical conduct. Integrity and ethical behavior are key values and are the responsibility of every member of the Columbia community. The University counts on every member of the community to adhere to these principles and to promote a positive working environment. In that spirit, Columbia asks that all members of the community familiarize themselves with the [Statement of Ethical Conduct](#).

Every member of the University community is asked to be aware of the University's mutual commitment to ethics and compliance. Collective

commitment to these values ensures that the reputation of the institution is maintained. A community member with an ethical or compliance concern may access a variety of resources. They may be able to discuss the concern with a supervisor or another responsible person in the relevant school or department or with one of the many specialized compliance resources around the University. For additional information on University compliance, including policies and training links, please visit the [University Compliance](#) website.

Additionally, the [Compliance Hotline](#) serves as another possible channel for employees to report or seek guidance on possible ethical or compliance issues. It is available to all members of the University community, including faculty, staff, and students by phone (866) 627-3768 and through [online reporting](#) with the option to report anonymously. Retaliation against those who report an ethical or compliance concern in good faith is strictly prohibited.

**Website:** <https://facultyhandbook.columbia.edu/content/statement-ethical-conduct-and-compliance-hotline>

#### **D. The Ombuds Office**

The Ombuds Office is a neutral complaint-handler who seeks fair and equitable solutions to problems. The Ombuds Office serves the entire Columbia University community. In considering any given instance or concern, the rights of all parties that may be involved, along with the welfare of the University, are taken into account.

The Ombuds Office is a safe and confidential place to voice concerns. No formal permanent records of individual cases are kept, except anonymous aggregate statistical data on the categories of complaints or inquiries. The Ombuds Officer will not report the names of callers or visitors or the specific content of problems reported unless permission is granted, or in the very rare instance in which there is reasonable cause to believe that the safety of the caller or others may be endangered.

Except in emergencies, the Ombuds Officer does not take action or investigate an issue without the permission of the person who introduced the information to the Ombuds Office. The Ombuds Officer will listen, offer information about Columbia University policies and procedures, present a range of options for resolving a problem or help find ways to convey information while maintaining the confidentiality of the source.

The Ombuds Officer may conduct an informal, impartial investigation or facilitate a resolution upon request. However, the Ombuds Officer does not arbitrate or adjudicate. The Ombuds Officer has no power to establish, change, or set aside any University rules or policies. However, the Ombuds Officer is a resource for administrators and, when appropriate, may make recommendations or propose general changes in existing practices to correct problem areas or stimulate discussion of issues affecting the University community.

The Ombuds Office supplements, but does not replace, the existing resources for conflict resolution and fair practice available at Columbia University. The Ombuds Office is independent of existing administrative structures and reports directly to the President of the University. Discussions with the Ombuds Officer are off-the-record and do not constitute formal notice to the University.

**Columbia Ombuds Office**  
**660 Schermerhorn Extension**  
**Website:** [ombuds.columbia.edu](https://ombuds.columbia.edu)  
**E-mail:** [ombuds@columbia.edu](mailto:ombuds@columbia.edu) | **Phone:** (212) 854-1234