

Student Grievance Process

Policy Statement

Leighton students have the right to pursue timely, legitimate grievances against employees of the University. Therefore, the University shall establish, publish, and follow a procedure that delineates the rights and responsibilities of the aggrieved party and the University employee against whom a grievance may be lodged.

Procedure

Leighton University (Leighton) has established the following procedures for resolving **student** disputes with employees, regardless of status (full-time, part-time, temporary, contractual) or role (administrators, faculty, and staff), and volunteers.

The University's formal student grievance procedure applies to all student (undergraduate and graduate alike) issues that are associated with Leighton University, including but not limited to **academic matters/issues**, student services, and administrative concerns. Grievances involving academic matters/issues are limited to final course grades and satisfactory completion of an instructional program's requirements. Students in need of **additional accommodations** at any time during this procedure should contact staff in the Counseling and Advocacy Services office.

The student grievance procedure may also be used by individuals who were Leighton students at the time the incident in question occurred. The student filing the grievance must be the subject of the alleged unfair/unbecoming treatment related to their status as a student. In no instance should a grievance matter be filed on behalf of another student?

Throughout the grievance process, it is the burden and responsibility of the student to present evidence to support the claim. Students are advised to keep written notes, where possible, and maintain documentation to provide proof of compliance with each of the 4 steps of the grievance procedure. Allegations should not necessarily, be cumulative. Instead, they should be presented individually and as they occur. However, claims arising from a single incident must be submitted in one grievance.

The student grievance procedure includes specific deadlines and timelines for pursuing a grievance. Students are required to follow the published steps and timeline outlined within this student grievance procedure. In most cases, issues have a shelf-life. Issues presented after the deadline elapsed will not be considered unless specific, extenuating circumstances caused the delay. A formal and written request for an extension due to extenuating events must have been made in writing by the student, the employee, the supervisor, or another leader within the specified timeframe for each step. Without exception, requests for deadline extensions must be submitted to the appropriate University officials. Where extenuating circumstances are present, documented, and supportive of the request, the University official handling the case will determine and communicate an appropriate revised timeline and next steps in writing to all involved parties.

In all cases, University officials (or designee) will conduct their work within each step of the process in a manner that is quick as possible within the fourteen (14) week day limit. The exception to this may occur in cases where a resolution in the case is deemed to affect students' ability to progress and matriculate in a particular program.

If University officials determine that the student cannot continue to attend class, participate or engage in student activities for a defined period because of the potential for harm to self or others, the Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Affairs, after consultation with other University officials, may recommend specific restrictions and will provide the rationale in writing.

Suppose the grievance or appeal involves claims of bias, discrimination, or harassment at any time in the process. In that case, the University official handling the grievance will coordinate with the University's Legal Counsel. The Legal Counsel will have up to fourteen (14) week days to complete the initial fact-finding inquiry and determine whether to open a Title VI or related investigation.

Suppose the grievance or appeal involves a claim of **sexual misconduct** at any time in the process. In that respect, the matter must be forwarded immediately to the University's Title IX coordinator in the Office of Human Resources, for will review and determine within fourteen (14) week days (beginning from the day the case was received) of the notification on the option to open a Title IX investigation. If the matter is determined as falling under the **Title IX investigation**, the procedures supporting the Sexual Misconduct Policy will be followed. If the issue does not fall under Title IX, the case will return to the appropriate University official handling the grievance case.

Prohibition on Retaliation

It is strictly prohibited for any person participating in good faith in connection with a grievance or complaint to exercise an act of retaliation. Violations will be addressed through these procedures and/or other applicable Leighton's disciplinary procedures. Any party that perceives to have been subjected to retaliation should report to a University official.

Prohibition on Providing False Information

Leighton places importance on the integrity of its policies and procedures. Consequently, any individual who intentionally and knowingly files a false report or complaint provides false information or deliberately misleads University officials will be subject to disciplinary action. It should be understood that false complaints may cause irreparable harm to the University community, regardless of the findings and decisions that follow an investigation.

Grievance Process

Step 1. The student meets or communicates with the University employee concerned within six working days of the incident occurrence. It should be understood that the purpose of this conversation should be an **informal** attempt on the part of the student to seek a resolution of the issue from the alleged University employee. Both parties must document the facts and possible outcome(s) for their records if the student is not satisfied that the concern has, amicably, been addressed or has documentation of attempted to contact the employee without getting a response. In that case, the student proceeds to move to Step 2. Following

Step 2. The student meets with the University employee's supervisor to discuss the grievance within fourteen (14) week days following the meeting with the employee. After this additional informal conversation, all parties should document the facts and possible outcomes for their records. Suppose the student communicates that the issue remains unresolved. In that case, the supervisor provides the student with specific information about the formal grievance procedure, which outlines Step 3, including a copy of the Official Student Grievance Form.

Step 3. If the student feels that the employee's conversation and supervisor did arrive to resolve the issue, the student should begin initiating the University's formal grievance procedure. The student submits the Official Student Grievance Form within fourteen (14) week days of the meeting with the supervisor. The student is encouraged to hold a meet with a counselor in the Counseling and Advocacy Services office for support with the following activities:

- Identifying the specific issues and aspects involved in the grievance;
 - Developing precise verbal and written approaches appropriate to the grievance and in compliance with the student grievance procedure;
 - Reviewing the procedure and possible strategies to meet the requirements of each step;
 - Determining when immediate support and other available assistance is necessary, especially if the matter involves claims of discrimination or sexual misconduct; and
 - Completing the Student Grievance Form;
1. The student completes the electronic form posted on the University's website to document the dates of any previous meetings and prior discussions held to resolve the grievance
 2. Within fourteen (14) week days from the meeting with the employee's supervisor, the student submits the form and any accompanying document. The form is, after that, routed directly to the Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Affairs (or, in their absence, their designee).

3. Within fourteen (14) week days of receipt of the form, the Vice President of Enrolment and Student Affairs logs the formal complaint and determines whether the student has met the published guidelines for procedures. If the said guidelines have been met, the Vice President establishes the official case, assigns it to the appropriate University official, and notifies the **appropriate Vice President**. Where the procedure's guidelines have not been met, the grievance is denied, and an explanation of the reason for the written denial is forwarded to the student. If the grievance procedures do not appropriately handle the issue raised by the student, the Vice President may redirect the student to other procedures for adjudication.

Step 4. Within fourteen (14) week days of receiving a grievance, the University official investigates the case to determine whether the concern meets the guidelines and threshold for being heard. If so, the University official notifies the employee and supervisor that a grievance has been lodged, requests a written copy of a response, and monitors the process through the successive steps. If not, the University official rejects the filed grievance and responds in writing to the student explaining the rationale for the denial.

Step 5. The employee and supervisor forward a written response or response to the University official within fourteen (14) week days days of receiving the notification from the university official. The University official uploads this documentation and adds it to the official case file.

Step 6. The University official discusses the official grievance case with the student within fourteen (14) working days of receiving the written responses noted in Step 5 and shares the information gathered regarding the issue. Both parties are required should document the conversation and possible outcome(s) for their records. The University official will determine the appropriate resolution within fourteen (14) week days of the discussion and inform the student, employee, appropriate supervisor, appropriate Vice President, and the Vice President of Enrollment Management and Student Affairs of the decision made. The decision of the University official is concluded except in instances outlined in the published appeals procedure. All records of formal grievances cases are stored in the complaint's portion of the University's Student Information System (Populi).

Appeals

The discovery of new evidence previously not offered or disclosed in the initial grievance and/or an allegation in cases of severe bias or discrimination at some level of the student grievance procedure and/or documentation showing that the University did not correctly follow the grievance policy are allowable exceptional circumstances. If the student believes that extraordinary circumstances justify reconsideration of the decision made by the chair or leader of the area, the student may file an appeal to the decision. An appeal may not be pursued if the student disagrees with the decisions made during the grievance procedure.

Requesting an appeal, the student follows these steps:

Step 1. Within ten (14) week days of the date of the written decision in the grievance case, the student files a written formal appeal with the assistance of a University counselor, who would have approved privilege and access to the appeal form available via the University's secure student management and tracking system on Populi. The appeal is sent within the Populi to the Vice President of Enrollment Management and Student Affairs, who redirects the form to the appropriate vice president.

The student must work with a Counseling and Advocacy Services counselor to explain what qualifies the grievance for an appeal based on the University's definition of exceptional circumstances. The student should be specific, use as much clarity as possible, and attach any relevant written documents supporting their appeal request. The name of the University's counselor assisting the student must be included on the appeal form.

Step 2. Upon receiving the appeal, the appropriate Vice President reviews the written appeal based on the University's definition of unusual circumstances. Suppose the vice president determines that the grievance, as presented, is not eligible for a draw an appeal; in that case, they communicate that decision to all the involved parties, and the case is closed within fourteen (14) week days. If a determination is made that the grievance is eligible for appeal, they conduct an appeal investigation and decide to receive the appeal within fourteen (14) weak days. During this time, the appropriate area Vice President has the prerogative to request any number of meetings with any party involved believe that such conversations will assist the parties in reaching an amicable decision. The area Vice President sends a copy of

the decision to the aggrieved student, employee, University official, and Vice President of Enrollment Management and Student Affairs via the University's case management and tracking system. The decision reached is final. No further appeal opportunity is available after the Vice President renders a final decision.

All appeal records are documented and maintained in the University's secure student management and tracking system.

Confidentiality

The University will make every reasonable and good-faith effort to protect the confidentiality of information received from a student grievance report and its related investigation; information related to a case will be shared on a need-to-know basis only. However, as appropriate and necessary, college administrators will share information to address and resolve the issues' concerns and prevent the relapse of similar instances. There may be instances where the University's ethical and legal responsibility is to disclose information regarding the circumstances relative to the specific grievance issue, depending on the nature of the alleged matter. The student will be notified before the information is released, should this be the case.