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Effective Date: September 2017

Last Updated: September 2020

Responsible Officers: University President

Policy Contact: Director of Operations

DEFINITIONS

Grievance: A grievance is defined as an issue related to a perceived academic or nonacademic injustice, whereby a student believes that he/she has been dealt with unfairly or in a way that violates established laws, rules, policies, or procedures by an employee or employees of the University.

Additional Guidance: A grievance does not involve perceived rude treatment, classroom style or grading practices as a whole. The faculty member is the primary authority regarding course policies, expectations, or grading. This grievance procedure is only to be exercised after normal decision making and appeals processes have been completed.

Academic Grievance: The faculty member is the primary authority regarding course policies, expectations, or grading. Students who find themselves in disagreement in their academic experience should make every effort to resolve the issue with the faculty member. The Student Handbook explains the process for academic grievances and appeals. Once the student has exhausted the appeal process specified in the Student Handbook, the student may use this grievance procedure. Academic grievances are limited to final course grades and satisfactory completion of instructional program requirements.

Academic Honesty: Academic honesty violations must first follow the Academic Honesty Policy described in the Student Handbook, overseen by the Academic Honesty Committee (AHC). Once the student has exhausted the appeal process specified in the Student Handbook, the student may use this grievance procedure. Appeals must be based on verifiable unfairness, inappropriate consequences, and/or new information.

Disciplinary Appeals: The non-academic disciplinary process is described in detail in the Student Handbook. Please refer to that policy for more details, including grounds and procedures for appeal.

Discriminatory Complaints: Complaints related to any type of discrimination (including racial incidents and sexual harassment) should go through the normal processes described in the relevant policies. After any existing appeals processes have been completed, this Grievance Policy may be used if necessary. Contact Student Life for more information about existing policies and procedures.

Important Note: All written communications will be made using the University email accounts unless other arrangements are made.

POLICY STATEMENT

Purpose: The purpose of this policy is to facilitate the reconciliation of student complaints, including academic and nonacademic issues. As imperfect followers of Jesus, we know that conflict will happen, but that the process of resolving the conflict is an opportunity for us to grow. The ultimate purpose of informal or formal conflict resolution is peacemaking and restoration of relationships. This policy applies to all student grievances as defined above, including but not limited to academic issues, student services or administrative concerns, or matters involving any form of discrimination. In some cases, there are other policies or procedures in place that must be followed before entering into the formal grievance procedure. See “Other Helpful Links” at the end of this policy for more information.

Students and employees of the University are expected to reconcile academic and nonacademic differences in a professional, respectful, and God-honoring manner. Informal reconciliation should always be attempted first, and involve discussion between the student, involved employee, and the employee’s supervisor if necessary. When attempts at informal reconciliation are perceived to be inadequate, an appeals process may be initiated if there is one specified according to University policy. After any appeals processes have been exhausted, if students believe a grievance has occurred as defined above, this formal grievance procedure may be used. This process has been developed to facilitate thoughtful and thorough evaluation in an effort to determine if an injustice has occurred. Students who decide to file a formal complaint as an academic or nonacademic grievance must follow the process detailed below. The institutional grievance procedure is the same for all students regardless of physical location (including distance education).

Process: A formal grievance must be initiated within a timely manner of the relevant occurrence. Specific timelines for grievances are specified in the Disciplinary Appeals process and the Grade Change Policy, among others. See “Definitions” above and “Other Helpful Links” below for more information.

A formal grievance will be initiated by submitting a completed Student Grievance Petition Form. The form is available on myVALLEYFORGE under the Student Life tab. The student should submit the completed form using the University email to the President’s Office. The President will then appoint a member of the Cabinet or other appropriate designee as the Grievance

Officer. The Grievance Officer will review the petition to ensure that regular University policies, processes, and appeals have already been followed. The Grievance Officer may, but is not required to, request additional information from the student and/or University employee, request additional evidence or documentation, or request an interview with any relevant parties.

Upon conclusion of the review, the Grievance Officer will present the results to the President's Cabinet, which will function as the Grievance Committee. Following deliberation, the Committee will render a written decision and forward it to the student and faculty/staff member involved in the grievance within one week. The decision of the Grievance Committee is final.

Student Grievance Petition Form: Students should include as much information as possible in the petition in order to make the investigation process as effective as possible. Petitions should include the original reason for the grievance as well as the details of any appeals processes that have been followed. Relevant/involved parties should be identified by name and include contact information if possible. Students should attach any evidence that may be helpful in the investigation, including emails, social media posts, or key witnesses. If relevant, students should describe the outcome they would like to see as a result of the grievance investigation.

HISTORY

Federal regulations for institutions of higher education include a number of disclosure and reporting requirements. According to Title 34 CFR §602.16(a)(1)(ix) and 34 CFR §668.43(b), the University is required to have effective policies and procedures for tracking and resolving student complaints within a reasonable time frame. In addition, the University must provide its students or prospective students with contact information for filing complaints with its accreditor and with its state approval or licensing entity. That contact information is below.

RESOURCES

University of Valley Forge Contact Information

Julia Patton, Director of Operations 610-917-2004 JGPatton@valleyforge.edu	Rev. Jennifer Gale, VP of Student Life 610-917-1488 JDGale@valleyforge.edu
Dr. Todd Guevin, VP of Institutional Effectiveness 610-917-1493 TGGuevin@valleyforge.edu	Dr. Jerome Douglas, VP of Academic Affairs 610-917-1403 JNDouglas@valleyforge.edu

External Agencies

Individuals also have the right to go to one or more of the agencies listed below to initiate a complaint or grievance if the issue is unresolved through on-campus channels. Students taking classes at the main campus or living in Pennsylvania: PA Student Complaints Students residing outside of Pennsylvania: UVF is approved to participate in the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) which regulates the manner in which participating institutions may offer distance learning education to students who reside in other states. If a student has a complaint that involves distance learning education offered under the terms and conditions of SARA, the student must file a complaint with the institution first to seek resolution. Complaints regarding student grades or student conduct violations are governed entirely by institutional policy and the laws of the SARA institution's home state. If a person bringing a complaint is not satisfied with the outcome of the University's internal process for resolving complaints, the complaint (except for complaints about grades or student conduct violations) may be appealed, within two years of the incident about which the complaint is made, to the University's SARA portal entity (Pennsylvania Department of Education). For purposes of this process, a complaint shall be defined as a formal assertion in writing that the terms of this agreement, or of laws, standards or regulations incorporated by the SARA Policies and Standards have been violated by the institution operating under the terms of SARA.

For a list of SARA member states, please visit the NC-SARA website. Students residing in non-SARA states should consult the list of state agencies for further instruction for filing a complaint in their respective state of residence.

Further information on SARA and the SARA complaint process:

<http://nc-sara.org/content/sara-and-students>

<http://nc-sara.org/content/sara-complaint-process>

For FERPA or PPRA complaints or grievances:

Family Policy Compliance Office U.S. Department of Education 400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C.

20202-5920 Phone: 1-800-USA-LEARN (1-800-872-5327)

Unresolved complaints may be filed with the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, the University's regional accrediting agency, once all other avenues provided by the University and the State agency have been exhausted.

Middle States Commission on Higher Education

3624 Market Street, 2nd Floor West, Philadelphia, PA 19104

Phone: 267-284-5000

Email: info@msche.org

Spanish: españolinfo@msche.org

General link: www.msche.org

Additional Resources

Documents available on our website ([Student Consumer Information](#)):

- Academic Honesty Policy (see Course Catalog)
- Disciplinary Appeals Policy (see Student Handbook)
- Academic Grievance Policy (see Student Handbook)
- Grade Change Policy (see Student Handbook)
- Facilities and Services for Students with Disabilities Policy
- Title IX Information
- UVF Sexual Misconduct and Violence Policy

Documents available on [myVALLEYFORGE](#):

- Racial Incident Form
- Student Grievance Petition Form