

## Office of the Ombudsperson

### Navigating Complaint, Grievance, and Appeal Processes

#### Before taking any action, prepare:

- Gather relevant documents, policy, and/or records. Save digital copies. If your access to records may end, for example, your ability to get to posted grades in a learning platform, take a screenshot to add to your materials file.
- Create a timeline of events (interactions, classes, phone calls, emails, etc.). Bullet points work well for this.
- List any questions you have.
- List any significant information with bearing on the matter.
- List your desired outcome(s) and alternatives that may be acceptable to you. Are they realistic? If you are unsure, seek feedback from someone you trust.

#### Contact the relevant office or individual directly:

- Politely inquire by phone, via email, or in person if when they will have time available to discuss your concern. If you inquire in-person, know that they may need to arrange for an appointment rather than discuss it in the moment.
- Ask for help understanding the issue. You are likely to learn more by approaching the concern with curiosity, than you would by taking a hardline position (e.g., *I deserved an A in the class*; or *I owe nothing to the College, you need to fix my account balance*; or *I won't attend any meeting, they lied, there is no issue here*).
- Be respectful and pleasant. Expect the same, in kind.
- Keep accurate records and take notes. Ask for the name and title of any employee you speak with. Note the dates/times of each conversation. Save emails, letters, and receipts. It is reasonable to ask employees to identify the rules or policies that governed their actions or informed their decisions.

**If you are unable to achieve a fair resolution or receive a satisfactory explanation as to why the matter will not/cannot be resolved as you had hoped, you may wish to pursue a further process – ask after any available next steps.**

#### Tips for writing appeal/grievance statements and letters:

- If the process requires a form, use it, and submit it as directed. If the process is digitalized, for example, must be submitted through a website, GrinnellShare, or other portal system, have your responses prepared and reviewed ahead of time. Write any narrative responses in a document that you can save for your records and then use to copy and paste from. Have any supplementary statement or supporting documents ready to upload.
- If you are expected to use email as a means of initiating an appeal or grievance, follow policy/process instructions so that your message is directed correctly. This may be an individual or office/unit email address. Use the subject line to help the recipient with your process, for example, use your last name followed by the kind of appeal or action you are seeking. Unless directed otherwise, include a brief summary message in the body of the email and attach a fuller statement in a PDF that includes copies, screenshots, etc.

- Prepare your materials in advance of the deadline.
- Review for clarity and overall presentation.
- Strive for error-free with all supporting documentation ready to be enclosed, uploaded, or attached.
- Review for the general tone.
- Consider having an objective third-party review your materials as well. Be open to their feedback.
- Keep copies of all letters sent and received as well as all relevant or supporting documents and forms.
- Thank people for their time and attention.

#### Be Factual and Specific

Introduce yourself briefly. Be clear, concise, and direct. Include factual detail and avoid overly personalizing or embellishing the situation. If an appeal's or request's success will depend upon particular facts which the decision-maker may want to verify, provide the specifics they will need to do so. **Be accurate or risk undermining your credibility.**

#### Provide Documentation

**Include all documentation required by a governing policy or needed to substantiate your explanation.** If documentation is being sent by a third party, provide the details of who will be sending what, and when you anticipate the decision-maker will receive it.

#### Talking About Feelings

When an issue is high stakes or important as a matter of principle, it can be tempting to overstate our case or to resort to personal attacks. When feelings are a legitimate part of a message own the feeling with an "I statement" (for example, *I was disappointed by the decision... rather than, How did he even become a supervisor?! He clearly isn't fit to interact with humans...*) then move on.