



Academic Standards, Regulations and Admissions Committee

Response to Charge S-2012

February 28, 2022

Charge number S-2012

**Title: Procedures Handling Student Complaints Against Rutgers Personnel
Regarding Instruction**

Description

Proposed Charge: Investigate the procedure for reporting and adjudicating student complaints against Rutgers Personnel, specifically in regard to course instruction and/or concerns about faculty.

Background:

A majority of our ASRAC committee members agree that Rutgers University at large has well defined student friendly steps within its policy and procedures in handling student concerns in reference to their course instruction and/or grade appeals. The concern is how efficiently this policy is communicated to the students and how accessible it is. When we analyzed the digital sources online, we found them sufficient in detail but not ordered in high priority through the commonly used search engines or departmental websites. Rather than amend a policy, we believe a centralized area should be created to promote the existing policy to better inform and serve the student.

Discussion/Considerations:

Based on the many sourced individual School student complaint and grade appeal polices, meeting with the course faculty is the recommended first step. ASRAC members agree that the simplest and most logical step would be to speak directly to the professor. We recognize the potential merit in this approach, specifically if the issue could be quickly and easily addressed. We understand students may be timid in approaching a faculty member directly, out of concern for possibly alienating the professor. When it comes to raising issues about the quality of

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instruction, starting with the subject area departments are likely an appropriate avenue. Rutgers's students can meet with the Chair, only after a discussion with the faculty/instructor has not been resolved with an amicable solution. Utilizing a student's advisor as a mediator is another option for addressing students' concerns with classroom instruction.

We cannot control what students raise as an issue even if it is not considered a legitimate request. Communication is key to the process between students and faculty. Department personnel and advisors should continue to reiterate the process in place when students are asked to speak to their course instructors if they have an issue. After that initial approach, cases can be escalated to the department Chair and/or Dean's office if not resolved, as delineated in the following policy as a prime example: <https://sasoue.rutgers.edu/policies-resources/teaching/53-policies-resources/125-grade-appeals>.

When the aforementioned steps have not reached a successful solution, students are welcome to contact their campus ombudsperson. Areas of assistance from the ombudsperson include conflicts with faculty as advertised at <https://ombuds.rutgers.edu/how-we-can-help>.

The Office of Ombudsperson for Students services both undergraduate and graduate students, alumni, and former students of Rutgers University. Some of the activities include:

- “listen to your concerns,
- refer you to other resources if necessary,
- help you gather information,
- facilitate a resolution to your problem, and
- encourage informal mediation.”

Each Rutgers University campus ombudsperson encourages the student to contact their campus staff person via phone, email or in person. The ombudsperson will schedule a time to listen, outline the issues, gather additional data and information and then broker a meeting with the faculty to reach a helpful resolution. Assistant Dean Sybil James, who serves as RU-NB Ombudsperson, met with the ASRAC committee members last March 2021. She confirmed that the role was to remain impartial when gathering the facts from both sides and strongly encouraged students to meet with faculty as a first step. Dean James has a law degree and is highly qualified to serve as ombudsperson.

It is a good idea to have the Office of Ombudsperson for Students as a centrally located website with all the delineated resources inserted with a suggested sequence of steps for students to follow. This site offers students a host of categories for students to file a complaint with clear guidelines.

Recommendation

Be it Resolved:

The University Senate recommends that each school publicize the existing policy on filing a student complaint regarding instruction to a centralized University online location to ensure that students are aware of appropriate steps for filing a grievance. Additionally, the Senate recommends these policies be linked to the University Ombudsperson website. These policies can be reviewed during the onboarding process during Student Orientation events, first year/transfer student newsletters, and academic department websites.

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Respectfully submitted,

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ASRAC Members

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