

STUDENT COMPLAINTS AND GRIEVANCES

ACADEMIC GRIEVANCES

STUDENT GRIEVANCE/COMPLAINT POLICY AND PROCESS

STUDENT ACADEMIC GRIEVANCE OR COMPLAINT FORM

ACADEMIC GRIEVANCES

It is the policy at Virginia University of Lynchburg to protect the rights and freedoms of students. The following procedures have been established to provide for an orderly, fair, and prompt resolution of student grievances concerning academic issues. These procedures are established to ensure the due process, equitable treatment, and protection of all parties involved in the process.

No adverse action shall be taken in response to an individual who registers an academic grievance. Academic grievance, as used here, shall mean a complaint by a student of Virginia University of Lynchburg against a representative of the University when s/he perceives that s/he has suffered adverse academic consequences from an alleged violation, misinterpretation, inequitable application, misrepresentation, or inappropriate implementation of the academic regulations and procedures of the University. In keeping with the intent and spirit of these procedures, it is incumbent upon all parties to show respect, restraint, and responsibility in their efforts to resolve the grievance. It is incumbent on students proceeding with a grievance to provide evidence of a violation. It is incumbent upon representatives of the University to arrange meetings and conferences concerning the matter in good faith and promptly communicate decisions to the student promptly.

The Academic Grievance procedure applies only to enrolled students. It applies to those cases involving a perceived academic impropriety arising from a decision taken by an individual instructor, a school, or program. This grievance procedure does not apply to: (1) complaints expressing dissatisfaction with a VUL policy as unfair; (2) school or program academic policies or degree requirements; and (3) matters covered by VUL such as student conduct.

This procedure is in no way intended to supplant or duplicate other grievance procedures available either to the student or the University representative(s) named in the grievance, or to prevent such individuals from pursuing other remedies as are provided by law.

Academic Grievance Procedures

When a student believes s/he can demonstrate s/he has been harmed by a violation, misinterpretation, inequitable application, misrepresentation, or inappropriate implementation of the academic regulations and procedures of the University, the following grievance procedure shall be followed. The failure of any University personnel at any level to communicate a decision to the aggrieved student within the stated time limits shall permit the student to proceed to the next step of the process. The failure of the student to appeal the grievance to the next step within the stated time limits shall constitute a withdrawal of the grievance and shall bar further action.

I. Initial Informal Procedures

The student shall initiate the informal procedures within **ten University working days** after the student first perceives the alleged violation on which the complaint is based. The informal procedures outlined below will be initiated prior to a formal grievance being filed.

1. Whenever possible, the student shall meet with the University representative whose actions are the object of the complaint to discuss the issue and attempt to resolve it satisfactorily.
2. If the complaint has not been resolved in conference with the University representative, or if the student cannot meet with the University representative, the student will discuss the complaint with the University representative's immediate supervisor, who will attempt to help the student resolve the complaint. In the interest of resolving the complaint, when the student discusses the complaint with the immediate supervisor, the immediate supervisor shall confer with the University representative.
3. If the student does not feel the problem has been resolved within **ten University working days** after the conference with the University representative's supervisor, the student may initiate the formal academic complaint procedure.

II. Formal Procedures

1. Within **thirty University working days** after the student first perceives the alleged violation on which the complaint is based, the student will file an [Academic Grievance Form](#) in the Office of Academic Affairs (**Available in the Office of Academic Affairs**). Thereafter, the complaint shall be referred to as a grievance. The form will be completed and returned to the Office of Academic Affairs.
2. Within **two University working days** of receipt by the Office of Academic Affairs of the grievance, the Office of Academic Affairs will send written notification to the student who has initiated the process acknowledging receipt of the formal grievance. At the same time, the Office of Academic Affairs will also send written notification to the University representative named in the grievance indicating that a formal grievance process has been initiated. A copy of the formal grievance will be attached. (To protect the rights and privacy of other individuals who may be identified by the student complainant, but who may or may not choose to participate in the grievance process, the Office of Academic Affairs will retain the right to expunge the names of such other individuals from the complaint.)
3. Within **five University working days** of receipt by the Office of Academic Affairs of the written grievance, the Office of Academic Affairs will inform the Academic Grievance Committee about the grievance and appoint a Chair. (For reasonable cause, the Office of Academic Affairs may extend this time requirement.) A copy of the grievance or redacted grievance, as the case may be, shall be provided to the Chair. The Academic Grievance Committee shall be composed of Administrators, Deans, Faculty, Student Government President and Vice President, unless any of these individuals have participated in the informal process, in which case s/he will not be a member of the committee.

4. Committee meeting(s) of the Academic Grievance Committee will be completed within **twenty University working days** of receipt of the written grievance. (For reasonable cause, this time requirement may be extended by the Office of Academic Affairs.) The Office of Academic Affairs will be responsible for making copies of the formal academic grievance, sending them to members of the Academic Grievance Committee, and scheduling the committee meeting(s).
 - a. During the meeting(s), the Academic Grievance Committee may interview the student, the individual against whom the grievance is directed, and/or request additional material they feel is necessary for a fair and complete consideration of the issue.
 - b. At all stages and at their own expense, the student and the individual to whom the grievance is directed may have one person with them during the process. Nevertheless, the student and the University representative named in the grievance shall serve as their own spokespersons. The role of their accompanying representatives, if any, shall be to advise the student or the University representative, and they will not be permitted to speak or to participate directly in any other way unless invited to do so by the Chair of the Committee.
 - c. Both the student and the University representative named in the grievance may request that the testimony of witnesses be heard. Requests for such witnesses must be made in writing in advance of any hearing scheduled by the Academic Grievance Committee and must be submitted to the Office of Academic Affairs no later than **five University working days following the date of written notification by the Office of Academic Affairs to the student and the University representative against whom the grievance is directed acknowledging the initiation of a formal grievance procedure.**
 - d. Requests for witnesses must include the complete name of all witnesses, a description of the relationship of the witness to the individual making the request, and a summary of the expected testimony each witness will provide. The Academic Grievance Committee will retain the right to limit the number of witnesses.
 - e. In the event that either a witness or the University representative, who is the subject of the grievance, does not appear at the meeting(s) called by the Academic Grievance Committee, or will not provide information or documents as requested, the recommendation of the Committee will be made on the basis of the information available to them.
5. When voting on an Academic Grievance, only committee members may be present. All members of the Academic Grievance Committee will participate in the vote.

The Academic Grievance Committee may decide to:

- a. Accept the arguments of the grievance, in which case they will recommend in writing to the Office of Academic Affairs an appropriate action to be taken concerning the

grievance. Such recommended actions may include, but will not be limited to, reinstatement after dismissal from the University, change of grade, approval of a waiver, retaking a test.

- b. Not accept the arguments of the grievance, which they will so recommend in writing to the Office of Academic Affairs.
 - c. As noted above, the Academic Grievance Committee will have completed its meetings within **twenty University working days** of receipt of the written grievance. The Chairperson of the Academic Grievance Committee will submit to the Office of Academic Affairs a written recommendation concerning the appropriate disposition of the grievance, as well as all supporting materials.
6. Within **ten University working days** of receipt of the recommendation from the Academic Grievance Committee, the Office of Academic Affairs will review the materials submitted, file a final decision, and provide written notification to both the student and the individual against whom the grievance is directed as to the disposition of the grievance. Normally, the Office of Academic Affairs will accept the findings and recommendations of the Academic Grievance Committee and (s)he will take the action appropriate to redress any demonstrated harm to the student. However, the Office of Academic Affairs will retain the right to undertake a further review of the grievance, to also interview the student, the individual named in the grievance, and/or request additional material (s)he feels is necessary to a complete consideration of the issue. If the decision of the Office of Academic Affairs differs from the findings and recommendations of the Academic Grievance Committee, (s)he will meet with the Committee in order to provide an explanation of the decision. The decision of the Academic Affairs Office is final.

If the Office of Academic Affairs is directly involved in any way in the informal stage of the grievance, the President or the President's designee will assume the responsibilities assigned to the Office of Academic Affairs at every stage in the formal process.

- 7. The Office of Academic Affairs will be responsible for recording and filing the decision. All materials connected with the grievance will be held in confidence in the Office of Academic Affairs, and shall not be utilized in proceedings concerning discipline, promotion, tenure, or appointments, unless otherwise provided by law.
- 8. The Office of Academic Affairs will be responsible for recording and filing the decision. All materials connected with the grievance will be held in confidence in the Office of Academic Affairs, and shall not be utilized in proceedings concerning discipline, promotion, tenure, or appointments, unless otherwise provided by law.

The decision of the Office of Academic Affairs is final and not appealable. Non-academic grievances should be addressed through the Student Complaints Policy/Procedures. VUL's Chief Operating Officer, who has no decision making authority for Academic Grievances, is available to discuss and advise on any matter of concern related to VUL to assist students seeking resolutions on non-academic matters.

STUDENT GRIEVANCE/COMPLAINT POLICY AND PROCESS

Virginia University of Lynchburg is committed to a policy of ensuring that no individual is excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination in university programs or activities on the basis of race, color, religion, political affiliation, age, disability, national origin, or sex. Virginia University of Lynchburg is also committed to a policy of ensuring that no individual is subject to retaliation for participating in the grievance process, complying with any law or reporting a violation of such law to a governmental authority, reporting an incidence of fraud, abuse, or gross mismanagement, or exercising any right otherwise protected by law.

Purpose

The purpose of the Student Grievance/Complaint Policy is to provide equitable and orderly processes to resolve grievances by students. This procedure applies to all student issues, including but not limited to academic issues, student services, or administrative concerns. Any student may file a grievance under this policy. The grievance can arise from any official faculty or staff action or decision deemed to be unjust or discriminatory by the student and is based upon violation of an institutional policy or written standard that protects every student. The goal of this process is to insure fair and equitable treatment of all students, to hold administrators, faculty and staff accountable for compliance with institutional policies and procedures. Resolution of student complaints, regardless of the outcome, also can improve a student's progress toward completion of a course or degree and ultimately success at the institution.

Any individual (including any student) who believes that he or she has been subjected to discrimination, harassment, or unfair treatment, or has been denied access or accommodation required by law in a Virginia University of Lynchburg program or activity shall have the right to invoke this Grievance Procedure. Any individual who believes that he or she has been subjected to retaliation for participating in the grievance process, complying with any law or reporting a violation of such law to a governmental authority, reporting an incidence of fraud, abuse, or gross mismanagement, or exercising any right otherwise protected by law shall also have the right to invoke this Grievance Procedure.

The identities of the grievant and respondents (the individuals against whom the allegations in the grievance are directed), as well as all witnesses, will not be disclosed except as required by law or policy, or as necessary to fully investigate the grievance.

Definition

- A. A grievable action is an action that:
1. Is in violation of written campus policies or procedures, or
 2. Constitutes misapplication or misinterpretation of University policies, regulations, rules, or procedures. Grievances may not be used to challenge policies or procedures of general applicability.

- B. Complaints between students, disciplinary decisions administered by the Office of Student Conduct, and decisions made by persons not employed by VUL are not grievable under these procedures.
- C. Tables are presented below to help determine what is grievable and what is not grievable action is provided below:

Table I: Grievable Issues

ISSUE	ACTION
1. Is your complaint about a violation of a written campus policy or procedure?	Contact the Student Grievance coordinator to file a complaint.
2. Is your complaint about an arbitrary, capricious, or unequal application or use of written campus policy or procedure?	At any time, you may ask for help from the campus.

Table 2: Non-Grievable Issues

ISSUE	ALTERNATIVE AVENUE
1. Is your complaint against another student?	See the Office of Student Conduct (Student Affairs Office)
2. Is your complaint about a financial aid decision, rule, and/or regulation?	See the Financial Aid Office in Humbles Hall to initiate the financial aid appeal process.
3. Is your complaint about facilities?	Submit a work request to the Student Affairs Office.
4. Is your complaint about computer equipment or technology?	File a request with the IT Department.
5. Is your complaint about your course grade?	Complaints about course grade must first be resolved through your professor, then the Academic Dean, and then the VP for Academic Affairs in that order until a resolution is reached
6. Is your complaint about sexual harassment or discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, religion, sexual preference, national origin, age, marital status, pregnancy, veteran's status, or disabling condition?	<p>FILING WITH THE OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS: The formal and informal procedures listed below are encouraged, but not mandatory. Individuals may also file a complaint directly with the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in the following ways.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E-mail: Grievant may file a complaint, using the following e-mail address: ocr@ed.gov • Online: Grievant may file a complaint with OCR using OCR's electronic complaint form at https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/complaintintro.html • Mail: Grievant may file a complaint with OCR by mail at U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 400 Maryland Avenue, S.W., Washington, DC 20202-1475 • Facsimile: Grievant may file a complaint with OCR by facsimile at (202) 453-6021. • An informative brochure on filing a complaint directly with the OCR is available at the Department of Education's website: http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/doc/s/howto.pdf

ISSUE	ALTERNATIVE AVENUE
7. Is your complaint in regard to a denial of accommodation due to a qualified disability?	Contact the University's Director of Disability Services Dr. Patricia Price, who can be reached at pprice@vul.edu or 434-528-5276 ext.1114. Inquiries about the University's compliance with and policies that prohibit discrimination on these bases may be directed to: United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights 400 Maryland Avenue, S.W. Washington D.C. 20202-1475

A grievance differs from an appeal of an academic decision, as it deals with service issues and not the actual outcomes of course work. A student may file a grievance in the cases of an unresolved difference or dispute between themselves and the university (office or individual) related to services rendered or non-academic decisions. The policy covers matters outside the scope of other policies of the university.

Complaints about sexual harassment and discrimination based upon protected class are addressed via the *Discrimination Complaint Procedure*; complaints about services related to disabilities are addressed through *Rights of Students with Disabilities Policy*, complaints about student behavior are addressed through the *Student Conduct Policy and Procedures* and student academic appeals including grading are addressed through *Student Academic Appeals Policy and Procedures*.

In cases where service issues underlie a disagreement about an academic evaluation, the service issue will be investigated and decided first.

Informal Grievance Procedure

Individuals who want to file an informal grievance alleging discrimination, harassment, or retaliation pursuant to this Grievance Procedure must send the informal grievance to the Director of Disability Services within 45 calendar days of the date of the actions or failures to act being grieved, or the date the individual should reasonably have known about those actions or failures to act.¹ Disability Services is located in Humbles Hall. The Director of Disability Services can be reached at 434-528-5276 ext. 1114 or pprice@vul.edu.

Individuals desiring to lodge a grievance are encouraged, but not required, to consult with the Director of Disability Services as soon as concerns arise. The Director of Disability Services will attempt conflict resolution at the lowest level possible and move forward when necessary to the next appropriate level. If the dispute cannot be resolved by this informal procedure within 14 calendar days of the date on which the informal procedure was initiated, the individual may then lodge a formal written grievance (see below).

Formal Written Grievance Procedure

Formal written grievances should be submitted to the Director of Disability Services (or alternate designee—see footnote 1). The Director of Disability Services will work with University personnel and the individual(s) in a timely manner to resolve disagreements.

The following procedures will be used to review all formal written grievances alleging discrimination, harassment, or retaliation:

- The written grievance (use [Student Formal Written Complaint Form](#)) shall specify the nature of the act claimed to be in violation and the period of time and circumstance in which the grievance arose. The written grievance shall include a statement concerning what actions if any, have been taken to resolve the issue prior to filing the grievance, and what the desired remedy the grievant seeks. The written grievance shall contain the name and contact information of the person making the grievance. The University will not consider a grievance that fails to comply with this paragraph but will inform the grievant of the deficiencies in the grievance and provide the grievant with seven calendar days within which to remedy those deficiencies. The grievance may be supplemented by supporting documents and/or affidavits from persons having first-hand knowledge of the facts.
- The grievance should be filed within 45 calendar days of the alleged violation (not including the 14-day period for an informal resolution described above), or within 45 calendar days of the date, the individual should reasonably have known about those actions or failures to act. If the written grievance is not filed within the 45-day period, the University will not consider the grievance, absent a showing of good cause, such as circumstances beyond the grievant's control. If the written grievance is filed outside the 45-day period, it should include a clear explanation of why the grievance was not filed within the prescribed period.
- Disability Services will investigate all pertinent facts and circumstances in support of the alleged violation.
- Disability Services may attempt resolution of a grievance through mutual agreement of the affected parties at any point during the course of the investigation.
- Should such resolution be achieved, the investigation shall be ended. The terms and conditions of the resolution agreement shall be issued to the grievant and to the appropriate faculty member, administrator or department charged with implementing the prescribed action. A copy of the agreement will be filed in the grievant's file in the office of the Director of Disability Services.
- Where resolution through mutual agreement is not achieved, written findings from the investigation, along with a recommendation for resolving the grievance, shall be forwarded simultaneously to the grievant and to the responsible administrator of the charged department by the Director of Disability Services.
- The Director of Disability Services shall appoint a Formal Grievance Panel of at least three university personnel from departments other than the department complained of, and schedule a Grievance Hearing for a date within 21 calendar days of the receipt of the formal grievance and shall provide the grievant and respondents with at least three calendar days written notice of the Grievance Hearing. The Hearing Notice shall include the allegations, the general manner in which the hearing will be conducted, and the rights of the grievant and respondents at the hearing, including the rights to submit documentary evidence and verbal testimony, and the right of the grievant to cross-examine respondents and witnesses and rebut evidence.
- The grievant and respondents shall bring all witnesses and/or evidence to the Grievance Hearing, except that evidence previously submitted by the grievant in the informal or formal grievance procedure need not be brought to the Grievance Hearing.

The Formal Grievance Panel shall conduct the hearing, accept evidence, determine the order in which evidence will be presented and witnesses examined and cross-examined, identify any additional witnesses or evidence relevant to the grievance, and question the grievant, respondents, and/or witnesses.

- Within 28 calendar days of the receipt of the request of the formal grievance, the Formal Grievance Panel shall make and send a decision to the grievant and respondents which shall include the specific issues raised in the grievance, the applicable standards, the facts alleged, specific findings concerning the merit or lack of merit of each allegation, the basis for the decision, the remedies to be provided, if any, and the grievant's right to appeal the decision (see Grievant Appeal Procedure, below).
- Upon final resolution of a grievance, copies of all records will be forwarded to and maintained by the Director of Disability Services. All records relating to complained-of failures to provide reasonable accommodation are evaluative in nature and, along with all medical information contained in grievance records, shall be deemed confidential.

If the grievance is partly or completely against the Director of Disability Services, the grievance should be submitted to any of the following: Chief Operating Officer at 434-528-5276 ext. 1111 or Rmorgan@vul.edu.

Grievant Appeal Procedure

Grievants who are dissatisfied with the Formal Grievance Panel decision must send an appeal within 14 calendar days of their receipt of the decision to the Chief Operating Office. The Chief Operating Officer office is located in Humbles Hall and can be reached at 434-528-5276. The appeal must be signed by the grievant and include the following:

- The name of and contact information for the grievant;
- A copy of the Formal Grievance Panel decision; and
- A statement concerning the specific flaws in the Formal Grievance Panel decision and why that decision should be reversed.

Within 14 calendar days of the Chief Operating Officer's receipt of the appeal, he or she shall send a final decision letter to the grievant. The final decision shall include the specific issues raised on appeal, specific findings concerning the merit or lack of merit of each raised issue, and the basis for the decision. This final decision letter is not subject to appeal.

A grievant who believes that his or her grievance has not been handled appropriately at any stage of the grievance procedure should bring this to the attention of the Director of Disability Services.

If the grievance is partly or completely against the Chief Operating Officer, the appeal should be submitted to University President, at 434-528-5276 or president@vul.edu

Final Review

Any enrolled or prospective student who feels their complaint was not handled in a satisfactory manner shall contact VUL's Chief Operating Officer to discuss and advise on any matter of concern related to VUL to assist students seeking resolutions on non-academic matters. If, after the

complainant has exhausted available remedies through the institution and feels a satisfactory resolution has not been reached, they are free to seek review by the accreditor and/or external agencies.

Filing Complaint with Accreditor, State, or Federal Agency

Pursuant to the United States Department of Education's Program Integrity Rule (34 CFR §668.43(b)), Virginia University of Lynchburg must provide enrolled students with contact information for filing complaints with its accreditor and with its State approval or licensing entity and any other relevant State official or agency that would appropriately handle a student's complaint.

Accrediting Agency

Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools; P.O. Box 328, Forest, Virginia 24551; Phone (434) 525-9539 • Fax (434) 525-9538; E-mail: info@tracs.org.

State Agencies

Virginia Residents

If a student complaint is a concern that VUL has incorrectly or unfairly applied its own written policy or procedure in your specific case, the student may submit a complaint to the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) as a final step after the VUL's internal complaint process has been fully completed.

Matters Outside SCHEV's Authority

1. Academic decisions such as admissions, grading, class scheduling, attendance, plagiarism determinations, etc. (handled by the institution).
2. Disputes involving other students, staff conduct, housing, or student account issues (handled by the institution).
3. Federal financial aid issues, discrimination complaints, or civil rights violations (contact the U.S. Department of Education).
4. Criminal matters such as assault, theft, property damage, stalking, etc. (contact campus or local law enforcement).

Students may contact State Council of Higher Education for Virginia staff to file a complaint as a last resort. The institution will not subject a student to unfair actions as a result of the student initiating a complaint.

- [SCHEV Student Complaints: https://www.schev.edu/students/resources/student-complaints](https://www.schev.edu/students/resources/student-complaints)
- State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV)
James Monroe Building
101 N. 14th St 9th FL Richmond, Virginia 23219
(804) 225-2600

Distance Education Students

Complaints against Virginia University of Lynchburg which is operating under SARA policies go first through the institution's own procedures for resolution of grievances. Allegations of criminal offenses or alleged violations of a state's general-purpose laws may be made directly to the relevant state agencies.

Complaints regarding student grades or student conduct violations are governed entirely by institutional policy and the laws of the VUL's home state, the Commonwealth of Virginia.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the institution's complaint process, the resolution of 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 SARA State Portal Entity of the home state of the institution or to the SARA State Portal Entity of the state in which the student is located. **Additional information on the SARA Student Complaint process is available at**

<https://nc-sara.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/SARA-Policy-Manual-25.2-Blackline-12.16.25.pdf> and <https://nc-sara.org/sara-student-complaints-0/>

Federal Agencies

Office of Civil Rights

The formal and informal procedures listed above are encouraged, but not mandatory. Individuals may also file a complaint directly with the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in the following ways.

- E-mail: Grievants may file a complaint, using the following e-mail address:
ocr@ed.gov
- Online: Grievants may file a complaint with OCR using OCR's electronic complaint form at <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/complaintintro.html>
- Mail: Grievants may file a complaint with OCR by mail at
U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20202-1475
- Facsimile: Grievants may file a complaint with OCR by facsimile at (202) 453-6021.

An informative brochure on filing a complaint directly with the OCR is available at the Department of Education's website: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/howto.pdf>

Veterans

The Virginia State Approving Agency (SAA) is the approving authority of education and training programs for Virginia. Their office investigates complaints of GI Bill beneficiaries.

While most complaints should initially follow the school grievance policy, if the situation can not be resolved at the school, the beneficiary should contact the SAA office via email at saa@dvs.virginia.gov.

UNIVERSITY FACULTY/STAFF APPEAL PROCEDURE

Faculty and staff are required to implement accommodation and remedial actions recommended or required through the above procedure. If faculty or staff members question an action, remedy, or accommodation recommended by Disability Services in the informal procedure or the decision of the Formal Grievance Panel in the formal procedure and wish to submit an appeal, they must continue to afford the grievant the action, remedy, or accommodation while their appeal is considered. To appeal, the faculty or staff member shall submit a formal written appeal to the Chief Operating Officer. The relevant documentation and reasoning for and against the requested accommodation(s) will be reviewed by the Chief Operating Officer who will issue a written decision within 14 calendar days. This final decision letter is not subject to appeal.