

SOUTHWEST MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY

POLICY

INSTITUTIONAL RECORD OF STUDENT COMPLAINTS

Background: The U.S. Department of Education expects the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Colleges and Schools (HLC) evaluation teams to be aware of major complaints or categories of student concerns that may or may not be addressed in the self-study. The primary source of that information will be an institutional log of student complaints and their disposition. The visiting team will use the log to consider whether institutions generally deal with complaints in a timely manner and in a way that demonstrates fairness to students. The visiting team will also look for any pattern to the complaints that suggests problems with institutional quality or with factors related to the General Institutional Requirements or Criteria for Accreditation. The team will not be reviewing or second-guessing institutional decisions in specific complaints.

Policy: To comply with federal regulations and the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Colleges and Schools, Southwest Minnesota State University will maintain a record of formal written and signed student complaints. The complaints tracked are those filed with a University Officer with the responsibility to handle the complaint. The records provided to the federal government and the HLC include summary information that is in compliance with the Data Practices Act and FERPA.

Procedure:

1. Students with complaints about any aspect of academic and non-academic programs may take those complaints to the Academic Dean's Office, BA 269.
2. University employees that receive a signed, written student complaint regarding any aspect of academic and/or non-academic programs will send a record of the complaint along with the resolution to the Academic Deans Office, BA 269. Actual complaint and supporting documents will remain in the affected office.
3. The Academic Dean's Office will establish a method of logging formal signed, written student complaints and resolutions that have been filed with a University Officer.
4. The log will include:
 - The date the complaint was first formally submitted to the appropriate officer.
 - Nature of the complaint (e.g. grade dispute, allegation of sexual harassment, etc.).
 - The steps taken by the institution to resolve the complaint.
 - The institution's final decision regarding the complaint, including referral to outside agencies.
 - Any other external actions initiated by the student to resolve the complaint, if known to the institution (e.g. lawsuit, EEOC investigation, etc.).
5. The log will only be used to track current and recent student complaints, not parents, employees, etc., even if the complaint relates to a student.
6. Individual students' identities and names will not be included on the log and will not be shared with the visiting HLC team.
7. A formal written and signed student complaint includes complaints received by email or fax as long as the address and/or phone number and the name of the complainant are included.