Book VCCCD Administrative Procedure Manual

Section Chapter 5 Student Services

Title AP 5530 STUDENT RIGHTS AND GRIEVANCES

Number AP 5530

Status Active

Legal Title IX, Education Amendments of 1972; Education Code Section 76224(a) 66301; 76120

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The purpose of this procedure is to provide a prompt and equitable means of resolving student grievances. These procedures shall be available to any student who reasonably believes the college decision or action has adversely affected his or her status, rights, or privileges as a student.

A grievance is an allegation of a violation of any of the following:

1. Sex discrimination as prohibited by Title IX of the Higher Education Amendments of 1972.

2. Financial aid determinations made at the college or District level.

3. Course grades, to the extent permitted by Education Code Section 76224(a), which provides: "When grades are given for any course of instruction taught in a community college District, the grade given to each student shall be the grade determined by the instructor of the course and the determination of the student's grade by the instructor, in the absence of mistake, fraud, bad faith, or incompetency, shall be final.” “Mistake” may include, but is not limited to, errors made by an instructor in calculating a student’s grade and clerical errors.

4. The exercise of rights of free expression protected by the state and federal constitutions, Education Code Sections 66301 and76120, and District Board Policy and Administrative Procedures concerning the right of free expression.

5. Violation of published District rules, Board Policies, and Administrative Procedures, except as set forth below.

This procedure does not apply to:

1. Challenges to the process for determining satisfaction of prerequisites, corequisites, advisories, and limitations on enrollment.

Information on challenges to prerequisites is available from the Office of Academic Affairs.

2. Allegations of harassment or discrimination on the basis of any protected characteristic as set forth in Board Policies 3410 and 3430 and 5 California Code of Regulations Section 53900 et seq. Such complaints may be initiated under the procedures described in the college catalogs.

3. Appeals for residency determination. Residency appeals should be filed with the Admissions and Records Office.

4. Student disciplinary actions, which are covered under separate Board Policies and Administrative Procedures.

5. Police citations (i.e. "tickets"); complaints about citations must be directed to the Campus Police.

6. Evaluation of the professional competence, qualifications, or job performance of a District employee.

7. Claims for money or damages against the District.

Information about other procedures is listed in the college catalogs or may be obtained from the Office of Student Learning.

The alleged wrong must involve an unjust action or denial of a student’s rights as defined above. A grievance exists only when such an error or offense has resulted in an injury or harm that may be corrected through this grievance procedure. As noted above there may be other procedures applicable to various other alleged injuries or harms, and this grievance procedure may not be the sole or exclusive remedy, and it may not be necessary to exhaust this process before presenting allegations to other government agencies or the courts. The outcome of a grievance must be susceptible to producing a tangible remedy to the student complaining or an actual redress of the wrong rather than a punishment for the person or persons found in error. For example, a grievance seeking only the dismissal of a District employee is not viable.

**Definitions**

College Grievance Officer. The administrator in charge of student discipline and/or grievances, appointed by the College President, who shall assist students in seeking resolution by informal means; if informal means are not successful, the College Grievance Officer shall assist students by guiding them through the formal grievance process.

Day. Days during which the District is in session and primary term classes are in session, excluding Saturdays and Sundays.

Grievant. Any student currently enrolled in the college, a person who has filed an application for admission to the college, or a former student. A grievance by an applicant shall be limited to a complaint regarding denial of admission. Former students shall be limited to grievances relating to course grades to the extent permitted by Education Code Section 76224(a).

Respondent. Any person claimed by a Grievant to be responsible for the alleged grievance.

**Informal Resolution**

Informal meetings and discussion between persons directly involved in a grievance are essential at the outset of a dispute. A student who has a grievance shall make a reasonable effort to resolve the matter on an informal basis prior to filing a formal grievance, and shall attempt to solve the problem with the person with whom the student has the grievance or dispute. If a student cannot resolve a grievance informally with the Respondent, then the student will request a meeting with the Respondent’s administrator, manager, or division chairperson, who shall meet with the student in an attempt to resolve the issue and may meet with the student and Respondent either jointly or separately. An equitable solution should be sought before persons directly involved in the case have stated official or public positions that might tend to polarize the dispute and render a solution more difficult.

At any time, the student may request the assistance of the College Grievance Officer in understanding or arranging the informal resolution process.

At no time shall any of the persons directly or indirectly involved in the case use the fact of such informal discussion, the fact that a grievance has been filed, or the character of the informal discussion for the purpose of strengthening the case for or against persons directly involved in the dispute or for any purpose other than the settlement of the grievance.

**Formal Resolution**

In the event an informal resolution is not reached, the grievant shall submit a preliminary written statement of the grievance to the College Grievance Officer within 20 days of the incident on which the grievance is based, or 20 days after the student knew or with reasonable diligence should have known of the basis for the grievance, whichever is later.

Within 10 days following receipt of the preliminary written statement of the grievance, the College Grievance Officer shall advise the student of his or her rights and responsibilities under these procedures, and assist the student, if necessary, in the final preparation of the formal written statement of the grievance.

The submission of this formal signed and dated written description of the complaint signals the beginning of the formal resolution, serves as the request for a hearing, and shall serve as the dated start of the hearing timeline.

The College Grievance Officer will submit a copy of the formal written grievance to the Respondent. The Respondent will be given an opportunity to submit a written response to the allegations to the College Grievance Officer. This response must be received within 10 days and shall be shared with the Grievant.

**Hearing Procedures**

Grievance HearingCommittee. The hearing panel for any grievance shall be composed of one administrator, one faculty member and one student. At the beginning of the academic year, and no later than October 1st, the College President, the President of the Academic Senate, and the Associated Students President shall each establish a list of at least two persons who will serve on student Grievance Hearing Committees. The College President will identify two administrators; the President of the Academic Senate will identify two faculty; and the Associated Students President will identify two students. The College President, or designee, shall appoint the Grievance Hearing Committee from the names in this pool; however, no administrator, faculty member or student who has any personal involvement in the matter to be decided, who is a necessary witness, who is a relative of any party or witness, or who could not otherwise act in a neutral manner shall serve on the Grievance Hearing Committee.

Upon notification of the Grievance Hearing Committee composition, the Respondent and Grievant shall each be allowed one peremptory challenge. The College President, or designee, shall substitute the challenged member or members from the panel pool to achieve the appropriate Grievance Hearing Committee composition. In the event that the pool names are exhausted in any one category, further designees shall be submitted by the College President (for administrators), the President of the Academic

Senate (for faculty), or the Associated Student President (for students).

The Grievance Officer shall sit with the Grievance Hearing Committee but shall not serve as a member or vote. The Grievance Officer shall coordinate all scheduling of hearings, and shall serve to assist all parties and the Grievance Hearing Committee to facilitate a

full, fair and efficient resolution of the grievance.

A quorum shall consist of all three members of the Committee.

Grievance Hearing Committee Chair. The College President, or designee, shall appoint one member of the Grievance Hearing Committee to serve as the chair. The decision of the Grievance Hearing Committee Chair shall be final on all matters relating to the conduct of the hearing unless there is a vote by both other members of the Grievance Hearing Committee to the contrary.

Time Limits: Any times specified in these procedures may be shortened or lengthened if there is mutual concurrence by all parties in writing.

Hearing Process. Within 10 days following receipt of the formal written statement of the grievance and request for hearing, the College President or designee shall appoint a Grievance Hearing Committee as described above. The names of the Grievance Hearing Committee shall be forwarded to the Grievant and the Respondent. They will each have 5 days to exercise the right to a preemptory challenge of a single committee member. . After 5 days the right to challenge the committee composition will be deemed waived. Within 10 days of confirmation, the Grievance Hearing Committee and the Grievance Officer shall meet in private and without the parties present to determine whether the written statement of the grievance presents sufficient grounds for a hearing.

The determination of whether the Statement of Grievance presents sufficient grounds for a hearing shall be based on the following considerations:

The statement satisfies the definition of a grievance as set forth above;

The statement contains facts which, if true, would constitute a grievance under these procedures;

The grievant is a student, which under certain circumstances includes applicants and former students, and meets the definition of “grievant” as set forth in these procedures;

The grievant is personally and directly affected by the alleged grievance;

The grievance seeks a remedy which is within the authority of the hearing panel to recommend or the college president to grant;

The grievance was filed in a timely manner;

The grievance is not clearly frivolous, clearly without foundation, or clearly filed for purposes of harassment.

If the grievance does not meet all of the above requirements, the Grievance Hearing Committee Chair shall notify the student in writing of the rejection of the request for a grievance hearing, together with the specific reasons for the rejection and the procedures for appeal. This notice will be provided within 5 days of the date the decision is made by the Grievance Hearing Committee.

The student may appeal the Grievance Hearing Committee’s determination that the statement of grievance does not present a grievance as defined in these procedures by presenting his/her appeal in writing to the College President within 5 days of the date the student received that decision. The College President shall review the statement of grievance in accordance with the requirements for a grievance provided in these procedures, but shall not consider any other matters, including any facts alleged in the appeal that were not alleged in the original grievance. The College President’s decision whether or not to grant a grievance hearing shall be made within 10 days and shall be final and not subject to further appeal.

If the statement of the grievance satisfies each of the requirements the College Grievance Officer shall schedule a grievance hearing to begin within 30 days following the decision to grant a Grievance Hearing. All parties to the grievance shall be given at least 10 days’ notice of the date, time and place of the hearing.

Before the hearing commences, the members of the Grievance Hearing Committee shall be provided with a copy of the grievance, the written response provided by the Respondent, and all applicable policies and administrative procedures. The Grievance Hearing Committee may request other documents as needed.

A time limit on the amount of time provided for each party to present its case, or any rebuttal, may be set by the Grievance Hearing Committee. Formal rules of evidence shall not apply. All witnesses shall be bound by the Student Code of Conduct and Professional Codes of Ethics to present truthful evidence. Any witnesses not so bound will testify under oath, subject to the penalty of perjury. Any relevant evidence may be admitted at the discretion of the Grievance Hearing Committee Chair, in consultation with the College Grievance Officer and Grievance Hearing Committee. Hearsay evidence and written statements will be admissible, but will be insufficient, alone, to establish the allegations.

The Grievance Hearing Committee Chair, in consultation with the Grievance Hearing Officer and Grievance Hearing Committee, shall be responsible for determining the relevancy of presented evidence and testimony, the number of witnesses permitted to testify, and the time allocated for testimony and questioning. The Grievance Hearing Committee Chair, in consultation with the Grievance Hearing Committee, shall further be responsible for instructing and questioning witnesses on behalf of the Grievance Hearing Committee, and for dismissing any persons who are disruptive or who fail to follow instructions. The Grievance Hearing Committee Chair, in consultation with the College Grievance Officer, shall have the final decision on all procedural questions concerning the hearing.

The Grievance Hearing Committee shall conduct the hearing in accordance with established standards of administrative procedure. Unless the Grievance Hearing Committee determines to proceed otherwise, each party to the grievance shall be permitted to make an opening statement. Thereafter, the grievant shall make the first presentation, followed by the respondent. The grievant may present rebuttal evidence after the respondent completes presentation of his or her evidence. The burden shall be on the grievant to prove by a preponderance of the evidence that the facts alleged are true and that a grievance has been established as presented in the written statement of the complaint.

Both parties shall have the right to present statements, testimony, evidence, and witnesses. Each party shall have the right to be represented by a single advisor but not a licensed attorney. The Grievance Hearing Committee may request legal assistance for the Committee itself through the College President. Any legal advisor provided to the Grievance Hearing Committee may be present during all testimony and deliberations in an advisory capacity to provide legal counsel but shall not be a member of the panel or vote with it.

The grievant shall, in consultation with the College Grievance Officer, have the right to be served by a translator or qualified interpreter to ensure his/her full participation in the proceedings.

Hearings shall be closed and confidential. No other persons except the Grievant and his/her representative and/or translator/interpreter, the Respondent and his/her representative, scheduled single witnesses, the College Grievance Officer, the Grievance Hearing Committee members, and the Committee’s legal advisor, if any, shall be present. Witnesses shall not be present at the hearing when not testifying, unless all parties and the Grievance Hearing Committee agree to the contrary. The rule of confidentiality shall prevail at all stages of the hearing. Moreover, the Grievance Hearing Committee members shall ensure that all hearings, deliberation, and records remain confidential in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), California Education Code Section 76200 et seq., and District Board Policies and Administrative Procedures related to the privacy of student and employee records.

The hearing shall be recorded by the District by electronic means such as audiotape, videotape, or by court reporting service and shall be the only recording made. No other recording devices shall be permitted to be used at the hearing. Any witness who refuses to be recorded shall not be permitted to give testimony. A witness who refuses to be recorded shall not be considered to be unavailable within the meaning of the rules of evidence, and therefore an exception to the hearsay rule for unavailability shall not apply to such witness.

At the beginning of the hearing, on the record, the Grievance Hearing Officer shall ask all persons present to identify themselves by name, and thereafter shall ask witnesses to identify themselves by name. The recording shall remain the property of the District and shall remain in the custody of the District at all times, unless released to a professional transcribing service. Any party to the grievance may request a copy of the recording. Any transcript of the hearing requested by a party shall be produced at the requesting party's expense.

Following the close of the hearing, the Grievance Hearing Committee shall deliberate in closed session with the Grievance Officer. The Grievance Officer shall assist with procedure but shall not be a voting member of the committee. These deliberations shall not be electronically recorded and the proceedings shall be confidential for all purposes. Within 30 days following the close of the hearing, the Grievance Hearing Committee shall prepare and send a written decision to the College Grievance Officer to be forwarded to College President. The decision shall include specific factual findings regarding the grievance, and shall include specific conclusions regarding whether a grievance has been established as defined in these procedures. The decision shall also include a specific recommendation regarding the relief to be afforded the Grievant, if any. The decision shall be based only on the record of the hearing, and not on any matters outside of that record. The record consists of the original grievance, any written response, and the oral and written evidence produced at the hearing, and additional information or documentation related to the hearing that is requested by the Grievance Hearing Committee. The District shall maintain records of all Grievance Hearings in a secure location on District premises for a period of 7 years.

**College President’s Decision**

The College President, at his/her discretion, may accept, reject, or modify the findings, decision, and recommendations of the Grievance Hearing Committee. The factual findings of the Grievance Hearing Committee shall be accorded great weight. The College President may additionally remand the matter back to the Grievance Hearing Committee for further consideration of issues specified by the College President. Within 20 days following receipt of the Grievance Hearing Committee's decision and recommendation(s), the College President shall send to all parties his or her written decision, together with the Grievance Hearing Committee's decision and recommendations. If the College President elects to reject or modify the Grievance Hearing Committee’s decision or a finding or recommendation contained therein, theCollege President shall review the record of the hearing, and shall prepare a new written decision that contains specific factual findings and conclusions. The decision of the College President shall be final, subject only to appeal as described below.

Any party to the grievance may appeal the decision of the College President after a hearing before a Grievance Hearing Committee by filing an appeal with the Chancellor. The Chancellor may designate a District administrator to review the appeal and make a recommendation.

Any such appeal shall be submitted in writing within 5 days following receipt of the College President’s decision and shall state specifically the grounds for appeal.

The written appeal shall be sent to all concerned parties by the Chancellor or designee. All parties may submit written statements, within 5 days of receipt, in response to the appeal.

The Chancellor or designee may review the record of the hearing and the documents submitted in connection with the appeal, but shall not consider any matters outside of the record and the appeal.

If the Chancellor chooses a designee to review the record and appeal statements, that designee shall make a written recommendation to the Chancellor regarding the outcome of the appeal. The Chancellor may decide to sustain, reverse or modify the decision of his/herdesignee.

The decision on appeal shall be reached within 20 days after receipt of the appeal documents. The Chancellor’s decision shall be in writing and shall include a statement of reasons for the decision. Copies of the Chancellor’s appeal decision shall be sent to all parties.

The Chancellor's decision shall be final.