

AC840: Student Complaint Policy

Policy Title:	Student Complaint Policy
Policy Number:	AC840
Owner:	Vice-President, Student Success
Approved by:	CET
Effective Date:	January 27, 2022
Reference:	

Links to Other Policy: [Student Code of Conduct](#), [Academic Appeals](#), [Workplace Harassment, Discrimination and Bullying](#), and [Sexual Violence Policy](#).

St. Lawrence College is committed to making our resources fully accessible to all persons. This document will be made available in alternative format upon request.

BACKGROUND

Definitions:

Administrator: May be a Manager, Supervisor, Associate Director, or Associate Dean or another role who has full supervisory responsibility for an employee and/or a service unit/department.

Anonymity: Anonymity allows the name of the complainant to be withheld. However, a student reporting a complaint to a College employee or College official should understand that while every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality, the College cannot investigate or follow up on an anonymous disclosure.

Complainant: full-time or part-time students, including online students who are currently enrolled in a course or program at St. Lawrence College.

Complaint: An expression, either oral or written, of some discontent or dissatisfaction with the College by one or more students about its standards of service, its operation, or its employees.

Confidentiality: The process of strict privacy guiding the College's response to a complaint. A Complainant's name and disclosure is known, but, only to those who need to know in order to help resolve the complaint/or provide support as per the Complainant's request.

Day / Business Day: For the purpose of this policy, "day" means any day that includes Monday to Friday, excluding holidays, as defined in the St. Lawrence College academic calendar.

Respondent: A person, department or office called upon to issue a response to a communication made by a Complainant. An Administrator may act as a Respondent if the complaint is regarding a policy, program or service within the college.

Senior Administrator: Refers to the next senior level of management, Dean, Director, or Vice-President.

Support Person: While not required, a support person may be chosen by any of the parties during the process to support the Complainant or Respondent involved. The support person will not be permitted to advocate for, or speak on behalf of, the Complainant

Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to ensure concerns of students can be addressed and resolved appropriately and in a timely way, and without fear of reprisal. St. Lawrence College places a strong emphasis on providing students with high-quality academic experiences and services, and to continuously improving them. An essential part of that commitment is receiving and responding to the concerns and complaints of students. The College is committed to ensuring this policy is enforced in a consistent, fair, and non-discriminatory way.

Scope:

This includes complaints from full-time or part-time students, including online students who are currently enrolled in a course or program at St. Lawrence College, or former students who were enrolled in a course or program when the alleged incident(s), leading to the complaint, occurred.

This procedure applies to circumstances not already covered by existing policy and procedures and specifically, [Student Code of Conduct](#), [Academic Appeals](#), [Workplace Harassment, Discrimination and Bullying](#), and [Sexual Violence Policy](#).

Should the concern raised relate to implementation of academic accommodations for students with disabilities, individuals are to be directed to wellness@sl.on.ca for information and support, as the matter may be best supported through retroactive accommodation.

POLICY STATEMENTS

1. The College will respond to any dissatisfaction with its services fairly and promptly.
 - Students and employees are encouraged to try to resolve complaints informally where possible.

- An initial response to a formal complaint is provided within 10 business days.
 - Information on how to move the complaint to the next level is provided if the Complainant is not satisfied with the College's initial response.
 - The Complainant can appeal a formal decision if dissatisfied with the outcome.
2. Complaints can be addressed using an informal and/or a formal procedure. Students are encouraged to try to resolve their complaint informally before proceeding with the formal complaint procedure. All College staff have a responsibility for receiving complaints, treating them seriously, and dealing with them promptly and courteously in accordance with the procedure set out in Appendix A. Advice and information regarding the complaint process for students can be obtained from Academic School offices, Student Rights & Responsibilities Office (SRRO) and Student Government offices.
 3. There are two stages contained in this policy (Step 1: informal and Step 2: formal) to allow escalation where it has not proved possible to resolve a complaint informally, or where a student considers that their complaint has not or cannot be resolved informally, or where it is apparent that serious, complex and/or multiple issues are involved.
 4. Administrators and/or Senior Administrators have the responsibility to resolve a complaint, and to lead or to contribute to an investigation into a complaint when this is considered appropriate.
 5. The Vice- President, Student Success is responsible for the appeal process, which may include delegation where deemed appropriate.
 6. All employees of the College who deal with a complaint shall respect the Complainant's and Respondent's rights to confidentiality. Note that confidentiality is not synonymous with anonymity.
 7. While not required, a support person may be chosen by any of the parties during the process to support the Complainant or Respondent involved. The support person will not be permitted to advocate for, or speak on behalf of, the Complainant or the Respondent. In circumstances where a student requires an interpreter or other accessibility-related support personnel, such role will be separate and apart from the role of the support person.
 8. There shall be no reprisals towards Complainants for engaging in Complaints Policy activity. A student is protected from retaliation in accordance with this policy as long as the complaint is made in good faith and is not knowingly false or materially inaccurate. Following investigation or fact-finding, the lack of a factual basis for a complaint will not unilaterally be considered evidence that a complaint was frivolous or vexatious.

9. A student who makes a complaint found to be vexatious or malicious, following the investigation under the Complaints Procedure, may be deemed to be in breach of the Student Code of Conduct policy. Investigation of retaliatory events will be launched by the Student Rights & Responsibilities Office. A complaint must be made within thirty (30) days of the incident(s) giving rise to the complaint except in extenuating circumstances which, in the opinion of the Senior Administrator assigned, would justify an extension.
10. A group of students may delegate one or more of its members to voice a complaint on its behalf. However, no one shall initiate a complaint on behalf of another person without their permission. The decision whether to hear from other members of the group rests with the Administrator(s) by whom the complaint is addressed.
11. The College has a number of policies dealing with specific types of complaints. These are listed in the scope of this policy. If students are unsure under which policy they should launch a complaint or if they require help to initiate the process, they can consult with any one of the following: their Academic Office, Student Rights & Responsibilities Office, Student Wellness or Student Governments.
12. Anonymous complaints will not be dealt with under this Policy. People wishing to give feedback anonymously should utilize the Feedback process, by emailing Feedback@sl.on.ca.

Further Assistance

The Complaint Policy and Procedure is published on the College website and is available through SLC.me. Copies of the Complaint Policy and Procedure, including the complaint forms. Students requiring assistance may consult with the Student Rights & Responsibilities Office for guidance on this process.

While every effort is made to respond according to the timelines, an extension may be justified in extenuating circumstances as indicated by a Senior Administrator.

MONITORING

All areas of the College are accountable for ensuring that the principles of this policy are upheld. It is the responsibility of the Vice-President, Student Success to maintain a clear record of all complaints. The Vice President, Student Success prepares an annual summary report on the formal complaints and the outcomes and presents the report for information to the College Executive Team.

Where a complaint is upheld and action is required, a record of the action taken shall be kept with the complaint documentation. Where recommendations for changes to policies or procedures are made as the result of a complaint, a record of consideration for quality improvement shall be kept with the complaint documentation. The Office of the Vice-President, Student Success will monitor complaints which have been referred to them and will be responsible for implementing, or recommending to the appropriate authority changes to systems or procedures suggested by the nature and pattern of the complaints received.

NEXT POLICY REVISION DATE

This policy will be reviewed in 5 years: By the end of 2026. This review will be initiated by the Director, Wellness, Accessibility & Student Success.

SPECIFIC LINKS

[Student Code of Conduct](#), [Academic Appeals](#), [Workplace Harassment, Discrimination and Bullying](#), and [Sexual Violence Policy](#).

APPENDICES AND ATTACHMENTS

- Appendix A - Procedures
- Appendix B – Complaint Guidance
- Appendix C - Complaint Form

APPENDIX A: PROCEDURES

Action	Responsibility
P.1 Step 1 - Informal Complaint Procedure	
a. Set up meeting with employee, or their supervisor (if necessary) to review complaint. Complainants received by frontline staff are normally directed to the person responsible for the service or program.	Complainant(s)
b. At meeting, state complaint clearly, preferably in writing, a copy is retained by the employee. If the student requires support formulating their complaint, assistance can be sought from the Student Rights & Responsibilities Office.	Complainant(s)

<p>A student may bring a member of the SRRO to this meeting as a support person.</p>	
<p>c. At meeting, listen to the concerns of the complainant(s) and seek clarification, if needed. An employee may bring a Union representative to this meeting, if applicable.</p>	Respondent/Administrator
<p>d. Explore ways to resolve the concerns. Either party may request a facilitated discussion (with a Supervisor) or mediation to be used as part of the informal complaint resolution process. An appropriate mediator will be appointed.</p>	Complainant(s) and Respondent/Administrator
<p>e. Agree on a way to resolve the concerns. The employee will provide a written account of the agreed upon solution(s) within two (2) business days. The complainant is kept informed of progress at all stages.</p>	Respondent
<p>f. If the issue is not resolved to the complainant's satisfaction, the complaint moves to Step 2 within five (5) business days of receiving notification of the decision.</p>	Complainant(s)
<p>P2. Step 2 - Formal Complaint Resolution</p>	

<p>a. If unable or unwilling to approach the employee, or if concerns have not been resolved during Step 1 with the employee or their supervisor as described above, email the written complaint to: complaint@sl.on.ca for delegation to appropriate Senior Administrator.</p> <p>b. The written complaint should include the following information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the complaint, including time and date of events • Employee(s) involved, or • Policy, procedure or issue of concern • Impact of event • Names of witnesses, if any • Action taken to date • Requested action for resolution, if known 	<p>Complainant(s)</p>
<p>c. Respond to the complaint acknowledging receipt of the document upon receipt.</p>	<p>VPSS Executive Assistant</p>
<p>d. Designate appropriate Senior Administrator to review the complaint as soon as possible, within two (2) business days of receipt.</p>	<p>VPSS Executive Assistant</p>
<p>e. Inform SRRO@sl.on.ca of summary details of Complaint received:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student name, ID • Program • Nature of Complaint • Senior Administrator assigned 	<p>VPSS Executive Assistant</p>
<p>f. Within ten (10) business days of reviewing the complaint and potentially meeting with the Complainant(s), investigate the merits of the complaint, which can include a detailed, in-depth discussion with the employee or the Complainant(s), and any other investigation method deemed appropriate by the administrator.</p>	<p>Senior Administrator</p>

<p>g. Provide the Respondent the opportunity to respond in writing to the specific concerns raised by the Complainant(s) within five (5) business days.</p>	<p>Senior Administrator</p>
<p>h. The Senior Administrator may decide to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring the Respondent and Complainant(s) together to discuss the situation, clarify the complaint, and develop a strategy to resolve the complaint • Propose an amicable resolution with the Respondent and advise the Complainant(s) in writing. • Uphold or partially uphold the complaint, provide an apology, and take appropriate steps to address the issue and avoid a similar problem in the future. • Dismiss the complaint as unfounded with reasons and respond to the Complainant in writing, outlining why no further action will be taken. 	<p>Senior Administrator</p>
<p>i. All complaints are to be addressed as quickly as possible. All formal complaints (Step 2) are acknowledged in writing, including the detailed response, within thirty (30) business days. All formal complaints receive a formal written response outlining the outcome and the right of appeal where appropriate. The Vice-President, Student Success Office is copied on all decisions.</p>	<p>Senior Administrator</p>

<p>P.3 Appeal of Decision</p>	
<p>a. If a Complainant remains dissatisfied with the College's response to the complaint, they may appeal in writing to the Vice-President, Student Success within five (5) business days of receiving notification of the Step 2 formal decision.</p> <p>b. There are three primary grounds under which a Respondent may request an appeal, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There has been a clear failure of due process in consideration of the complaint, which the Complainant can define and provide evidence. 	<p>Complainant(s)</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The decision of Step 2 was unreasonable or substantially disproportionate to the circumstances. • New material evidence or facts become available, which the Complainant could not reasonably have provided earlier, and which may be sufficient to alter a decision. In these cases, the senior administrator is obliged to consider the validity and admissibility of the new information/facts. <p>c. The Complainant should set out their concerns clearly and succinctly and provide evidence in support, where possible.</p> <p>d. The Complainant must also explain how the response received at Step 2 falls within one of the grounds set above in paragraph and outline the remedy sought.</p>	
<p>e. The Vice-President, Student Success Office is responsible for receiving complaints-related appeals and determining eligibility for appeal. Where eligibility for appeal is met, The Vice-President, Student Success, or delegate will receive the written appeal submission and all documents provided at Step 2, meet with appropriate persons knowledgeable about the complaint, and make inquiries as needed. The Vice-President, Student Success, may appoint a delegate to hear the appeal, where appropriate. Such delegate should be a Senior Administrator with no prior involvement under Step 1 or Step 2.</p>	<p>Vice-President, Student Success</p>
<p>f. The Vice-President Student Success, or delegate as above, may decide to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uphold the original decision and dismiss the appeal. • Quash the decision and refer the complaint back to the area concerned and propose an amicable settlement. 	<p>Vice-President, Student Success</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uphold or partially uphold the complaint, offer an apology, and recommend that appropriate steps be taken by the manager responsible to address the issue and to avoid a similar problem in the future. 	
<p>g. Inform the Complainant(s) of the decision within ten (10) business days of receiving the appeal and indicate that the matter is now closed. The appeal decision is final and binding. For appeals delegated to a Senior Administrator, that Administrator will be responsible for notifying the Vice-President, Student Success Office of the appeal outcome.</p>	<p>Senior Administrator</p>

APPENDIX B: GUIDANCE FOR STEP 1 AND STEP 2

1. Either a verbal or written complaint can be resolved through the Step 1 resolution process.
2. Where an employee is the subject of a complaint students are encouraged to approach the employee directly. If this is not appropriate, students are encouraged to approach the Supervisor of the employee that is the subject of their complaint.
3. A Complainant can be accompanied by a peer, Student Rights & Responsibilities staff, or a member of the Student Governments during the complaint resolution phases.
4. A Respondent can be accompanied by a Union representative during any step of the complaint resolution phases.
5. It is not possible to preserve a Complainant's anonymity while resolving a complaint through this process. If a student wishes to provide feedback anonymously, they may do so by emailing Feedback@sl.on.ca.
6. Students are expected to submit complaints, within the timeline(s) and procedures indicated in this policy. However, the College may exercise its discretion to extend the timelines where there is a justifiable reason why the student has not submitted a complaint within the timelines. Under certain circumstances, depending on the complexity of the complaint, it may be necessary for the College to amend the timelines and procedures. All such amendments will be available to the College without recourse by the student(s) or employee(s), provided they continue to result in a fair process.
7. Following investigation or fact-finding, the lack of a factual basis for a complaint will not be considered evidence that a complaint was frivolous or vexatious. Any

- retaliation by the Respondents because a student engaged in the student complaints process is unacceptable and will be addressed appropriately as guided by Human Resources.
8. While a student will not be disadvantaged as a result of making a complaint, the College may consider referring the matter to the Student Rights & Responsibilities Office, should there be reasonable/compelling evidence that a student complaint was frivolous, malicious or brought in bad faith. A complaint will be deemed vexatious or frivolous if it is:
 - i. obsessive, harassing, or repetitive;
 - ii. insistent on pursuing non-meritorious complaints and/or unrealistic, unreasonable outcomes;
 - iii. insistent on pursuing what may be meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner;
 - iv. designed to cause disruption or annoyance; and/or
 - v. demanding for redress which lacks any serious purpose or value

In such cases, the College dismisses the complaint as unfounded and refers the Code of Conduct violation to the Student Rights & Responsibilities Office.