

Student Complaints – as Reported to the Higher Learning Commission, Federal Compliance Reporting, February 2015

NMT's practice is to handle student complaints swiftly and fairly at the first point of student interaction.

Definitions of NMT Student Complaints are as follows:

Student complaint: Any concern with a person, process, policy or service of which a student requests clarification, investigation, and resolution; or any student appeal of a policy.

- Level 1 Complaint: A verbal complaint that is resolved. These are not tracked unless required by specific policy or law.
- Level 2 Complaint: A written complaint containing information that identifies the student that reaches the level of the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Dean of Graduate Studies, or the Vice President of Student and University Relations, who is also the Dean of Students. This type of complaint and its resolution are tracked.
- Level 3 – Formal Grievance -- Complaint: Formal Grievance, which is a written complaint alleging a wrong-doing by the institution or its faculty or staff that requests further action that what was determined or an appeal of a determination, such as an appeal for a hearing with the Student Discipline Committee.

Thus, an informal approach is used so that the student is interacting with the decision-maker within the Academic Division or the Student and University Relations Division who has the most detailed knowledge of the student experience. An escalation path is available to any student who is not satisfied with the initial handling of their complaint, as outlined in the policy:

- The academic escalations for undergraduates are handled by the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs. The Vice President for Academic Affairs will handle student concerns that have reached the Office of Academic Affairs at student request or if the Associate Vice President is unavailable.
- The undergraduate student life/non-academic escalations are handled by the Vice President for Student and University Relations and Dean of Students.
- The graduate student academic escalations and student life/non-academic escalations are handled by the Dean of Graduate Studies.

Because NMT has an open door policy, the above-mentioned leadership do not “turn away” any student who requests to see them.

Thus, if a student initially meets with the Dean of Graduate Studies, the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs or the Vice President for Student and University Relations and Dean of Students about his or her concern, additional members of the faculty or administration will be included in future meetings, where appropriate. The President also has an open door policy and meets with students who request a meeting with him.

In addition to the university-based complaint process, the New Mexico State Department of Higher Education has a student complaint process. The student initiates the process by submitting a written complaint, using the New Mexico Higher Education Department Submit a Complaint webpage. There has been one complaint filed by a graduate student from the university in the 2009-2014 period, and it was dismissed.

Recording, Data and Reporting of Undergraduate Student Academic Complaints

Undergraduate students typically come to Academic Affairs after not feeling their concern has been resolved elsewhere or because they have been directed to the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs who reviews all academic policy appeals. Thus, the Office of Academic Affairs treats all complaints as Level 2 Complaints, unless a student specifically files a Level 3 – Formal Grievance -- Complaint. Prior to Fall 2014, undergraduate student complaints were recorded in files; however, the addition of a brief intake form in Fall 2014 has improved the process for accuracy in information and data. Undergraduate student complaints are recorded as follows:

- Students fill out a brief intake form; an example is included at the end of this section of this report.
- Resolution is recorded and dated on the intake form; any supporting documentation is attached to the form. These files are kept in the Office of Academic Affairs, organized by semester.
- The student is notified by email of the resolution.
- Academic Affairs staff records pertinent information, such as type of complaint and date of resolution, on a data spreadsheet.

Data from 2005 to Fall 2014 on Academic Complaints by Undergraduate Students are as follows:

UG ACADEMIC CONCERN/COMPLAINT 2005 to Fall 2014	Approved	Denied	Action Take or Policy Change	TOTAL
Admission Appeal	0	0		0
Course Retake Appeal*	6	0	Reviewed by AVPAA/unchanged	6
Course Substitution Appeal	1			2
Dual Credit Appeal	2	1		3
Graduation Appeal**	1			1
Grade Appeal	21	10	Adherence to 4- point scale being reviewed by Academic Affairs	31
Late Registration Appeal	0	0		0
Readmission Appeal	20	11	ASAC considering more part-time readmissions	30
Suspension Appeal	1	2		3
Transfer Appeal	3	2		5
Override Appeal	0	2		2
Other Appeal	2	1		3
Academic Concern	n/a	n/a		5
Academic Center for Technology (ACT)/DE Issue	n/a	n/a		0
Academic Department/ Program Issue	n/a	n/a		1
Administration Issue	n/a	n/a		8
Center for Student Success (CSS)/	n/a	n/a		1
Associate Dean for Student Success Issue				
Community Education Outreach Program Issue	n/a	n/a		1
Course Issue	n/a	n/a		5
Center for Graduate Studies/Dean Issue	n/a	n/a		1
Dean Issue (Eng. Dean or A&S Dean)	n/a	n/a		0
Instructor Issue	n/a	n/a	Reporting to Council of Chairs and Faculty Senate, Required New Faculty Training, Planned Chair Training, Planned Instructor Handbook, Options for Students – see narrative	55 (30 separate complaints)

Library Issue	n/a	n/a	0
Office for Student Learning (OSL) Issue	n/a	n/a	0
Registrar Issue	n/a	n/a	10
Tech Computing Center (TCC) Issue	n/a	n/a	3
Veterans Affairs Office Issue	n/a	n/a	1
Deferred to other Office***	n/a	n/a	9

TOTAL

Source: Office of Academic Affairs

*This does not reflect an accurate number; some have been denied. Prior to 2013, these complaints were handled as Level 1; 2013 and later they have been handled as Level 2, as are all complaints that come to Academic Affairs.

**These appeals are very rare and are usually recorded as course substitution or waiver.

***An example of a complaint deferred to another office would be a request by a student for a substitution for a required course within his or her major. This is deferred to the appropriate Department Chair, as Academic Affairs does not override major requirements unless it is in consultation with and approval by the Department Chair.

Data showing the number of Academic Appeals approved or denied in the last four years follow:

UG Academic Concern/Complain	2011		2012		2013		2014		TOTAL	
	Approved	Denied	Approved	Denied	Approved	Denied	Approved	Denied	App	Den
Admission Appeal			1						1	
Course Retake Appeal					4		2		6	
Course Substitution Appeal							1		1	
Dual Credit Appeal		1					2		2	1
Graduation Appeal (see *** above)										
Grade Appeal	2		5	1	5	2	1		13	3
Late Registration Appeal									0	0
Readmission Appeal	3	2	1		8	5	1		13	7
Suspension Appeal		1						1	0	2
Transfer Appeal	1				1	2			2	2
Override Appeal									0	0
Other Appeal		1				1	1		2	1
	2011		2012		2013		2014		Total	
Academic Concern							1		1	
Academic Center for Technology (ACT)/DE Issue										

Academic Department/ Program Issue					
Administration Issue	1		4		5
Center for Student Success (CSS)/ Associate Dean for Student Success Issue	1				1
Community Education Outreach Program Issue		1			1
Center for Graduate Studies/Dean Issue	1	2	1	1	5
Course Issue		2	1	1	4
Dean Issue (Eng. Dean or A&S Dean)					0
Instructor Issue	1	1	15 (12 separate complaints) #	38 (16 separate complaints) ##	55
	2011	2012	2013	2014	Total
Library Issue					0
Office for Student Learning (OSL) Issue					0
Registrar Issue		1	3	1	4
Tech Computing Center (TCC) Issue		1	1		2
Veterans Affairs Office Issue				1	1

Source: Office of Academic Affairs

#One group of four students with the same complaint.

##One group of three students with the same complaint; one group of eight students with the same complaint; and one group of eleven students with the same complaint.

Instructor complaints are handled immediately with a resolution in a week or two at the most, as the semester moves swiftly, and if the complaint is not addressed, it can affect the student's progress.

Complaints often are that the student needs clarification from the instructor on course materials or expectations, and this can be resolved by arranging for the instructor and the student to meet or by discussion with the instructor by the Department Chair or occasionally the AVPAA or the VPAA along with the Department Chair.

To address the rise in the number of student complaints concerning instructors, we have implemented or will be implementing the following:

- Reporting numbers and categories of student complaints to Council of Chairs and Faculty Senate;
- Mandatory New Faculty Training,
- Planned Department Chair Training,
- Planned Instructor Handbook.

Academic Affairs collects instructor or course complaints by category and will begin reporting these to Faculty Senate and Council of Chairs each semester, beginning March 2015.

The table of these complaints for the last two years follows:

Instructor Issues*	2013	2014
Expectations not on syllabus	1	5
Unclear expectations/requirements	2	9
No dates on syllabus		4
Exam/assignments added during Dead Week		3
Unfair grading, including 50 pt. loss for F and not adhering to 4 point scale	3	15
Instructor speaks in demeaning manner to students or raises voice	1	4
Instructor/course material disorganized	2	9
Provided powerpoints/"teaches" by reading these		
Can't understand instructor due to complexity of material that instructor understands but doesn't try to explain to students	3	2
Can't understand the instructor due to English-speaking ability		
Can't understand the instructor due to poor delivery skills, such as speaking too softly		
Can't understand the course material and instructor doesn't try to help		9
Instructor not available enough/not in during office hours	4	5

*Because a student might have several complaints about the instructor and teaching ability, and all complaints are marked, these numbers do not match with the total number of instructor complaints in the earlier table. These numbers also reflect groups of students who had the same complaints about one instructor.

Again, these complaints are handled swiftly and are typically rectified easily. If the student's concern is found to be valid, the instructor is required by the Department Chair:

- to attend instructor trainings at the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning (CITL),
- to attend the Teaching Coffee Hour (a grassroots sharing session led by faculty),
- and possibly to have constructive reviews by a colleague who attends some of the instructor's classes.

Recording, Data and Reporting of Undergraduate Student Non-Academic/Student Life Complaints

As is shown in the Academic Appeals and Issues Policy and Procedure in the Undergraduate Catalog and the Grievance Policy in the Student Handbook (which includes all three levels of Student Complaints), the Vice President for Student and University Relations and the Dean of Students does often serve as the first point of contact for any student-life or non-academic complaint. These typically are verbal, resolved quickly and therefore have been considered Level 1 Student Complaints. However, the Vice President for Student and University Relations and Dean of Students has reviewed this process and in December 2014 began incorporating an intake form and is thereby treating student complaints seen in her office as Level 2. An example of the form is at the end of this section. These complaints are being recorded on a database and will be tracked with periodic information and data sharing with other Vice Presidents and pertinent offices.

Recording, Data and Reporting of Graduate Student Academic and Non-Academic/Student Life Level 1 Complaints

The Dean of Graduate Studies reviews complaints that are both academic and non-academic, as is stated in the Academic Appeals and Issues Policy and Procedure.

Because graduate students typically request information initially from the Center for Graduate Studies, the Graduate Dean reports that almost all complaints in her office are Level 1 and therefore are not recorded. Because the Dean keeps a file on each graduate student, any recorded complaints have been placed in the student's file. As of Spring 2015, the Center for Graduate Studies will begin keeping a database on the number of academic and non-academic Level 2 Complaints and will track complaints for sharing with other Deans and with Vice Presidents, Faculty Senate and pertinent offices.

Recording, Data and Reporting of Undergraduate and Graduate Level 3 – Formal Grievance -- Complaints

The reporting of a Level 3 – Formal Grievance -- Complaint is very low. No policy changes were made as a result of these grievances. See the table below containing the 5-year historical trend. All grievances were resolved to-date with the exception of one graduate student grievance that is still unresolved.

Year Grievance was Submitted	Undergraduate Grievances Submitted	Resolution Year	Graduate Grievances Submitted	Resolution Year
2010	1	2010		
2011	2	2011; 2012	1	2012
2012	1	2013	1	2012
2013				
2014				

Policy Review or Change Based on Student Complaints

The patterns of student complaints are presented in several forums so that the university can consider the specific process and/or policy that raised a concern and evaluate opportunities for improvement. The forums for discussion are:

- Vice Presidents discuss the complaints and consider action based on them
- Summaries of undergraduate academic complaints are presented during new faculty orientation
- Metrics on undergraduate academic complaints are presented to the Faculty Senate on a semester basis (beginning in March 2015)
- A description of complaint patterns are presented to the Council of Chairs and the Graduate Council

Because the Vice Presidents discuss recurring concerns with both Level 1 and Level 2 Complaints, changes have been made even with Level 1 Complaints or from the review of Academic Dishonesty incidents. (Academic Dishonesty data has been presented to the Faculty Senate each Fall semester for several years, according to the policy, and is discussed in the Assurance Argument.)

- An example of a policy change resulting from a student Level 1 Complaint pattern is that degrees are conferred monthly instead of only at the end of the semester. The relevant complaint was that a student would finish defending their thesis in January, one month after the semester completed, and would not receive their degree until May, which is the end of the succeeding semester. This timing created a delay in the individual's ability to be hired into their career position.

- An example of a process change resulting from an Academic Dishonesty pattern is having the International Office instruct students that they must never sign for anyone in any circumstance.
- Due to the number of students appealing the Course Repeat policy (Level 2 Complaint but formerly handled as Level 1 Complaint) even after receiving a C or better in the course, the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs researched and reviewed what the Course Repeat policy is at several other universities and decided that the NMT policy is in keeping with other universities. NMT students might never graduate if they were allowed to repeat courses to improve their GPA. The Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs has allowed an override of the policy if a student can show that he or she must have higher than a C to, for example, be considered for medical school.
- Student Level 2 Complaints have been low concerning our Final Exam/Dead Week Policy; however, because students have expressed concern with this policy as a “side-point” in other complaints to the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, a review of this policy is currently being conducted and will be brought before Council of Chairs and Faculty Senate.
- Other actions taken or planned are noted within the tables above.
- Actions taken for instructor/course complaints are discussed following the table of that information.

Student Appeal of Responsible Conduct Policy: Level 3 – Formal Grievance -- Complaint

The Responsible Conduct Policy for Undergraduates is found in the Undergraduate Catalog on pages 60 to 76 and in the Graduate Catalog on pages 59 to 76. This policy includes both the Academic Honesty Policy and the Guide to Student Conduct and Citizenship with the Student Code of Conduct Policy. This very detailed, comprehensive policy ensures fairness and provides for due process, lists the appeal process for a hearing with the Student Discipline Committee if the student believes the determination in the academic honesty incident or the student discipline incident is unfair.

The Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs determines all alleged undergraduate student violations of the Academic Dishonesty Policy; the Dean of Graduate Studies determines all alleged graduate student violations.

As stated earlier, Academic Dishonesty data has been presented to the Faculty Senate each Fall semester for several years, according to the policy, and is discussed in the Assurance Argument in 2.E.

The Vice President for Student and University Relations and Dean of Students determines all alleged undergraduate student conduct violations. If the alleged conduct violation occurs within an academic context or with someone under the Academic Division (i.e. with an instructor or within the classroom or within the library), the Vice President for Student and University Relations and Dean of Students confers with the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs (or the Vice President for Academic Affairs) and a collaborative determination is made.

The Dean for Graduate Studies determines all graduate student conduct violations.

These appeals are recorded in the Level 3 – Formal Grievance – Complaint table above.

The following is the information on the intake form used by the Office of Academic Affairs:

Student Concerns and Inquiries

Please fill out this form and bring a hard copy to your appointment with the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs (AVPAA) or the Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA) in Brown Hall 200 or present to the AVPAA or VPAA if you are being seen without an appointment.

Student Name:

Student 900 Number:

Student Email:

Student Phone Number:

Date:

What is your concern or inquiry?

If this concerns a class, what is the course name and number? Who is the instructor?

If applicable, have you spoken with the instructor?

If applicable, have you spoken with the Department Chair?

Do you want to remain anonymous if the AVPAA/VPAA must look into the situation?

Please Note: For some concerns, you cannot remain anonymous. This will be discussed in the meeting.

AVPAA/VPAA fills out the following:

Action and Resolution/Date

Policy Involvement

The following is the information on the intake form used by Student and University Relations:



STUDENT CONCERNS AND INQUIRIES

Date: _____

Student's
Information: _____

Name(s) / ID(s) / Phone #(s)

CONCERN OR INQUIRY:

ACTION OR RESOLUTION:

ACADEMIC ISSUE:

Course Name: _____

Instructor: _____ Notified Instructor? ☐ No ☐ Yes,
Date: _____

Notified Department Chair?: ☐ No ☐ Yes, Date: _____

The following is the information on the intake form used by the Center for Graduate Studies (this was not on Federal Compliance report for the HLC):

Student to fill out

Student Concerns and Inquires for the Graduate Dean

Please fill out this form and bring a hard copy to your appointment with the Dean in The Center for Graduate Studies Fidel 2nd Floor.

Student Name_____ Date:_____

Student 900 Number:_____ Student Phone#:_____

Student Email _____

What is your concern or inquiry?

- If this concerns a class, what is the course name & number?
-
- Who is the instructor?
-
- Have you spoken with the instructor?
-
- Have you spoken to the Department Chair?
-

Do you want to remain anonymous if the Dean must look into the situation?

Please Note: For some concerns, you cannot remain anonymous. This will be discussed in the meeting.

Dean to fill out

Nature of Complaint	
Academic	
Advisor	
Professor	
Course Program	
Withdrawal Prejudices	
Late Registration	
Financial Aid	
International	
University Policy Procedure	

Resolution	
Did not require action	
Referred to academic dept.	
Referred to business area	
Referred to other	
Referred to campus police	
Dismissed by student	
Handled by Graduate Studies	

Other _____

Appeal _____

Dean fills out the following:

Action & Resolution/Date

Policy Involvement:

Notes: