

## INTERIM REPORT

### FEDERAL COMPLIANCE: INSTITUTIONAL RECORDS OF STUDENT COMPLAINTS

#### Background

In February of 2014, Rock Valley College submitted its self-study narrative and federal compliance packet. In its response to the *Institutional Records of Student Complaints* portion of the federal compliance packet, the College outlined its informal and formal complaint process. Appendix A details this response. On March 31-April 2, 2014, Rock Valley College participated in a comprehensive site visit. As a result of that site visit, the Commission required an interim report on the College's efforts to centralize student complaints through its use of Maxient. Appendix B details the recommendations of the peer review team in the *Report of a Comprehensive Evaluation Visit*.

#### Changes Made Since Comprehensive Site Visit

The site visit team noted that the College was implementing Maxient, a web-based conduct management software, to centralize student complaints with the expectation that such implementation would be fully in place by June 30, 2014. To facilitate a consistent implementation of this centralized collection of documents related to formal student complaints, the College has engaged in the following activities since the comprehensive site visit:

#### Review and Revision of the Student Complaint Process

At the April 30<sup>th</sup> Dean's Council meeting, the academic deans and the Vice President of Liberal Arts and Sciences reviewed the student complaint process as it was outlined in the Student Handbook. Based on this conversation, several changes were suggested. Working with the Dean of Students, revisions were made to the student complaint process. For example, written documentation of the complaint was now required at the beginning of the formal process. In doing so, the information collected in the [written process](#) could subsequently be entered into Maxient (if not entered into the system directly through the [electronic version of the form](#)), creating a formal record of the complaint which could be followed-up on and monitored by all necessary parties. The process as outlined in the Student Handbook at the time of the comprehensive site visit is provided in Appendix C and the revised process in the current Student Handbook is provided in Appendix D. Change details are highlighted in Appendix D.

#### Shared Information about Change

Based on their discussions and revisions, the Vice President of Liberal Arts and Sciences, academic deans, and the Dean of Students developed a decision chart outlining the informal and formal student complaint processes on campus (see Appendix E). To provide an update of changes made and build consistency in use of the process, this document was shared in June and July of 2014 to the following:

- Deans Council (academic deans and chairs, as well as program coordinators and supervisors)
- Academic Council (faculty, faculty leaders)
- Leadership Team Meeting (college administrators in leadership roles)
- Student Development Council (student development administrators and managers)
- President's Office
- Teaching and Learning Committee of the Board of Trustees

### Training on Use of Maxient for Management of Formal Complaints

To further enhance consistency of implementation of the revisions made to the student complaint process, the Office of the Dean of Students trained Academic Affairs administrators and staff, as well as academic deans and their administrative assistants, in the use of Maxient to record and monitor formal student complaints. This training was conducted primarily on a one-on-one basis at the desk of the end user so that the end user could become familiar with Maxient from their own work space. The initial training was completed early in the fall semester, and additional training is available as needed upon request.

#### Student Complaint Data

In the federal compliance packet submitted as part of the self-study narrative in February of 2014, the College reported 73 formal student complaints since the previous accreditation self-study process. As stated in the excerpt provided in Appendix A, formal student complaints were often related to teaching style, communication, or grades.

The December 19, 2014, Summary Report from Maxient indicates that 18 formal student complaints have been documented and remain open since the comprehensive site visit in April (see Table 1). An audit of the student complaint data in Maxient indicates that 13 of the 18 open student complaints were filed in the fall semester, while the other five (5) were filed in the spring. Furthermore, the data suggest that some (7) of these 18 may, in fact, be duplicate entries. The audit of these data suggests that a review of the operational process will further enhance the use of Maxient to collect and monitor formal student complaints. For example, though limited in sample size, these data suggest further refinement of monitoring cases that become inactive over time, as well as ensuring duplication of records don't occur through a single user (e.g., submitting both paper and electronic written complaints).

The majority of the formal complaints submitted by students are in relationship to faculty-student interaction similar to those reported in the self-study narrative. For example, the student perceives the faculty to be rude, having handled a classroom situation inappropriately, or grading unfairly. It should be noted, however, that in those cases where a particular faculty member has been identified by more than one student for similar complaints, procedures spelled out in the faculty contract and by human resources have been implemented.

Table 1: Count of Case Type Occurring from April 1, 2014 to December 19, 2014

Case Type	Number
Academic Integrity	26
Behavior Intervention Team	26
RSO	11
Student Complaint	18
Student Conduct	70
Title IX	7
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>158</b>

Source: Maxient, Conduct Manager Summary Report, 11.22.2014

## Conclusions

The steps taken by the College since the comprehensive site visit have resulted in a common, consistent process for student complaints. The revisions made to the process have led to clarity in understanding the distinction between the informal and formal process. Furthermore, the sharing of these process changes has reinforced consistency of implementation. As such, regardless of where a student initiates the complaint, the process outlined in the student handbook (see Appendix D) and decision chart (see Appendix E) can be appropriately implemented and reinforced.

Additionally, Maxient is providing the College with an efficient resource to document and share formal student complaints. Key users have been trained on using this system, which has enhanced monitoring of and communication about student complaint cases. Supports will need to be put in place to ensure this training continues as people and positions change in the natural evolution of the institution. Furthermore, the College will engage in regular audits of the system data to ensure that improvements are made to the student complaint process as needed.

## APPENDIX A

### FEDERAL COMPLIANCE FILING BY INSTITUTIONS

*Excerpt from February 2014 Self-study Report*

#### Institutional Records of Student Complaints

**1. Explain the process for handling student complaints.**

The Procedure for the Resolution of Student Complaints is described on page 32 of the [Student Handbook](#). Students can initiate the process by contacting the Dean of Students in person, by email, by telephone, or with the [online complaint form](#).

If a student meets with the Dean of Students they are given a copy of the complaint resolution process and instructed on both the informal and formal complaint procedures. All students are encouraged to first utilize the informal complaint procedure; however, this is not a requirement for utilizing the formal complaint procedure.

**Commission Policy**

An institution shall make available an account of the student complaints it has received, its processing of those complaints, and how that processing comports with the institution's policies and procedures on the handling of grievances or complaints.

Students must consult with the Dean of Students before filing a formal written complaint. Written complaints are sent to the appropriate staff or faculty supervisor, who has 30 days to investigate and respond in writing to the student. If students feel the decision of the immediate supervisor is arbitrary or capricious, or they have new evidence to present, they may appeal the decision in writing within 10 days to the next level supervisor, who also has 30 days to investigate and respond.

**2. Summarize the number and type of complaints and track their resolutions since the last comprehensive evaluation by the Commission.**

Seventy-three complaints were reported to the Dean of Students since the last evaluation. Complaints are typically related to the manner in which a faculty member teaches, communicates, or grades. Such complaints are managed directly by the appropriate Academic Dean, and details of conversations between Academic Deans and Faculty are not shared with the Dean of Students. However, a copy of the resolution letter is filed with the Dean of Students for tracking.

Paper files have been standard practice for archiving complaints, and in some cases Academic Deans keep files separate from the Dean of Students Office. The College has recognized that the current practice is inefficient for tracking student complaints and resolutions. To address this limitation the College has started using student conduct software (i.e., [Maxient](#)) for tracking complaints. Students can now submit complaints online, and an electronic record is created and can be used to track the entire case. The College plans to move all complaints to the electronic process by end of academic year 2014.

**3. Explain how the institution integrates what it has learned from the complaint process into improvements in services or in teaching and learning.**

The College has some specific conflict resolution policies related to common complaints, legislative requirements, and best practices. As such, the following processes are detailed in the Student Handbook.

- [Academic Appeal and Review Process](#) (pages 17-18)
- [Appeal of Capricious Final Grade](#) (page 18)
- [Compliance with Section 504 and Americans with Disabilities Act](#) (page 35)
- [Student Discipline/Conduct Appeal Process](#) (pages 30-31)
- [Sexual and Other Harassment Policy](#) (pages 33-34)

The College recognizes the importance of a centralized tracking system for monitoring complaints. Implementation of Maxient should allow the Dean of Students Office to electronically track all written complaints and appeals by type and completion. Such records will enhance the Colleges ability to integrate what it learns from student complaints into improvements in teaching and learning or student services. The College also recognizes the importance of educating students, faculty, and staff about the complaint process.

## APPENDIX B

### FEDERAL COMPLIANCE FILING BY INSTITUTIONS

*Excerpt from March 31-April 2, 2014 Report of a Comprehensive Evaluation Visit*

#### Federal Compliance Monitoring Required

##### **Monitoring**

*Institutional Records of Student Complaints: recommend that during the next HLC review the team confirms through review of documentation that Maxient, the student conduct software that is to be implemented by June 30, 2014, is operational, and that the student complaints are centralized for more accurate and efficient tracking and follow-up.*

##### **Rationale**

*While Rock Valley College has a clearly defined procedure to review and resolve complaints in a timely manner, the administration acknowledges in its 2014 Federal Compliance Report that it has no centralized log of those complaints for the purpose of review and action. The report does reference to 73 complaints made to the Dean of Students since the last college comprehensive visit. The Deans report that they also keep student complaint records separate from the Dean of Students, and no systematic accounting of the department specific files is available. The college recognizes that segregation of student complaint files is inefficient and informed the team that all complaints plan to be moved to an electronic record-keeping system, Maxient, by June 30, 2014.*

## APPENDIX C

# PROCEDURE FOR THE RESOLUTION OF STUDENT COMPLAINTS

Excerpt from 2013-2014 Student Handbook

### Procedure for the Resolution of Student Complaints

Students may encounter a variety of conflicts during their courses of study at Rock Valley College that may require review by appropriate administrative or academic personnel. The purpose of the following procedure is to provide an equitable system for resolving conflicts between students and faculty or staff members when a review of the issue is not otherwise available under established College policies and procedures. The College has already established appropriate procedures for conflict resolution.

#### TYPE OF COMPLAINTS/APPEAL

Academic Misconduct.....	see pages 17-18
Capricious Grading.....	see page 18
Disability Section 504/ADA .....	see page 35
Student Discipline Appeal.....	see pages 30-31
Sexual and Other Harassment.....	see pages 33-34

Questions regarding these procedures or guidance on the applicability of any RVC policy or procedure to a student's specific problem should be directed to the Dean of Students.

#### Applicability

This complaint procedure applies to all registered RVC students (full-time, part-time, special programs, Community Education/Continuing Professional Education) and is applicable in the review of problems such as the following:

1. All aspects of the degree granting process, including grading, evaluation or status (unless established policies are already available).
2. Alleged professional misconduct toward a student by a faculty or College staff member while in the scope of College employment.
3. Alleged illegal, intimidation, discrimination, and harassment based on sex, race, religion, age, disability, national origin or sexual orientation, and the College specifically prohibits such intimidation, discrimination, and harassment, including sexual harassment (Title IX and 504 complaints are included).
4. Allegations concerning the application or propriety of College, regulations, policies, and procedures regarding student rights and behavior.

#### General Complaint Procedures

No student shall be penalized by the College for filing or participating in the complaint process when the student has acted reasonably and in good faith. All complaints must be initiated within 60 days of the date of the incident or after the student should have become aware of the incident giving rise to the complaint. The College reserves the right to waive the 60-day rule based on the facts and circumstances of the complaint and after giving due consideration to the protection of the rights of both parties.

#### Informal Procedures

All students are encouraged to first utilize informal discussion to resolve any problems encountered at the College. Each student, faculty member, administrative and staff member has an obligation to resolve problems fairly and informally through discussion between the aggrieved student(s) and the specific College person immediately involved with the problem. Although students are strongly encouraged to use informal discussion for problem solution, it is not a requirement for the filing of a formal complaint.

#### Formal Procedures

Students should always first attempt to resolve issues through an informal process with the faculty or staff person. If a student is unable to resolve the issue informally they may file a formal complaint.

1. Student must first consult with the Dean of Students before filing a written complaint.
  - a. Where a previously established grievance procedure already exists the Dean of Students will refer the complainant to the appropriate process.
  - b. In cases of alleged illegal discrimination based on race, gender, religion, age, marital status, creed, or disability, the Dean of Students will contact the Vice President of Student Development prior to advising the student about a course of action.
  - c. In all other cases, the written complaint will be referred to the immediate supervisor of the specific College employee involved.
2. After consultation with the Dean, the student may submit to the Dean a written statement of the problem in order to continue the formal resolution process.
  - a. The written statement must be signed and dated and must clearly state the nature and basis of the alleged offense, the name(s) of the person(s) committing the alleged offense, the specifics of the incident(s) in question and the names of any known witnesses.
  - b. The immediate supervisor will conduct an investigation and respond in writing to the student, with a copy to the Dean of Students, within 30 days of the filing date of the complaint. An extension for additional review may be granted by agreement of the Dean.
3. If the student feels that the decision of the immediate supervisor is arbitrary or capricious or if he/she has new evidence to present, he/she may appeal the decision in writing to the next level of supervision or an individual designated by the Dean within 10 days of the decision.
  - a. A copy of the appeal must be submitted to the dean.
  - b. Upon appropriate review, the appellate determination must be communicated in writing to all parties involved within 30 days of the date of the appeal.
4. As appropriate, the Dean of Students may designate different persons to review cases or may consolidate complaints when such action is consistent with administrative efficiency and a fair resolution of the problem. In cases where the complaint itself is frivolous, harassing in nature, or not specific, the dean may refuse to process the complaint. Written notification will be provided.
5. The decisions of the Dean of Students or appointed designee regarding review and appeal shall be final.

#### Interpretation and Revision

Any question of interpretation regarding the Code may be referred to the Dean of Students or his or her designee for final determination. The Code may be periodically reviewed and amended as necessary under the direction of the Dean of Students, or his or her designee. See the College website for the most recent version. For more information on the Code, contact the Dean of Students, located in the Student Center, via telephone at (815) 921-4268 or via email: RVC-StudentConduct@RockValleyCollege.edu.

Rock Valley College Student Code of Conduct Adopted August 21, 2006; Revisions, June 2010; August 2012; June 2013.



## APPENDIX D

### PROCEDURE FOR THE RESOLUTION OF STUDENT COMPLAINTS

Excerpt from 2014-2015 Student Handbook

Major changes in the student complaint process are highlighted.

#### TYPES OF COMPLAINTS and APPEALS

Acts of Academic Misconduct .....	see page 31
Appeal of a Capricious Final Grade.....	see page 33
Disability/Accommodation Grievance .....	see page 43
Sexual & Other Harassment Policy .....	see page 43
Suspension or Expulsion Appeal .....	see page 54 (See: B. Appeal Process)

Questions regarding these procedures or guidance on the applicability of any RVC policy or procedure to a student's specific problem should be directed to the Dean of Students.

#### Applicability

This complaint procedure applies to all registered RVC students (full-time, part-time, special programs, Community Education/Continuing Professional Education) and is applicable in the review of problems such as the following:

1. All aspects of the degree granting process, including grading, evaluation or status (unless established policies are already available).
2. Alleged professional misconduct toward a student by a faculty or College staff member while in the scope of College employment.
3. Alleged illegal, intimidation, discrimination, and harassment based on sex, race, religion, age, disability, national origin or sexual orientation, and the College specifically prohibits such intimidation, discrimination, and harassment, including sexual harassment (Title IX and 504 complaints are included).
4. Allegations concerning the application or propriety of College, regulations, policies, and procedures regarding student rights and behavior.

#### General Complaint and Conflict Resolution Procedures

No student shall be penalized by the College for filing or participating in the complaint process when the student has acted reasonably and in good faith. All complaints must be initiated within 60 days of the date of the incident or after the student should have become aware of the incident giving rise to the complaint. The College reserves the right to waive the 60-day rule based on the facts and circumstances of the complaint after giving due consideration to the protection of the rights of both parties.

#### Informal Procedures

All students are encouraged to first utilize informal discussion to resolve any problems encountered at the College. Each student, faculty member, administrative and staff member has an obligation to resolve problems fairly and informally through discussion between the aggrieved student(s) and the specific College person immediately involved with the problem. Although students are strongly encouraged to use informal discussion for problem solution, it is not a requirement for the filing of a formal complaint.

#### Formal Procedures

Students should always first attempt to resolve issues through an informal process. If a student is unable to resolve the issue informally, they may file a formal written complaint. The formal written complaint process begins with the Dean of Students office. All questions or concerns regarding both the formal and informal process should be directed to the Dean of Students office.

1. Student must submit a written summary of their complaint to the Dean of Students and schedule a consultation with the Dean of the Students to review their written complaint before proceeding with the process. The written complaint must be signed and dated by the student and must clearly

state the nature and basis for the complaint, including names of person/s for which the complaint is being made against, and any known witnesses. The written complaint must also include specifics of the incident/s.

a. Where a previously established grievance procedure already exists, the Dean of Students will refer the complainant to the appropriate process.

b. In cases of alleged illegal discrimination based on race, gender, religion, age, marital status, veteran status, disability, sexual orientation, pregnancy, or any other protected class, the Dean of Students will contact the Vice President of Student Development prior to advising the student about a course of action and resolution.

c. In all other cases, the written complaint will be referred to the immediate supervisor of the specific college employee involved.

2. After student consults with the Dean of Students to review the written complaint, and review the formal complaint process, the student will acknowledge they understand the process and agree to follow the college procedures before the complaint moves to the next step. Upon acknowledgement by the student, the Dean of Students will forward the students complaint to the appropriate Supervisor or Academic Dean for investigation.

3. The immediate supervisor or Academic Dean will conduct an investigation and respond, in writing, to the student, within 30 business days of receipt of complaint. An extension for additional review and response time may be granted by the Dean of Students. A copy of the complaint response will be provided to the Dean of Students office.

4. If the student feels that the decision of the Supervisor or Academic Dean is arbitrary or capricious, or if the student has new evidence to present, they may appeal the decision in writing within 10 business days of receiving the complaint response, to the next level of supervision or an individual designated by the Dean of Students.

a. The written appeal must be submitted to the Dean of Students within 10 business days.

b. The Dean of Students will forward the written appeal to the appropriate individuals and will communicate the results to the student, in writing, within 30 business days from the submission of the student's written appeal.

5. The Dean of Students may designate different persons to review complaints or may consolidate complaints. When consolidation is important for the efficiency of fair resolution, the Dean of Students will notify all parties involved. If the Dean of Students deems a complaint to be frivolous, harassing in nature, or does not provide enough specifics, the Dean may ask the student to rewrite the complaint, or refuse to forward the complaint to the next steps. If this determination is made, the Dean of Students will communicate this decision to the student/s.

6. The decision of the Dean of Students, or designee, regarding the complaint appeal shall be final.

#### Drug-Free Schools & Communities Amendment Act (Public Law 101-226)

The following information is provided to all Rock Valley College students and employees in compliance with the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act Amendments of 1989 (PL 101-226). Questions and concerns regarding this legislation or any of the information contained in this document should be directed to the Dean of Students Office.

#### 1. Policies - Alcohol, Other Drugs

As an academic community, Rock Valley College is committed to providing an environment in which learning and scholarship can flourish. The possession or use of



# APPENDIX E

## RVC STUDENT COMPLAINT RESOLUTION FLOW CHART

Revised June 2014

Rock Valley College

### Resolution of Student Complaint

