

## **Student Complaint Policy (SCP)**

Approved by the University Council on September 14, 2022  
Approved by the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees on October 5, 2022

### **I -Rationale**

NDU strives to provide its students with a supportive learning environment and ensures that the appropriate framework is in place for them to achieve the best student life experience.

This policy aspires to promote a culture where student complaint is heard and acted upon effectively, fairly, with utmost confidentiality, and promptly.

The complaint must be filed in accordance with this policy.

This policy complies with NDU's mission.

### **II -Definition**

**Complaint:** a statement that something is unsatisfactory or unacceptable that relates to a process or a service in the University community.

**Complainant:** the student or group of students who file(s) a complaint, enrolled in a credit-bearing course.

**Complaint handler:** a designated member whose responsibility is to handle the complaint.

**Nature of complaint:** refers to complaint type that relates to and impacts all aspects of a student's life.

**Credibility:** refers to a filed complaint in which the student complaint is clearly stated, and the information provided is reliable and preferably supported with evidence.

**Resolution:** refers to a final written decision adopted by the Student Complaint Committee.

**Appeal:** refers to a request for reconsideration of the Student Complaint Committee's decision.

### **III- Scope**

The University defines a student complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction made by a student against an individual, a service or a facility of the University.

This policy applies to all students who are enrolled at NDU at the time of the incident.

This policy addresses complaint, and not petitions, which are usually academic or financial in nature (such as and not limited to academic rules and regulations, financial aid, student discipline, etc.).

This policy addresses student complaints that are not addressed by other existing policies.

This policy considers complaints where the complainant honestly believes them to be significantly true and that are preferably based on evidence. The Student Complaints

Committee must take all reasonable steps to ensure that the complainant is protected against any subsequent victimization.

#### **IV - Guiding Principles**

This policy is based on the principles of fairness, equity, and transparency. It is set out to ensure:

1. timely resolution of a complaint, with an emphasis on the informal resolution at the earliest opportunity.
2. that all complaints will be treated with the utmost confidentiality as far as reasonably practicable.
3. that the process is evidence-based, when available.
4. that the processes, decisions, and the reasons behind them are clear and there is an opportunity for independent review.
5. that no student will be disadvantaged for submitting a complaint. However, if a complaint is found to include deliberate false statements, and/or misleading and inaccurate facts, the University may consider disciplinary procedures.
6. that when the complaint involves a group of students, all correspondence must be handled by one designated student representative.
7. that anonymous complaints will not be considered.

#### **V - The Formation and Role of the Student Complaint Committee**

The University Student Complaint Committee is formed by a decision of the President of the University for two years liable for renewal and shall consist of permanent members: the Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Dean of Students if complainant does not object, and the University Legal Counsel and other members as deemed appropriate by the President.

Other members of the NDU community may be called upon by the Committee and whose role is related to the complaint.

In case of any actual, perceived, or potential conflict of interest, the Committee member will not be allowed to follow the complaint in the matter, and the President will suggest another member to replace them temporarily if needed.

##### **The Role of the Committee**

The work of the committee is concerned with receiving complaints from students and is filed according to the form that is available online on the Student Information System (SIS).

The Committee shall initiate an investigation of the formal complaint. The main goal of the investigation is to gather all relevant evidence and information to determine, in an objective manner, whether the allegations of the student(s) are true or false. The Committee will abide by the following key principles:

- **Impartiality, Objectivity, and Accuracy.** Investigations must be conducted fairly and equitably. Evidence to support and refute the allegation(s) must be gathered and reported in an unbiased and independent manner. Adequate and accurate records and documentation should support reports and conclusions.
- **Competent, Responsible, Reliable, and Independent Investigators.** Those conducting investigations and preparing reports should be skilled, responsible, independent, well trained, and respectful of all parties. They will conduct their investigations in a diligent and

focused manner and submit reports in a timely way. Investigators must be free of any influence that could impair their judgment.

- **Safety.** The safety and well-being of the complainants and witnesses are paramount. The Committee will strive to keep them safe to the extent of the University's capacity.
- **Legality.** Investigations should be conducted in accordance with all applicable Lebanese laws, rules, and regulations as well as all the University's policies. If the allegation appears to be a criminal offence, consideration must be given to informing local authorities and/or conducting legal action, upon the approval of the President. However, the student's rights and privacy should be respected.

## **VI- Procedure for a Complaint**

### **A- Informal Complaint Stage**

In most cases, it may be possible for complaints to be addressed at an early stage by discussing them with the staff / unit / faculty most directly concerned. Matters must be raised within a maximum of ten (10) working days from the incident and the department personnel concerned will aim to resolve the issue, where practicable, within five (5) working days.

If a student has attempted to resolve matters informally but is not satisfied with the result, they may decide to submit a formal complaint.

### **B- Formal Complaint Stage**

#### **1. Submission of online form:**

To file a formal complaint, a student should submit a complaint through the Online Student Complaint Form found on the SIS. The student writes their complaint and attaches any supporting document (s), if available.

In his/her description of the incident, the following shall be included:

- The name(s) of the individual(s) or office(s) against which the complaint is being alleged.
- A detailed narrative of the action deserving the complaint (including how the student has been harmed or treated unfairly); the date, place or time that the incident occurred; and a list of other people who were either involved or witnessed the incident.
- A description of efforts to informally resolve the complaint.
- A statement that clearly reflects the request of the student.

Once the complaint is submitted, an automatic email will be sent to the complainant to confirm the submission. The complaint handler will access the system and forward the complaint to the Student Complaint Committee who will meet to begin the resolution process. The complainant should keep a copy of their complaint and any other documentation submitted for their own records.

#### **2. Committee's Resolution:**

If the complaint is not justified and credible, then the student will be given an explanation. If the complaint is considered justified and credible, the Student Complaint Committee will initiate the process and take the appropriate measures to reach the final resolution, within a

maximum of fifteen (15) working days. The complainant will be informed of the means to resolve the complaint.

### **3. Withdrawal of a complaint:**

The complainant has the right to withdraw a complaint up until the first meeting is held with the Committee, in which case the complaint shall be registered as concluded and noted as withdrawn. The complainant would have to log in to SIS and request the withdrawal of their complaint in writing to the person handling the complaint. The complainant is expected to specify the justified reason(s) behind their withdrawal. The complaint handler who receives the notification will inform the Student Complaint Committee of the withdrawal in writing.

In case the concerned parties agreed to amicably settle their dispute, withdrawal is accepted. Both parties will sign the complaint settlement.

## **C. Appeals**

The student may request an appeal on one condition, only in the event that new information or evidence is presented.

The appeal must be made within the same semester of the final resolution issued by the Committee in relation to the formal complaint to the Appeal Committee through the President.

## **VII. Confidentiality**

As mentioned in the Notre-Dame University–Louaize (NDU) Confidentiality Policy, the University stresses the right to privacy and confidentiality in all matters related to administrative and academic work. Violators of the University's *Confidentiality Policy* shall be subject to disciplinary action.

- A. **Confidentiality of the complaint:** The two parties including witnesses have a right to confidentiality, other than in exceptional situations. To protect the integrity of the investigation, information obtained from any unit at the University will be shared with authorized people on a need-to-know basis and will not be disclosed to others unless required by law.
- B. **Confidentiality statement:** Upon appointment, all Committee members shall sign a non-disclosure agreement. Dissemination of documents and/or information relating to a complaint, without prior approval, is prohibited and leads to disciplinary action.

## **VIII. Amendment**

The policies, procedures, and practices described herein may be modified, or supplemented, when necessary.