Texas Tech University - Costa Rica

Standard 12.4: Student Complaints

The institution (a) publishes appropriate and clear procedures for addressing written complaints, (b) demonstrates that it follows the procedures when resolving them, and (c) maintains a record of student complaints that can be access upon request by SACSCOC. (SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation: Foundation for Quality Enhancement, 2018, Standard 12.4)

Texas Tech University is in compliance with Standard 12.4 – Student Complaints. Texas Tech University (TTU) has policies and processes to address student complaints at all campus and instructional sites. All TTU procedures are in effect at Texas Tech University – Costa Rica (TTU-CR) regarding addressing and resolving student complaints. A comprehensive listing of student complaint policies and processes is provided in this response, along with information and evidence of the dissemination of that complaint procedure, and information about record retention and maintenance. At the time of this response, no complaints had been received in relation to TTU-CR; thus, no complaint evidence can be provided.

The university has identified multiple categories of student complaints or grievances most likely to occur ranging from issues such as grades and academic status to other types of issues such as harassment, or disability-related complaints. Each of the categories of potential student complaints and the procedures and policies pertaining to those issues are treated separately in the narrative. Student complaint procedures at Texas Tech University – Costa Rica are overseen by the appropriate academic or non-academic unit for the type of complaint. Each responsible unit maintains its own records, and complaints are processed according to the responsible unit’s own policies and procedures. Student complaint processes are listed in the TTU Student Handbook.

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I. Grading Complaints

The grade appeal process involves several steps beginning with a discussion of the grade with the instructor of record. In the event a student is not satisfied with the outcome of the discussion, he or she should then discuss the matter with the chairperson of the department in which the course is offered. If the student is dissatisfied with these outcomes, he or she may then file the formal grade appeal form, with supporting documentation, at the office of the dean of the college administering the course. The student has within 45 days of the next long semester to submit all documentation. The documentation from the student and the instructor will be submitted by the office of the dean to the college appeals board, made up of a chairperson, two faculty members, and two students appointed by the dean’s office. The appeals board will submit their recommendation to the dean at which time he or she will make a decision on whether the instructor of record should change the grade. The decision is provided
in writing to the student, the instructor, the chairperson of the appeals board, and the Provost. If the student believes due process was not followed, he or she can appeal to the Provost. These policies and processes are outlined in Texas Tech University Operating Policy (TTU OP) 34.03 “Student Grade Appeal”. Information about the Grade Appeal Process is disseminated annually in the TTU Student Handbook and Undergraduate & Graduate Academic Catalog and is available online. The dean’s office is responsible for the administration of these processes and maintains the records associated with grade appeals.

II. Academic Status Complaints

The Undergraduate and Graduate Academic Catalog, TTU OP 34.07 “Undergraduate Academic Status”, and TTU OP 34.15 “Grade Replacement Policy” contain policies and processes related to academic status. Undergraduate academic status involves the determination of good standing, warning, probation, suspension, and dismissal. Students in good standing maintain an adjusted cumulative GPA at or above 2.0. Students with an adjusted cumulative GPA that falls below a 2.0 will be placed on academic warning, at which time a student should seek advice from the academic advisor or academic dean for academic recovery solutions. First year students who fall below 2.0 must successfully complete a Strategies for Learning course the next semester. If the student’s term and cumulative GPA remain below 2.0 for the next consecutive term, the academic standing will be academic probation. The student should seek advice from the academic advisor or academic dean for academic recovery solutions and should re-enroll in the Strategies for Learning course. If the student’s term and cumulative GPA remain below 2.0 for a third consecutive term, the student will be academically suspended for one full term (fall, spring, or summer) and must seek permission to return from the academic dean. If the student is permitted to return and the term and cumulative GPA following the next completed term remain below 2.0, the student will be academically dismissed from the institution for one calendar year. Following the dismissal period, the student may appeal to the academic dean and the student’s transcript record will be notated if the student is approved to re-enroll in the university. If upon returning, the student continues to have a term and cumulative GPA less than 2.0, the student will be permanently dismissed from the institution. Students are advised to utilize grade replacements to improve GPA performance.
III. Student Record Complaints & FERPA

Students have the right to challenge inaccurate, misleading, or otherwise inappropriate records and information related to them. The TTU Student Handbook Section O, “Student Records”, outlines the policies and procedures. Any student wishing to challenge records or information directly relating to him or her must notify the individual responsible for maintaining the records. The notice must be in writing and specifically identify the item challenged and the basis for the custodian of the challenged records. A reporting form is available from the Office of the Registrar. Any meetings between the student and the custodian of the records will be informal. If any of the participants (record custodian, student, or author) are not satisfied with the results of the informal meeting, a formal hearing will be conducted within seven University working days following the request for the hearing. The hearing will be conducted by an institutional official or other party who does not have direct interest in the outcome of the hearing appointed by the Associate Vice Provost for Student Affairs. The student may present evidence relevant to the content of the educational records to demonstrate how they are inaccurate, misleading, or otherwise in violation of the privacy rights of the student. The hearing also provides an opportunity for correction or deletion of any inaccurate, misleading, or otherwise inappropriate data contained in the records and for insertion into the records a written explanation by the student requesting the content of the challenged records. A written decision must be delivered in writing to all interested parties within seven University working days after the conclusion of the hearing.

The Registrar’s Office provides oversight for the protection of students’ educational records and the complaints related to violations of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA). A student who believes there has been a violation of his/her privacy should contact the TTU Office of the Registrar and complete the FERPA grievance report or they may contact the US Department of Education, Family Compliance Office. Students can also consult with the TTU-CR Student Services staff member and then file the complaint via the on-line form. Complaints filed within the Registrar’s Office are investigated by the Registrar’s office, in coordination with University Counsel. The responsible department is advised regarding additional FERPA training and use of technology resources. The Registrar’s Office requires routine FERPA training for any faculty or staff member who has access to student records and/or the student information system. Additional information about academic records privacy is available on the Registrar’s website.
IV. Sexual Harassment and Discriminatory Harassment Complaints

Anti-discrimination policies are available annually in the “Anti-Discrimination Policy”, Section C in the TTU Student Handbook. Texas Tech University Operating Policy (TTU OP) 40.02 “Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Policy and Complaint Procedure for Violations of Employment and Other Laws” and TTU OP 40.03 “Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault, Sexual Misconduct, and Title IX Policy and Complaint Procedure” provides policy and process information regarding sexual and discriminatory harassment. This information identifies how to file a sexual harassment or other discriminatory harassment complaint against a student, faculty, or staff member.

Grievances and investigations of formal complaints against other student(s) pertaining to adverse actions taken by the Student Conduct Procedures outlined in the TTU Student Handbook, Part I “Code of Student Conduct”. Students can file allegations of misconduct, including sexual harassment and discriminatory harassment, against student(s) or student organization(s), by completing an online incident report form on the Office of Student Conduct website. Staff are also available in the Office of Student Rights and Resolution, Office of the Dean of Students, and Office of Student Conduct to take verbal reports of allegations and assist with the processes. Conduct procedures have been extensively updated in response to guidance from the Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights related to sexual harassment and sexual violence for the TTU Student Handbook. The procedures include options for reluctant victims; immediate remedies to eliminate hostile environments and ongoing harassment; a thorough, reliable, and impartial investigation of the reported incidents; and options for informal and formal resolutions as well as appeal procedures for both the complainant and respondent.

Grievances and investigations of formal complaints against faculty or staff related to unlawful discrimination or other violations of the law that adversely affect their educational environment should be directed to the Office of the Dean of Students, Title IX Administrator, or the TTU Office of Equal Employment Opportunity. Prior to filing a formal grievance, a student should attempt to resolve the situation by addressing the offending party in an informal manner, unless doing so is impracticable, the student is uncomfortable doing so, or if the student believes that the conduct cannot be effectively addressed through informal means. If the situation is not resolved by informal means, the student may file a formal grievance. Students wishing to file a
grievance should provide information in writing outlining the details of the grievance to the Office of the Dean of Students. However, even if a formal grievance is not filed, the Dean may notify key personnel at his or her discretion about the allegation, and other action may be taken by TTU-CR as deemed appropriate. Upon receipt of a signed grievance, an investigation will be conducted by the Dean of Students or designee. The Associate Vice Provost for Student Affairs and the appropriate academic dean will be notified of the grievance. The investigation may consist of the review of the grievance and any supporting documentation, examination of other relevant documentation, and interviews with relevant individuals. The extent of the investigation and its procedures will be determined by and at the discretion of the Office of the Dean of Students. The Equal Employment Opportunity Office, Title IX Administrator, or other administrators may be consulted to assist with the investigation. After the investigation is complete, the Dean of Students or designee will provide a written determination to the student who has filed the grievance, the accused parties, the appropriate academic dean, and the Associate Vice Provost for Student Affairs. In the event a finding of a violation of this policy is made, appropriate disciplinary action will be taken as determined by the appropriate administrator. Disciplinary action for faculty and staff would be referred to the next senior level administrator and coordinated with the Equal Employment Opportunity Office.

The Dean of Students, in conjunction with the Equal Employment Office or Title IX Administrator, maintains records related to sexual harassment and discriminatory harassment complaints from students in an electronic database system for seven years from the completion of the complaint process.

Additionally, special efforts to inform students about sexual assault, a form of sexual harassment, occur such as TTU’s sexual violence website and other sexual violence publications. Faculty and staff receive additional information about these processes via distribution of a special resource folder to all faculty and staff. The same procedures outlined above are designed to be able to adequately investigate and resolve complaints of sexual assault as well as other forms of sexual harassment.
V. Conduct Complaints Against Other Students and Student Organizations

The Code of Student Conduct outlines the process for filing a conduct complaint against a student or student organization. It is available annually online in the TTU Student Handbook. The “Code of Student Conduct” outlines the process for filing a complaint, as well as the conduct investigation and hearing processes that would follow receipt of the complaint by the Office of Student Conduct. To file an alleged Code of Student Conduct violation, the student(s) or student organization individual(s) will complete an incident report form, which can be found online at the Office of Student Conduct website. Students can also consult with the TTU-CR Student Services staff member and then file the complaint via the on-line form for adjudication. The Managing Director of the Office of Student Conduct or designees will inquire, gather, and review information about the reported student misconduct. Through written notification, a Student Conduct Officer or designee will talk with a student or student organization representative about his or her involvement in the alleged violation of the Code of Student Conduct. Students are provided a rights and responsibilities document outlining rights to be exercised before and during the conduct process. A thorough, reliable, and impartial investigation of the reported incidents will be conducted including meeting with the party bringing the complaint to finalize the complainant’s statement, interview witnesses, collect evidence, create timelines, and receive information from the respondent. Once the investigative process is complete, the student will be given notice of a pre-hearing meeting as an opportunity to review the investigation report and other documents or evidence to be used in a hearing. Formal allegations will be assigned, and the determination will be made if the conduct process will be resolved informally or formally with an administrative hearing or discipline committee hearing. At resolution if the student or student organization is found responsible for the allegations, then sanctions, conditions, and/or restrictions can be imposed. Students or student organizations may appeal the conduct decision to the Managing Director of Student Conduct or the Dean of Students. The Office of Student Conduct maintains student conduct complaints and records in an electronic database system for seven years from the date of completion. Announcements and advertisements are provided throughout the academic year to keep students informed annually about these policies and processes.
VI. Disability-Related Complaints

Texas Tech University Operating Policy 40.04, “Access for Individuals with Disabilities”, TTU OP 34.22 “Establishing Reasonable Accommodations for Students with Disabilities”, and the TTU Student Handbook, “Student Initiated Grievances” guide the process for complaints related to disabilities. The Student Disability Services website clearly outlines process for students. Students who are denied disability services or a specific accommodation may appeal the decision to the Managing Director of Student Disability Services, then to the Associate Vice Provost for Student Affairs. Students may also file a complaint with the Office of Civil Rights.

Students complaining of discrimination based on disability should direct complaints to the ADA Campus Coordinator for Students/Managing Director Student Disability Services and to the Associate Vice Provost for Student Affairs for grievances related to disability. Students may file a complaint with the Campus ADA Coordinator in person, by email, or by mail. The complaint should include name, address, email address, contact information; name and address of the entity or person that committed the discrimination; a description of the acts of discrimination, dates and names of those involved; and other information to support the complaint including relevant documents. Decisions can be appealed to the Associate Vice Provost for Student Affairs. Outcomes may include remedies such as grade adjustments, course or instructor changes; mediation; or referral to the academic college. These policies and processes are disseminated to students at Red Raider Orientation, during special presentations, with printed materials, and on the Student Disability Services website. Records are maintained by Student Disability Services for 3 years following graduation or last date of enrollment for the student.

VII. Online and Distance Student Complaints

Students enrolled in distance learning courses use the same complaint procedures outlined throughout this document for students enrolled in face-to-face courses. Options would be provided to the student to participate in meetings or hearings via skype or other technology tools. In accordance with the Higher Education Opportunities Act of 2008, Texas Tech University provides a website related to enrollment in distributed education courses or programs and complaint processes for filing with the accrediting agency and other appropriate state agencies.
VIII. Student Employment Complaints

A student wishing to file a complaint concerning employment issues such as wages, hours, working conditions, performance evaluations, merit raises, job promotions, job assignments, or similar matters involving management decisions concerning the employee should follow the procedures found in TTU OP 70.10, “Non-faculty Employee Complaint Procedures”. The process outlines that a student employee should submit in writing a description of the complaint with dates, names, specific resolution sought, and additional supporting information. Student employees are asked to have a verbal discussion with their immediate supervisor to attempt to resolve the complaint. If resolution is not reached, the student employee can use the statement of employee complaint form to outline the complaint and submit to the second level supervisor and to Human Resources. If the complaint remains unresolved, the student employee may make a written request to the appropriate vice president/dean to review the complaint. The determination by this administrator is final.

A student wishing to file a complaint about unlawful discrimination or other violations of the law that adversely affect their employment should follow the procedures found in TTU OP 40.02 “Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Policy and Complaint Procedure for Violations of Employment and Other Laws” and TTU OP 40.03 “Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault, Sexual Misconduct, and Title IX Policy and Complaint Procedure”. This process is outlined in IV “Sexual Harassment and Discriminatory Harassment” of this response. Students have access to complaint processes related to student employment at TTU in the TTU Student Handbook. The Office of Equal Employment Opportunity oversees these processes and maintains records associated with these concerns for two years following closure of the complaint.

IX. Other General Complaints

Students can seek assistance with complaint resolution from the Office of the Dean of Students (ODOS). The Office of the Dean of Students offers to students an explanation of the complaint processes and can provide conflict coaching and dispute resolution for student-related problems. Information is also available on the Office of the Dean of Students website. The office works closely with the Risk Intervention and Safety Education (RISE) office to monitor issues of concern for students and campus climate issues.
Conclusion
Texas Tech University – Costa Rica is in compliance with Standard 12.4 – Student Complaints. Texas Tech University has demonstrated there are clear and established procedures for receiving, managing, and resolving student complaints at all campus and instructional sites.