



Student Concerns Involving Faculty: Introduction and Advice to Students



It is possible that during your time at Spokane Community College (SCC) or Spokane Falls Community College (SFCC) you may have a concern about something in one of your classes. SCC and SFCC have collaboratively developed the following process to help students bring forward a concern in a productive way. This document outlines the process for bringing a concern forward, suggestions on approaches for communicating a concern, and steps towards resolving the concern. Please note that this is an individual process. Group concerns will not be considered. If you have a concern and are considering bringing it forward, here are some things to think about:

- **Partner with us to create a successful educational experience!** Learning how to speak up for yourself in a way that is true to your experience and is also respectful of the processes that are in place is an important aspect of your learning and growth as a student. You are always encouraged to bring forward concerns, because effective communication is the best way to solve a problem and work productively together.
- **Conflict is normal.** When many people come together with different ideas about the world and how things should be, there are bound to be conflicts. Remember that conflict and differences in opinion about how to do things, especially in a college setting, are normal and expected. If concerns are addressed constructively, challenging situations can also create significant opportunities for learning, growth, and improvement.
- **Talk with your faculty!** We encourage you to seek out conversations with your faculty members in a respectful, non-confrontational manner if a concern arises. All faculty know that students will have questions about a class procedure, assignment expectation, grading scale, etc. Faculty design their courses around teaching and learning best practices and welcome student questions that seek clarification. As you will see below, the first step of this process is to have an informal conversation with the faculty about your concern.
- **Resolution.** The goal of this process is to create a dialogue that will address your concern. Resolution does not mean that everyone gets what they want; it means that everyone has been heard and considered.

What Concerns Are Handled Under This Process?

This process is for students who have a concern about the way a faculty is carrying out their responsibilities. The goal of this process is to create a dialogue that will address your concern. This procedure is not meant to address other kinds of issues that students might want to bring

forward such as discrimination, sexual misconduct, errors on a transcript, how to seek a retroactive withdrawal, miscalculation of a final grade, etc. There is information at the bottom of this document listing such concerns.

Prior to Contacting the Faculty About a Concern

- Read through the syllabus and related documents regarding course policies, grading scales, assignment due dates, etc. Read through hard copy and Canvas pages for course policies.
- Check Canvas (gradebook, assignment comments, email inbox, or class-wide announcements) for feedback from the faculty on an assignment or to review the assignment rubric.
- You may also need to check any physical copies of submitted materials for faculty comments or items that were passed out in class that described how an assignment would be graded.
- Review any previous communications with the faculty to make sure your concern has not already been addressed.
- Consider the resolution you are hoping for at the end of this process.

Guidelines for Sending Emails to Faculty

Whenever you send a professional email, consider it through the eyes of the person who will receive it. Remember that people receive many emails every day, so be sure that yours is clear, respectful, and to the point:

- Check your syllabus for the faculty's preferred method of communication.
- Send any emails through your Canvas or Bigfoot email account so they are not mistaken for spam.
- Emails should include a clear, brief subject line about the nature of the email (e.g., Grade on Assignment #3 in English 101).
- Address faculty by title and last name (you can find this information in the syllabus) unless they have indicated otherwise.
- Use full sentences and pay attention to spelling and punctuation.
- Be precise about what you are seeking clarification on and why.
- Watch your own email or Canvas inbox carefully for a response.

Locating Contact Information for Faculty

Faculty typically list their contact information on the syllabus or within Canvas. You can also check the Faculty and Staff Directory on your college's homepage.

Locating Contact Information for Department Chairs

You can get contact information for the Department Chair by asking your faculty. Or you can contact the following staff members at each college:

SCC Students: Please contact the Executive Assistant to the Vice President of Instruction (509-533-7075; Building 1, Room R-222) or the Executive Assistant to the Vice President of Student Services (509-533-7015); Building 1, Room R-222)

SFCC Students: Please contact the Student Support Services Office Manager (509-533-3553; Building 17, Room 117)

Note: *if the faculty is also the department chair, you will instead meet with a different department chair of the faculty's choosing to complete the Step 2 process. If you're not sure who to meet with, you can ask the faculty the points of contact listed above.*

Student Concerns Involving Faculty – Process & Steps

An informal conversation is often the best way to resolve the issue. Therefore, Steps 1, 2, and 3 described in this section are the “informal” phase of this process. You have the right, with advanced notice, to a supporter during any meeting. Supporters provide support but otherwise do not speak or provide legal counsel. They may not be an employee of Spokane Colleges.

Step 1: Communicate With the Faculty

How do I do this? Step 1 is to communicate with the faculty with whom you have the concern and describe your concern. Whenever possible, you and the faculty are encouraged to have this conversation either in person, by phone, or by video conference. You can send an email to request a conversation. See above for best practices in sending an email to the faculty. During the conversation, tell the faculty about your concern and how you would like to resolve it.

When will I hear back? The faculty will respond within five (5) instructional days. If you have made at least two good faith attempts utilizing different methods to contact the faculty on instructional days (such as sending an email, attending posted office hours, or leaving a voice message) and received no response, you can move on to Step 2.

What happens next? You and the faculty will have a conversation and work towards addressing your concern. If the concern is resolved at Step 1, there is no need for further action. If your concern is not resolved after communicating with the faculty, you can move on to Step 2 and contact the department chair for assistance.

Step 2: Communicate with the Department Chair

How do I do this? If your informal concern is not resolved in Step 1, you will next speak with the faculty's department chair. The department chair is a representative for the faculty's department but does not supervise the faculty.

The department chair will first confirm with the faculty that you attempted to contact them during instructional days for Step 1 resolution. The department chair will then work to address your concern between you and the faculty. At any point during the informal process, the department chair may schedule an informal meeting between you, the faculty, and the department chair to attempt to address your concern.

When will I hear back? The department chair will respond to you within five (5) instructional days after hearing your informal concern.

What happens next? You and the Department Chair will have a conversation and work towards addressing your concern. If the concern is resolved at Step 2, there is no need for further action. If your concern is not resolved after communicating with the department chair, you can move on to Step 3.

Note: In some exceptional circumstances, the dean may determine that the informal process can be initiated at Step 3.

Step 3: Communicate with the Dean

How do I do this? If your concern is not addressed at Step 2 by meeting with the department chair, you will next speak with the dean who supervises the faculty. At any point during the informal concerns process, the dean may call an informal meeting between you, the faculty, the department chair, and the dean to attempt to address your concern.

When will I hear back? The dean will respond to you within ten (10) instructional days of receiving the concern. If the dean does not respond, you may contact the appropriate Vice President for assistance.

What happens next? You and the Dean will have a conversation to address your concern. If the concern is addressed at Step 3, there is no need for further action. If your concern has not been addressed through the informal concerns process, you may file a formal complaint using the Formal Student Complaint Process Form. This form must be submitted to the Dean's office within ten (10) instructional days of the Dean's Step 3 response. Failure to do so causes the complaint to be denied as untimely.

Note: The source of this process is the Master Contract between the Community Colleges of Spokane (i.e. Spokane Colleges) Board of Trustees and the CCS Association of Higher Education.

Processes and Resources to Address Other Issues

If you have an issue that is not addressed by the student concern process, you can contact the college employees at the bottom of this page for information about these other processes and resources:

- Title IX reporting, which includes gender discrimination and sexual misconduct
- Discrimination
- Grade change request (miscalculation of final grade)
- Error on transcript
- Retroactive withdrawal
- Financial aid appeal
- Complaint about campus facilities
- Security/safety concern
- Concern about student conduct, including academic dishonesty
- Concern about a fellow student, threat of harm to self or others (non-emergency)

SCC Students: Please contact the Retention Specialist (509-533-8591; Building 6, Room 115A) or Student Resource Navigator (509-533-7196; Building 6, Room 102H)

SFCC Students: Please contact the Student Support Services Office Manager (509-533-3553; Building 17, Room 117)

What If I Have Questions Before I Start the Process?

Students should start this process by contacting their faculty first; there is no need to go through anyone else. If you have more questions about the process and would like clarification before contacting the faculty, the following employees are available:

SCC Students: Please contact the Executive Assistant to the Vice President of Instruction (509-533-7075; Building 1, Room R-222) or the Executive Assistant to the Vice President of Student Services (509-533-7015); Building 1, Room R-222)

SFCC Students: Please contact the Student Support Services Office Manager (509-533-3553; Building 17, Room 117)

These employees can meet with you to walk you through how this procedure works, help you identify relevant contacts such as the department chair, the dean, and the Vice President if needed, and provide you with overall guidance and tips about how to prepare and proceed.