

COLLEGE OF SCIENCES AND MATHEMATICS CONFLICT REPORTING PROCEDURES

Conflict has many sources in the workplace. Conflict can be due to discrimination, bullying, and/or issues of equity or inclusion based on race, national origin, religion, gender, marital status, familial status, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy and childbirth, medical conditions, etc. Additionally, conflict can arise because of issues with employees, coworkers, or supervisors related to behavior, work performance, problems with excessive work hours, bias-related incidents, conflicts of interest, work assignments, concerns with the quality of instruction/grades, etc.

COSAM believes it is crucial that we foster an environment of respect, open communication, and support for all members of our college. As a part of this commitment, it is necessary that we take all grievances very seriously and respond to them promptly and responsibly, with a goal of reaching an outcome that satisfies all parties involved. **Grievances are defined as a complaint or a strong feeling that you have been treated unfairly.** To deal with conflict effectively, it is important to understand the resources available so that a resolution can be reached that works for all parties involved. This document presents guiding principles intended to support COSAM graduate students as they navigate reporting grievances and resolving conflict in their workplace.

As there are different types of issues or conflicts a student may encounter in their positions, there are also different reporting procedures for those conflicts. Below is a guide to assist you in determining the steps you need to take to resolve different types of conflicts you may encounter. Auburn University uses a progressive disciplinary process. Steps that are taken in the disciplinary process are subject to the type of violation. All outlined procedures align with Auburn University policies and procedures.

Reporting a Conflict: Graduate students can direct concerns to several different entities, but generally the following order should be adhered to:

- **Supervisor-** Generally, graduate students should address complaints to their immediate supervisor. In the case of GTA-related issues, the immediate supervisor would be the instructor of record (e.g., the faculty member). In the case of GA or GRA-related issues, the immediate supervisor would be the faculty advisor.
- **Graduate Program Officer (GPO)-** Graduate students that are uncomfortable discussing the issue with their immediate supervisor or the issue does not fall under the purview of their immediate supervisor should report those issues to their GPO. **The COSAM GPOs are:**
 - Biological Sciences- Dr. Aaron Rashotte (amr0008@auburn.edu)
 - Chemistry and Biochemistry- Dr. Chris Easley (cje0003@auburn.edu)
 - Geosciences- Dr. Ashraf Uddin (uddin@auburn.edu)
 - Mathematics and Statistics- Dr. Yanzhao Cao (yzc0009@auburn.edu)
 - Physics- Dr. Dave Maurer (damm0014@auburn.edu)
- **Department Chair-** If the graduate student is uncomfortable speaking with their GPO, they may talk with their Department Chair. **The Department Chairs are:**
 - Biological Sciences- Dr. Paul Cobine (pac0006@auburn.edu)
 - Chemistry and Biochemistry- Dr. Doug Goodwin (goodwdc@auburn.edu)
 - Geosciences- Dr. Ming-Kuo Lee (leeming@auburn.edu)
 - Mathematics and Statistics- Dr. Ash Abebe (abebeas@auburn.edu)
 - Physics- Dr. Allen Landers (landeal@auburn.edu)

- **Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies (ADR)**- If the grievance needs to be elevated to the Dean's Office, the graduate student should contact the COSAM ADR, Dr. Mark Liles (lilesma@auburn.edu).
- If in doubt, ANY employee (including graduate students) can speak with the COSAM Human Resources Sr. Manager, Mrs. Stephanie Woodley (woodlsc@auburn.edu) or HR Generalist III, Mrs. Katherine Calloway (ksc0013@auburn.edu). Grievances can also be directed to Sr. Assistant Dean of Strategic Initiatives and Programs, Dr. Kimberly Mulligan (kxm0001@auburn.edu) in the Office of Inclusion, Equity, and Diversity (OIED) for guidance. Matters will remain confidential and if they are unable to assist, they can direct the employee to the correct place.

***Please note that all matters will be kept confidential unless the complainant requests otherwise, is viewed as being in danger of hurting themselves or others or is a Title IX complaint.**

*For any issue, COSAM also offers an anonymous suggestion link and that can be found [here](#).

*In addition COSAM OIED also has a site to ask questions or share concerns that you can access [here](#).

- Finally, should you want to speak to someone outside of COSAM, all employees and students have access to the Auburn University Ombudsperson. The Ombudsperson is a neutral resource with training in conflict resolution who provides confidential and informal assistance to the campus community. Our current Ombudsmen, Mr. Kevin Coonrod, can assist with any issue that you may want to discuss, including misconduct, retaliation, health and safety concerns, violations of university policy, academic freedom, and integrity, etc. You can get more information at <https://www.auburn.edu/administration/ombuds/> or email ombuds@auburn.edu to make an appointment.

Addressing Different Types of Grievances:

Graduate Student General Grievance Policy: Graduate students can file a grievance within their department by sending an email detailing the issue to their supervisor, GPO, Department Chair, COSAM HR, COSAM ADR, or COSAM OIED. Graduate students can feel free to copy any of the aforementioned addressees as they see fit. Ideally, graduate students can keep grievances within their department by working directly with their supervisor, GPO, or Department Chair but should feel free to elevate the grievance to higher offices (Chair, COSAM Dean's offices) as appropriate.

Step 1. The grievance should include a clear statement of the problem, description of previous efforts to resolve the problem (if applicable), and the proposed resolution to the problem. To qualify as a grievance, graduate students need only to include the word "grievance" in the subject line of the email.

- Upon receipt, the addressee of the grievance (e.g., GPO, Chair, COSAM Dean's office) shall have five business days to acknowledge the receipt of the grievance and ten business days to take steps to address the grievance. Steps to address the grievance would include scheduling a meeting to discuss solutions, addressing and resolving the grievance directly, eliciting additional information or preferred solutions, referring the grievance to higher university authorities, etc.
- **Addressees should address grievances within 10 business days.** If a grievance is not addressed within 10 business days, the graduate student should file a new grievance, noting this delay, to a new, higher office addressee.
- If a complainant is unsatisfied with the resolution of their grievance, the graduate student should file a new grievance noting the proposed resolution to a new, higher office

addressee. This new grievance should also detail the previous grievance and actions (or inactions) made by previous addressees.

- Grievance addressees (GPO, Dept. Chair, COSAM ADR, COSAM HR, or COSAM OIED) do not retain discretion to decide what constitutes a grievance and must address all grievances received from graduate students.

Graduate Student Academic Grievance Policy:

Academic grievances are defined as those involving conflicts between a student and faculty instructor(s) or mentor(s) with respect to differences arising within credit-bearing coursework, research, or mentoring.

This can include, but is not limited to:

- **Grading-** If a student believes they have been graded inappropriately on an assignment or exam or given a final grade that is inappropriate.
- **Academic Misconduct-** Accusations of cheating, plagiarism, or other academic misconduct

The steps to resolve academic conflict are outlined in the Auburn University Student Academic Grievance Policy:

Step 1. Students should first seek to resolve the conflict with the person(s) who is the alleged cause of the complaint.

Step 2. If a satisfactory resolution is not reached at Step 1, students should bring the complaint to the department, starting with their GPO, followed by the Chair. **Submission of a grievance to the department should be in writing and a written response from the respective office must be made within 10 business days.**

Step 3. If one or more of the parties are not satisfied with the resolution, the Dean's Office should be notified in writing. If the issue is related to coursework or research, it should be directed to the Associate Dean of Research. Mentoring issues can either be directed to the Associate Dean of Research or the Sr. Assistant Dean of Strategic Initiatives and Programs. **Submissions of a grievance should be in writing and a written response from the respective office must be made within 10 business days.**

Step 4. If the issue is still not resolved, students have the right to seek resolution through the formal grievance process. Formal grievances must be filed in writing using the online reporting form which can be found here: <https://auburn.edu/academic/provost/academic-grievances/>.

All graduate students have the right to receive written notification of all decisions, actions, or contingencies that will affect their studentships.

***Please note that the Auburn University Ombudsperson is also a resource during the academic grievance process.**

Graduate Student Discrimination/Bias Grievance Policy:

Step 1. Students should first seek to resolve the conflict with the person(s) who is the alleged cause of the complaint.

Step 2. If a satisfactory resolution is not reached at Step 1, students should bring the complaint to the department, starting with their GPO, followed by the Chair. **Submission of a grievance to the department should be in writing and a written response from the respective office must be made within 10 business days.**

Step 3. If one or more of the parties are not satisfied with the resolution, the Sr. Assistant Dean of Strategic Initiatives and Programs or Associate Dean for Research should be notified. **Submissions of a grievance should be in writing and a written response from the respective office must be made within 10 business days.**

Step 4. If the issue is still not resolved, there are options that the student can seek:

- **Bias Education and Response Team (BERT)**- BERT consists of a cross-disciplinary group of staff and faculty who will ensure that students, faculty, and staff have the means to report bias incidents. This group of professionals share information about incidents reported to the BERT, and advocate for prevention and awareness programs. BERT members will also connect those impacted by bias-related incidents with immediate and ongoing support resources. You can learn more about the office here: [BERT Website](#). The reporting form can be found here: [BIAS Incident Form](#).
- **Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Employment (AA/EEO)**- AA/EEO strives to ensure an inclusive and equitable working, living, and learning environment for members of the Auburn University community. The office provides guidance for promoting equal access to employment and educational opportunities and resolves issues of harassment and discrimination based on protected class. You can learn more about the office here: [AAEEO Office](#)

Graduate Student Title IV Grievance Policy: Title IX prohibits discrimination based on sex in education programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance. Title IX applies to both students and employees at the university. Title IX complaints include sexual harassment, quid pro quo sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence and stalking. **Please note that if you disclose a Title IX matter to an Auburn employee (including GAs, RAs, instructors, professors, supervisors, and mentors), they are REQUIRED to report that matter to the Title IX office.** For more in-depth information on what would be considered a Title IX complaint, please visit their website: <https://cws.auburn.edu/TitleIX>.

- **A brief overview of the Title IX process:**
 - A report is filed. If you would like to file a complaint online, you may do so by going to their website: [Title IV Reporting](#). **This form can be submitted anonymously, however that limits the effectiveness in responding to suspected violations.**
 - You may also contact a Title IX coordinator directly (the website has a list of the coordinators).
 - You may also report these types of complaints externally to the [Auburn Police Division](#), [Opelika Police Department](#), and [Lee County Sheriff's Office](#).
 - **Someone from the Title IX office will contact you, but you are not required to take the matter any further.** If you decide not to pursue a claim, the complaint will end there, and no further investigation or actions will be taken by either the Title IX office or your supervisor/department.
 - If you respond to the report, there are several processes and remedies available to you:
 - A formal process (adjudication and hearing).
 - An informal process (mediation). The informal process may be requested at any time. **In the informal process, the respondent need never know of the complaint if the complainant chooses.** Some remedies (e.g., mutual no contact agreements) must be agreed to by both parties in this process.
 - Either process can involve:
 - Supportive Measures (e.g., working with academic or work deadlines/attendance, changes in office/lab space, etc.)
 - Mutual no contact agreements
 - Punitive actions
 - **Throughout the entire process, you are in control!** You decide who knows what, you can remain anonymous, you choose what punishments and/or supportive measures are pursued.

Should a student need further assistance, the university offers [Student Counseling Services](#) for GAs, GRAs and GTAs. In addition, there [is Safe Harbor](#), [Auburn Cares](#), [AU Medical Clinic](#), [Domestic Violence Intervention Center](#), [Rape Counselors of East Alabama](#), [Unity Wellness Center](#) that are available as well.

COSAM believes that by addressing grievances appropriately, we will ensure a more inclusive environment. As we work through conflict resolution, please keep in mind that:

- Active listening should be employed so that individuals are able to express their concerns fully without judgement.
- Empathy and compassion allow someone to feel heard and valued. During this process, we must show compassion and acknowledge the feelings of those who have been harmed.
- Grievances must be responded to in a timely fashion. Even if the grievance will take some time to address, maintaining open communication and keeping everyone involved aware of the timeline will help to avoid exacerbating the situation and/or causing mistrust.
- Grievances must be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Respecting the privacy of all parties involved ensures that sensitive information is not shared without their consent.

The ultimate goal is to prevent grievances from arising in the first place by creating a culture of open communication, respect, and collaboration among all members of COSAM. We all play a vital role in maintaining an environment where everyone in our community can thrive. By taking grievances seriously and responding appropriately, we contribute to a more supportive and inclusive environment for all.