

STUDENT GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

Policy

WITS seeks to foster the values of respect, fairness, integrity, and transparency among faculty, staff, and students. When a conflict arises that requires resolution, students are expected to attempt to resolve the matter directly with the relevant party(ies). In cases where direct communication proves unsuccessful or unsatisfactory, a student has the right to file a formal grievance without fear of coercion or reprisal under the following procedures:

- *Informal Dispute Resolution* – WITS makes available an Ombudsman who offers a safe opportunity where faculty, staff, and students may discuss problems or issues. The Ombudsman provides confidential, neutral, and informal assistance in navigating options for solving problems, conflicts, and/or disputes that arise across the institution. The Ombudsman is an objective third party who acts as a resource with respect to navigating institutional rules, regulations, policies, procedures, and academic issues. The Ombudsman is dedicated to developing and implementing fair and equitable resolutions to individual or organizational concerns. The Ombudsman reports directly to the Executive Dean/Menacheles and receives support from the Office of Administrative Affairs. Requests for assistance from the Ombudsman are received at ombudsman@wits.edu.
- *Formal Written Complaint for Academic Grievance* – If a student has an academic grievance, such as a grade appeal or allegation of unfair grading practices, the student should confer with the respective faculty and administrator (Executive Dean/Menacheles for kodesh courses; Academic Dean for general studies) regarding the specific issue(s). If the student remains dissatisfied after consultation with the faculty and administrator, the student should submit a formal written grievance via an Academic Grievance Form. The Academic Grievance Form is available in the Office of Administrative Affairs and accessible on the WITS website. The Academic Grievance Form provides instructions on preparation of the written grievance.

The student (grievant) shall submit the Academic Grievance Form to the Office of Administrative Affairs. If the grievant is uncomfortable submitting the form personally, the grievant may submit the completed form to the Ombudsman, who shall forward the complaint to the Office of Administrative Affairs.

The Office of Administrative Affairs shall forward the complaint to the Grievance Committee who will investigate the details of the complaint/grievance.

The Academic Grievance Form shall be reviewed by the Grievance Committee who will investigate the details of the grievance. The Grievance Committee is comprised of the following members: a) Executive Dean/Menacheles, b) Academic Dean, c) President of the Board of Directors, and d) One part-time faculty member. If any of the individuals on the Grievance Committee is a party to the grievance, he or she will recuse himself/herself from

the process.

A response to the grievance shall be provided to the grievant within two weeks of the formal request for consideration, unless more time for investigation is needed. Any decision of the Grievance Committee is deemed final.

- *Formal Written Complaint for Non-Academic Grievance* – If a student has a non-academic grievance, such as an allegation of physical abuse or lack of accommodations for a physical disability, the student should seek clarification and resolution, where appropriate, with the relevant faculty or staff member regarding the specific issue(s). The student should also consult with the Executive Dean/Menacheles and/or Academic Dean. If the student remains dissatisfied, or does not feel comfortable approaching the faculty or staff member directly, the student should submit a formal written grievance via a Non-Academic Grievance Form. The Non-Academic Grievance Form is available in the Office of Administrative Affairs and accessible on the WITS website. The Non-Academic Grievance Form provides instructions on preparation of the written grievance.

The student (grievant) shall submit the Non-Academic Grievance Form to the Office of Administrative Affairs. If the grievant is uncomfortable submitting the form personally, the grievant may submit the completed form to the Ombudsman, who shall forward the complaint to the Office of Administrative Affairs.

The Office of Administrative Affairs shall forward the complaint to the Grievance Committee who will investigate the details of the complaint/grievance. The Grievance Committee is comprised of the following members: a) Executive Dean/Menacheles, b) Academic Dean, c) President of the Board of Directors, and d) One part-time faculty member. If any of the individuals on the Grievance Committee is a party to the grievance, he or she will recuse himself/herself from the process.

A response to the grievance shall be provided to the grievant within two weeks of the formal request for consideration, unless more time for investigation is needed. Any decision of the Grievance Committee is deemed final.

- Complaints Pertaining to Institutional Licensure or State Approval

A complaint pertaining to occupational licensure requirements is to be submitted to the appropriate licensing board or entity. WITS is approved by the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC). For a complaint involving a college or university, MHEC requires that a student must first exhaust the complaint/grievance procedures established by the institution. Complaints can be filed with MHEC using the following procedures shown in the following table.

MHEC Complaint Process

A student or faculty personnel may submit a complaint in writing to MHEC when it involves an alleged violation of the Education Article, COMAR, or college or university policy, but only after the student or faculty member has first exhausted the complaint/grievance procedures established by the institution. Should the opinion of the complainant be that the complaint has not been resolved appropriately by the institution, the complainant may submit an official complaint to the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) in writing; students should use the College and University Student Complaint Form and faculty personnel should use the College and University Faculty Complaint Form. The Faculty Complaint Form is not used to make a complaint against a professor or faculty personnel.

To file an official complaint, a signed College and University Student Complaint Form or College and University Faculty Complaint Form must be submitted to MHEC with copies of supporting documentation included. The complaint documents are to be submitted to:

Director of Academic Affairs
Maryland Higher Education Commission
6 N. Liberty Street, 10th Floor
Baltimore, MD 21201
Fax: 410-332-0270
Email: collegiatecomplaint.mhec@maryland.gov

College and University Student & Faculty Complaint Forms can also be retrieved at:
https://mhec.maryland.gov/institutions_training/Documents/acadaff/MHECStudentComplaintForms.pdf.
Within 10 business days of receipt of an official complaint, MHEC will acknowledge its receipt and begin investigating for evidence of violation of the Education Article, COMAR, or institutional policy.

A copy of the complaint and supporting documents will be provided to the College or university President. MHEC will require the President to look into the matter and provide a written report back to MHEC within 30 business days of receipt of MHEC notification. MHEC staff may interview the institution employees, students, or the student complainant as part of its investigation.

MHEC may take regulatory action based on its review and in accordance with the Education Article and COMAR Title 13B, and the manner for which the institution is approved to operate.

MHEC will inform the student or faculty complainant and the college or university President in writing of its determination(s).

Complaints pertaining to matters other than those addressed in the Education Article or COMAR Title 13B, or pertaining to the institution's approved policies, will not be entertained by MHEC, nor will it be referred to another agency or organization.

- Complaints Pertaining to Institutional Accreditation

A complaint concerning compliance with the standards of accreditation is to be submitted to the institution's accrediting body. WITS is accredited by the Association of Institutions of Jewish Studies (AIJS). Complaints can be filed with AIJS using the following procedures shown in the following table.

AIJS Complaint Process

Complaints regarding accreditation should be submitted to:

Association of Institutions of Jewish Studies
500 W. Kennedy Boulevard
Lakewood, NJ 08701-2620
Phone: 732-363-7330; Fax: 732-415-8198
Email: nlandesman@theaijs.com

Complaints that are received by AIJS concerning an AIJS-accredited institution will be handled according to the following procedures. Within 10 days of receipt by AIJS, the complaint is screened to see if it has any face validity and if it is relevant to AIJS' role in accrediting and overseeing the institution. This generally means that the complaint has to address an institutional issue that bears on compliance with AIJS's Standards for Accreditation.

If AIJS determines that the complaint does not fit into AIJS's responsibilities, the complaint will be acknowledged and replied to as not being within the purview of AIJS. As a courtesy, a copy of the complaint will be forwarded to the institution, and the case will be closed. If AIJS determines that the complaint is relevant to its accreditation Standards or policies, or if it falls within AIJS' oversight responsibilities, AIJS will contact the institution and forward the complaint to the institution. AIJS will then allow 30 days for the institution to respond to AIJS that it has reviewed the matter and either resolved the complaint to the complainant's satisfaction or otherwise dealt with the issue in accordance with the institution's published Grievance Policy. An explanation of its actions is required, as well as a statement that the institution certifies that it followed its own published Grievance Policy. AIJS will then review the institution's response and Grievance Policy.

If the institution informs AIJS in its response that the complainant did not follow the complaint policy of the institution, AIJS will instruct the complainant to follow the complaint policy of the institution. If the complainant claims to have followed the institution's published Complaint Policy, and the matter is not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant, AIJS will make a determination as to whether the complainant did actually follow the institution's complaint policy. If it is determined by AIJS that the institution did in fact follow its published Complaint Policy, and followed through with a proper disposition, the complainant will be so informed, and that case will be closed.

If AIJS determines that the institutions did not in fact follow its own published Complaint Policy, or if the matter involves issues to substantially question the institution's compliance with AIJS Standards or policies, AIJS will launch an inquiry into the issue within 10 days. AIJS will ask for documentation from the complainant, substantiating the complaint, and an explanation of the disposition from the institution (which should document how the institution followed its own Complaint Policy and procedures).

Within 10 days of the receipt of these above materials, the executive director of AIJS, together with the chairman of the Executive Accrediting Council (EAC), will review the complaint file to determine if the institution complied with AIJS standards and policies. AIJS will contact the institution and allow the institution the opportunity (30 days) to review the matter and provide an explanation and/or additional information to AIJS.

If after receipt of the institutional response and a review of any additional documentation, AIJS makes a final determination that the institution is not in compliance with AIJS standards and/or policies, a formal corrective action plan will be required from the institution within 30 days.

If the response is accepted by AIJS, both the complainant and the institution will be so advised, and the case will be closed. If the corrective action plan is not accepted by AIJS, the matter will be placed on the agenda of the EAC to determine if an adverse action, or other sanction should be initiated against the institution for noncompliance with AIJS Standards of Accreditation.

AIJS will make a good faith effort to address anonymous complaints against an accredited institution or against AIJS itself and treat it in a similar manner to a regular complaint. Obviously, there is no mechanism to respond directly to an anonymous complainant. All complaints received by AIJS regarding an accredited institution will be filed and stored in an easy and accessible manner. Site visitors will be given access to the file of an institution that is being reviewed, and any complaints on file in AIJS will be considered in the final decision of the EAC.

- Complaints Pertaining to Potential Violations of Consumer Protection

A complaint pertaining to potential violations of consumer protection is to be submitted to:

Consumer Protection Division – Office of the Attorney General
200 Saint Paul Place
Baltimore, MD 21202
Telephone: 410-528-8662
More information is available at: oag.state.md.us/Consumer/complaint.htm

- Complaints Pertaining to Discrimination

A complaint concerning discrimination is to be submitted to:

Office for Civil Rights, Philadelphia Office – US Department of Education
100 Penn Square East, Suite 515
Philadelphia, PA 19107-3323
Telephone: 215-656-8541
More information is available at:
www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/howto.html