

Academic Freedom Complaint Procedure

Academic Affairs Division

Section 1: References and Resources

VPCC Related Policy: not applicable

VPCC Related Forms: Academic Freedom Complaint (AFC) form (under development)

VCCS Related Policy:

VCCS Policy 3.5.6 ([Academic Freedom and Responsibility](#))

VCCS Policy 3.13 ([Alternative Dispute Resolution and Grievance Procedures](#))

External Source Mandate: [SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation Standard 6.4](#)

External Resource: [American Association of University Professors Core Principles](#)

Section 2: Purpose

This document outlines the procedures related to Academic Freedom and the resolution of disputes related to the potential infringement of academic freedom at Virginia Peninsula Community College (VPCC). This procedure aims for resolution of academic freedom concerns prior to engaging in the formal grievance process.

Section 3: Overview

- 3.1 Academic Freedom is defined by the VCCS policy 3.5.6 ([Academic Freedom and Responsibility](#)).
- 3.2 At times, faculty may believe that their academic freedom has been infringed upon. As a result, the faculty may want to alert administration of their concern or may want to file a complaint regarding their academic freedom.
- 3.3 The grievance process described in VCCS Policy 3.13 (Alternative Dispute Resolution and Grievance Procedures) may apply to any variety of conflicts. However, violations of Academic Freedom, a core principle of the VCCS as outlined in the VCCS Policy 3.5.6 and the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), require particular attention and expertise. When faculty believe their Academic Freedom has been violated, the procedures outlined below govern the process for resolution prior to engaging in the formal grievance procedure as outlined in VCCS Policy 3.13.

Section 4: Procedure

Faculty who believe their Academic Freedom may have been violated may follow the procedure below prior to filing a formal grievance as outlined in VCCS Policy 3.13.

- 4.1 Optional Resolution at Department or Division Level

- 4.1.1 A faculty member who believes their Academic Freedom, as outlined in VCCS Policy 3.5.6, may have been violated, is encouraged to bring their complaint to the relevant department/college administrator(s) or colleague(s) to clarify policies, decision-making authority, and other issues related to the complaint. If the complaint is resolved at this level, the complainant is encouraged to report the outcome to the Vice President of Academic Affairs (VPAA) and the dean of their division to be recorded. Please note that step I is optional, especially if the faculty member believes that this process is not in the best interest for the resolution of their case. Faculty may choose to skip this step and move directly to filing a formal academic freedom complaint.

4.2 Academic Freedom Complaint

- 4.2.1 The complainant will submit an [Academic Freedom Complaint \(AFC\) form](#) to the office of the Vice President of Academic Affairs (VPAA) within 30 days of the incident rising to the complaint.
- 4.2.2 The complainant will meet with VPAA and the Faculty Senate President (or their designee) to discuss the content of the complaint and explore options for resolution within 15 days of the complaint from being received. Resolutions must be agreed upon by all parties involved.
- 4.2.3 If no resolution is agreed upon, the VPAA and President of the Faculty Senate will determine whether the complaint can be reasonably interpreted as a violation of Academic Freedom. This, and any subsequent steps listed below, should be completed within two months of the no resolution decision.
- 4.2.3.1 If it is determined to not be a violation of Academic Freedom, the complaint is recorded with the VPAA's office, but no further action is taken on this AFC. The complainant may elect to initiate the formal grievance procedure as outlined in VCCS Policy 3.13 if they disagree with the determination.
- 4.2.3.2 If it is determined to be a possible violation of Academic Freedom, the AFC process continues as outlined below.
- A. An ad hoc Committee of Academic Freedom (ACAF) will be convened. The ACAF shall consist of five members, including two faculty members for the complainant's division, two faculty members from outside the complainant's division, and the standing President of the VPCC Faculty Senate. The VPAA, in consultation with the Faculty Senate President, will select the committee members and provide the charge.
 - B. Members of the ACAF should be familiar with the principles of Academic Freedom outlined in VCCS Policy 3.5.6 and promulgated by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). Prior to reviewing the complaint, the ACAF will meet to review its charge and will review general academic freedom principles.
 - C. The ACAF will then review the complaint by discussing it with relevant parties and gathering evidence as needed, such as interviews, literature research, and best practice research. This information gathering step may not necessarily require involvement of, or exposure to, complainant identity. This review may

include discussion with the involved parties, relevant shared governance bodies, disciplinary experts, Academic Freedom experts, and other faculty members and administrative staff members, as appropriate.

- D. After completing their investigation of the complaint, as detailed in step 3, the ACAF will compile a report and make a recommendation to the VPAA or those representing the College. If this recommendation is agreed upon by both parties (those representing the complainant and those representing the College), the report shall then be signed off on by the VPAA and College President
- E. To facilitate the long-term protection of Academic Freedom principles at VPCC, the VPAA's office will serve as a repository of Academic Freedom Complaints. Each time the ACAF makes a recommendation, the ACAF shall compile a report to be submitted to the Faculty Senate Executive Board, the VPAA, and the College President. This report shall include all preliminary complaints reported to the ACAF, proposed resolutions, and outcome.
- F. If either party rejects the ACAF recommendation, the complainant may initiate the formal grievance procedure outlined in VCCS Policy 3.13, with the ACAF recommendation to be included as written evidence at all levels of review. The complainant may also elect to drop the complaint.

Section 5: Effective Date and Approval

Reviewed and approved: February 11, 2025

- College President, Dr. Towuanna Porter Brannon
- Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dr. Kerry Ragno
- Vice President for Workforce Development and Innovation, Todd Estes
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