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# PEER RESOURCE OUTREACH

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Policies and guidelines for the 2019-2020 academic year



**Note:** This handbook contains general policy information for students and members of the Peer Resource Outreach.

## Table of Contents

|      |   |   |
|------|---|---|
| I.   | Introduction.....   | 2 |
| II.  | Office of Research & Graduate Education.....                              | 2 |
| III. | Principles.....   | 2 |
| IV.  | Key Roles.....  | 3 |
|      | A. What the group can do.....   | 3 |
|      | B. What the group cannot do.....  | 3 |
| V.   | Concerns/Discussion Points.....   | 4 |
|      | A. Reasons to Contact.....  | 4 |
|      | B. Academic Concerns.....   | 4 |
|      | Academic Dishonesty.....  | 4 |
|      | Progress to Degree.....   | 4 |
|      | Concerns about instructor/advisor.....                                    | 4 |
|      | Conflicts with professors, processes, departments, or other students..... | 5 |
|      | Probation/Dismissal.....  | 5 |
|      | C. Non-Academic Concerns.....   | 5 |
|      | Financial Issues.....   | 5 |
|      | Harassment and Discrimination.....  | 5 |
| VI.  | Frequently Asked Questions.....   | 7 |

## I. Introduction

The Peer Resource is an organization dedicated to addressing students' questions, complaints and concerns in a safe place. We are here to listen and assist with difficulties in regards to student, faculty, staff, and university matters as they related to the Health Sciences Center Graduate Programs. We are here to help you identify options so that you can seek resolution. As your peers, we are here to serve as your advocates to help voice your thoughts and/or direct you to the best place for help. The Peer Resource Outreach is not a formal decision-making authority. Our group reports to the Office of Research and Graduate Education, and to the Assistant Vice President for Graduate Education.

*Current members of the group can be found at: [www.hsc.wvu.edu/resoff/graduate-education/peer-resource-outreach/](http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/resoff/graduate-education/peer-resource-outreach/)*

## II. Office of Research & Graduate Education

The Assistant VP for Graduate Education, and staff assistants are part of the HSC Office of Research & Graduate Education. The following will interact with you most on programmatic issues. Please meet the others on our website: <http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/resoff/home/>

|                      |   |              |                        |
|----------------------|---|--------------|------------------------|
| Laura F. Gibson, PhD | Senior Associate VP for Research and Graduate Education | 304-293-7206 | lgibson@hsc.wvu.edu    |
| Lisa M. Salati, PhD  | Assistant VP for Graduate Education                     | 304-293-7759 | lsalati@hsc.wvu.edu    |
| Connor Ferguson      | Admissions Coordinator                                  | 304-293-6321 | clferguson@hsc.wvu.edu |

**NOTE:** *The Office of Research and Graduate Education is always an available resource to help you in your needs as a graduate student. For matters that you feel must be handled at an administrative level, please contact Dr. Lisa Salati or another member of the office.*

*Questions regarding **academic appeals** should be directed to the Assistant Vice President for Graduate Education, Dr. Lisa Salati, [lsalati@hsc.wvu.edu](mailto:lsalati@hsc.wvu.edu)*

*Questions regarding **account issues** should be directed to the Office of Research and Graduate Education Chief Business Planning Officer, Joyce Turpen, [jaturpen@hsc.wvu.edu](mailto:jaturpen@hsc.wvu.edu)*

## III. Principles

### *Confidentiality*

The Peer Resource Outreach encourages you to feel comfortable discussing concerns related to coursework, peers, faculty, etc. without fear of that information leaving the session. The identity of those that utilize the group and its resources offered will not be disclosed without your explicit permission. We will not divulge your name or identity, in any way, or discuss your concerns without your explicit permission. The only exceptions are in situations of imminent risk of serious harm, suspected abuse, or if required by law. We will make every

effort to inform you if your case is likely to require a breach of confidentiality and keep you involved in the entire process.

We do not participate in any formal process within the University. We will keep no records containing identifying information on behalf of the University. Our group recognizes the need for a truly confidential setting in order to better assist our peers that are experiencing problems. With our confidential setting, we are able to offer a safe space and the freedom to talk about especially sensitive situations that you may not yet feel comfortable talking about with others.

*\*As students on a graduate assistantship, we were mandatory reporters per West Virginia University's Title IX policies and procedures.*

### *Informal*

As your peers, the Peer Resource Outreach works outside of the Office of Research and Graduate Education. While the concern may be shared, your identity will not be revealed nor will you be required to act on a resolution. For filing a formal grievance, the student must contact the Office of Research and Graduate Education or the Assistant Vice President for Graduate Education.

## **IV. Key Roles**

Our group is not a formal decision-making authority. We are a neutral and impartial resource for students in their times of need. We will provide fair and consistent treatment to all students. Our group operates independently of the Office of Research and Graduate Education and will not provide formal processes or formal decisions.

### **A. What the group *can* do**

- Provide a safe and confidential setting where peers can feel respected and heard
- Listen to concerns, problems, and disputes
- Review options and explore solutions
- Explain relevant policies and procedures
- Answer questions, or help find others who can answer them
- Make appropriate referrals and provide appropriate resources when necessary
- Assist students with conflict resolution skills
- Help students effectively communicate ideas on how to improve some aspect of their program/training

### **B. What the group *cannot* do**

- Participate in formal processes and legal procedures
- Give legal advice
- Give financial or tax advice
- Make administrative or academic decisions on behalf of the University

- Accept formal grievances
- Conduct investigations
- Determine the guilt or innocence of those accused of wrongdoing
- Keep official University files and records
- Be expected to solve the problem

## V. Concerns/Discussion Points

### A. Reasons to Contact

If a student is having a serious dispute (or are not sure if it is a serious issue) with a peer, faculty, staff member, or the University and:

- Does not know how to proceed
- Is trying to avoid conflict escalation
- Is feeling unfairly treated
- Is feeling subjected to intimidating, bullying, or emotionally toxic behavior
- Is feeling their concerns are not being heard
- The student has an idea they would like to share

### B. Academic Concerns

#### *Academic Dishonesty*

The Peer Resource Outreach will only guide students on University policy on academic issues. If the student expects dishonesty has occurred, they will be guided on how to report it. Cases in which a student has been found committing academic dishonesty, the matter should remain within the administrative level of the Assistant Vice President for Graduate Education.

#### *Progress to Degree*

Students may have questions or concerns about the variables impacting their progress towards graduation. The Peer Resource Outreach will be able to provide advice on understanding advisors and policies, as well as where to look or seek for additional support.

#### *Concerns about instructor/advisor*

Students may feel they have the wrong mentor. The protocol will vary depending on the reason – mentor has left the university or there is a conflict with the mentor. The group will help guide the student through the protocols in the student handbook and can make referrals on how to help resolve the issue.

### *Conflicts with professors, processes, departments, or other students*

Unhappiness in a student's chosen laboratory and/or with their mentors does not mean the student will definitely need to leave the laboratory. The key to handling these situations effectively is to act as soon as a problem occurs, and the Peer Resource Outreach will be available to provide advice towards conflict resolution and mitigating the conflict efficiently.

### *Probation/Dismissal*

Cases regarding appealing probation or dismissals should be sent directly to the Assistant Vice President for Graduate Education. The Peer Resource Outreach is unable to make formal decisions regarding probation and dismissal. Students have the right to due process in all decisions regarding their grades and status in graduate schools. Appeals of decisions must follow a standard set of procedures. Procedures for student appeals can be found in the Graduate Catalog.

## **C. Non-academic concerns**

### *Financial Issues*

Student account issues should be directed to the Office of Research and Graduate Education Chief Business Planning Officer, Joyce Turpen, [jaturpen@hsc.wvu.edu](mailto:jaturpen@hsc.wvu.edu), or the WVU Office of Financial Aid. The Peer Resource Outreach is unable to provide advice on financial matters.

### *Harassment and Discrimination*

A student may approach an advocate expressing a situation in which they felt discriminated against or treated inappropriately. The Peer Resource Outreach will listen to the case with an open mind and provide adequate resources to support the student.

Cases regarding sexual assault, abuse, or harassment will be taken seriously. The Peer Resource Outreach will listen to the situation and provide adequate support and resources to assist the survivor. In some cases, the advocate will be required to report a case to the Title IX Office of Equity Assurance (<https://titleix.wvu.edu/>) and/or the Assistant Vice President for Graduate Education.

The Board of Governors at WVU mandates that the University will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, ancestry, age, physical or mental disability, marital or family status, pregnancy, veteran status, service in the uniformed services, religion, creed, sex, sexual orientation, genetic information, gender identity, or gender expression in the administration of any of its educational programs or activities. University policy on addressing cases of discrimination, harassment, sexual and domestic misconduct, stalking, and retaliation can be found in BOG Governance Rule

1.6. If the student reports this to the Peer Resource Outreach, they will be directed to the Title IX Office of Equity Assurance.

## VI. Frequently Asked Questions

### Can the Student Peer Resource Outreach give me legal advice?

No. The Student Peer Outreach group can help you identify university procedures and policies, discuss options, and mediate, but cannot give legal advice.

The West Virginia University Office of Student Legal Services is able to provide counseling, advice, and representation for students as needed  
(<https://studentlegalservices.wvu.edu/>)

### Which member of the Peer Resource Outreach group should I reach out to?

The members of the Peer Resource Outreach group come from a variety of programs and background. You are more than welcome to contact a representative from your program, or anyone else that you desire. We do ask that you contact us via email – you can find out information at [www.hsc.wvu.edu/resoff/graduate-education/peer-resource-outreach](http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/resoff/graduate-education/peer-resource-outreach)

### What if the informal process doesn't work?

If you and the Peer Resource are unable to reach a resolution to the conflict, you may wish to contact a representative from the Office of Research and Graduate Education. The Assistant Vice President for Graduate Education will always be willing to help, and can redirect the conflict through appropriate channels if needed.

### What if I have a sexual harassment or discrimination complaint?

All complaints regarding sexual harassment or discrimination should be directed to the WVU Title IX and Office of Equity Assurance (<https://titleix.wvu.edu/>).

### What should I expect in a meeting?

Meetings scheduled with a member of the Peer Resource Outreach will vary based on your needs. The Peer Resource will spend a brief amount of time explaining their role before you discuss your concern(s). After you have finished discussing the situation, you and the Peer Resource will begin to examine possible options for resolution. You are not required to bring anything, but if you have any documents that you believe are pertinent to your concern, you are welcome to bring them.

### Is it *really* confidential?

The Resource Outreach encourages all participants to feel comfortable discussing concerns related to coursework, peers, faculty, etc. without the fear of that information leaving the session. However, there are legal exceptions and University policies that will require breaking confidentiality. These exceptions are in situations of imminent risk of

serious harm, suspected abuse, or if required by law. We will make every effort to inform you if your case is likely to require a breach of confidentiality and keep you involved in the entire process.