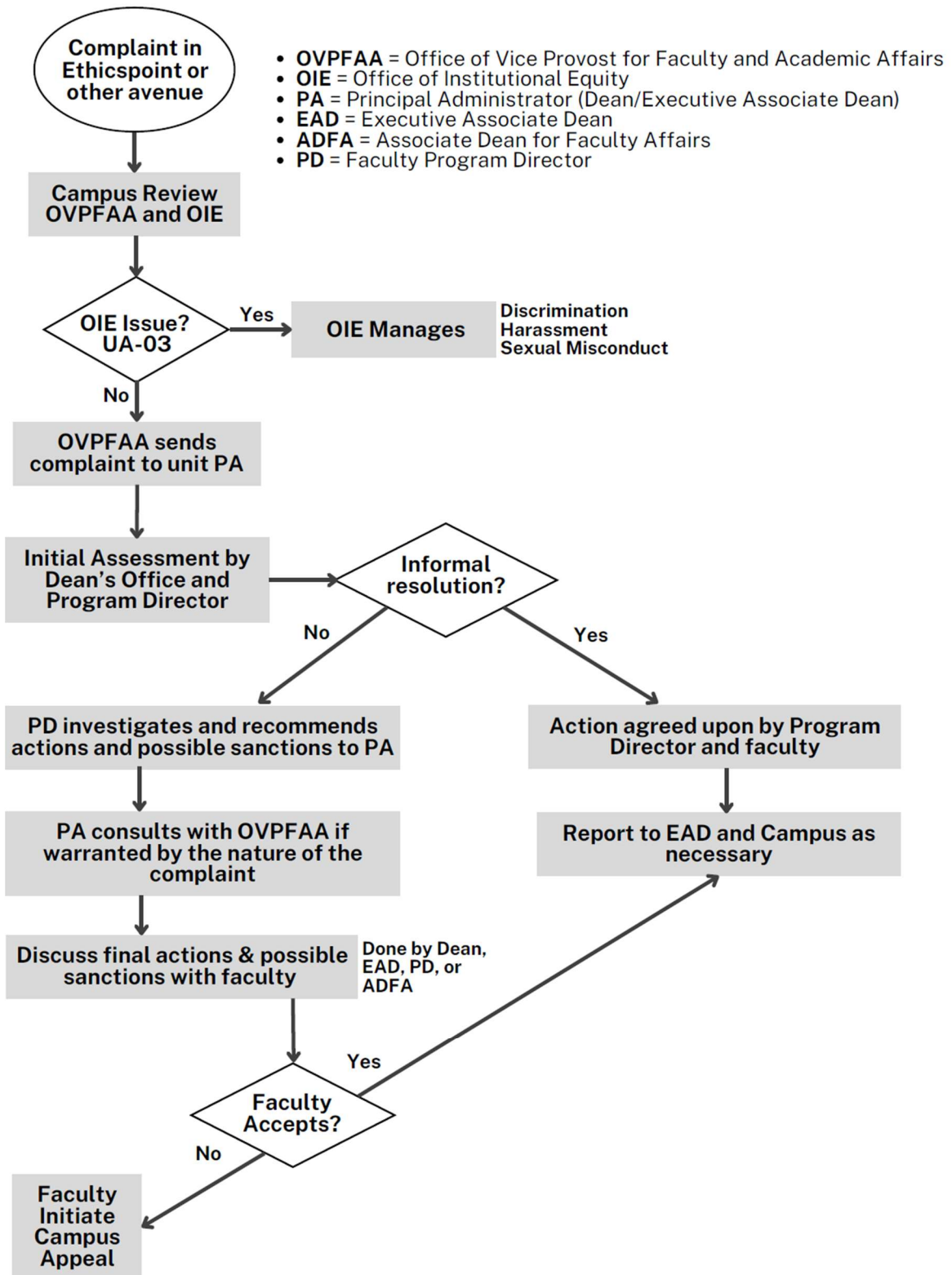


## O'Neill School Procedures for Addressing Student Complaints - March 2025



### **Summary of the Complaints Process at the O'Neill School**

1. Student complaints are received via several channels, including Ethicspoint (the centralized campus reporting system), the Dean's office, program directors, academic advisors, and other faculty members.
2. For complaints originating via Ethicspoint, the VPFAA and other campus administrators first review to determine if it is an SEA 202 complaint or related to another issue (such as discrimination, harassment, sexual misconduct, etc.) that is managed by the Office of Institutional Equity (OIE)). If it is determined to not be an OIE matter, the complaint is then sent to the Principal Administrator, which is the Dean's Office at O'Neill.
3. Within O'Neill, complaints related to teaching will typically be referred to the relevant program director, who will make an initial assessment, which may include the following actions.
  - Contact the student to receive a written summary of their perception of the issue/event.
  - Notify the faculty member of the complaint and allow them an opportunity to respond with their own account of events.
  - When the faculty member disputes the student's account of events, program directors seek any additional information or evidence. Examples of this would include whether more than one student has complained about the same issue or if there is a pattern of complaints over multiple courses or semesters.
  - Program directors are expected to defer to faculty judgements on matters of pedagogical philosophy so long as they are generally reasonable, appropriate, and consistent with norms within the field of study.
  - If the complaint involves an issue related to the relevance or appropriateness of course content, the program director will consult with the PA and, if needed, with other faculty who have subject matter expertise.
4. As mentioned in the core values statement below, when evaluating complaints, program directors generally should give the benefit of the doubt to the faculty member. If, after hearing the faculty member's account and assessing the available evidence, the program director determines that the complaint is not legitimate, they notify the student that they have investigated allegation, but no action will be taken, and the matter is considered closed.
5. If it appears that there is legitimacy to the complaint, the program director will first seek an informal resolution.

- This could involve an informal conversation where the program director makes suggestions for appropriate ways to address/correct the issue and prevent it from happening again, and the faculty member agrees to take the suggested action.<sup>1</sup>
  - The program director will then report the steps taken to resolve the complaint to the Dean's office and to the student.
6. If an informal resolution is not possible, the program director will report the results of the investigation to the Dean's office, who will then address the matter directly or refer the matter to the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs (OVPF AA) to determine appropriate next steps.
  7. If any sanctions are deemed necessary, the Dean's office will discuss final actions with the faculty member and may involve VPFAA if warranted.
  8. If the faculty member feels that the outcome of the investigation or the imposition of sanctions were not justified, they may initiate a campus appeals process.

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<sup>1</sup> Most student complaints about teaching that have been found to have merit have historically been resolved via this informal process.

### **Core Principles and Values Within the Complaints Process at the O'Neill School**

- Students have a reasonable expectation that faculty will behave professionally and appropriately and have a right to complain when faculty do not meet this expectation.
- As a public affairs school in a public university, the O'Neill school should comply with all federal, state and local laws, rules, and regulations.
- Student complaints should be taken seriously, but an overly aggressive or adversarial complaint system has the potential to create a chilling effect in the classroom that would have negative effects on both students and faculty.
- Faculty should always be given the benefit of the doubt when the only evidence of wrongdoing is a student's allegation, particularly when there is no broader pattern of complaints from multiple students or over multiple semesters.
- To be effective instructors, faculty must have significant discretion to determine the most appropriate pedagogical strategies for the classes they teach, which may vary based on factors such as the size and topic of the class, the level of student, and the faculty member's own previous work experiences and teaching philosophy.
- O'Neill faculty teach courses that involve complicated and politically controversial topics and often must push students outside their comfort zone to question previously held beliefs and assumptions. Doing this without making any mistakes or errors is impossible, and the complaints process must reflect this reality.
- When the central issue of the complaint involves a question about the relevance or ideological bias of course content, faculty with expertise in the subject area should be consulted, and their judgements should weigh heavily in determining whether the material is appropriate.
- Any sanctions or penalties imposed on faculty should be proportionate to the nature of the offense. Minor mistakes, particularly when they are the first offense and the faculty makes a good faith effort to address the concern, should not result in disciplinary action.
- The purpose of the complaint system is to address legitimate student concerns about faculty teaching. O'Neill and IU administrators have a responsibility to ensure that this process is not used in a manner that seeks to attack or intimidate faculty.