COMPLAINT PROCEDURE

I. General Information

a. Application of Policy

The complaint procedure is intended to provide a mechanism to investigate and where possible resolve complaints of alleged violations of this Policy against employees and students. The procedures outlined below are intended to ensure that the College will conduct an impartial, fair, effective, and efficient investigation of all allegations of discrimination without fear of retaliation. The complaint procedure is available to any employee or student who believes he/she has been discriminated against on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, genetic information, veteran status, maternity leave, gender identity, and/or subjected to sexual harassment, sexual violence, or retaliation. A complaint filed in another forum does not preclude a student or employee from filing a complaint under this Policy. Further, a complaint filed in another forum, including a criminal or civil complaint, shall not delay an investigation of a complaint filed under this Policy.

b. Confidentiality of Process

The complaint procedure will be conducted as confidentially as reasonably possible to protect the privacy rights of all individuals involved. The College may share information concerning the complaint with parties, witnesses and/or others during any phase of the procedure on a need-to-know basis and shall share information with union representatives as provided for in G.L.c.150E. All individuals with whom information is shared shall be advised of the confidential nature of the information and directed not to discuss the matter with anyone other than a personal advisor, if applicable.

c. Complainant Requests Confidentiality

Where a Complainant requests that no action be taken by the College or requests that her/his identity not be revealed, the College shall take reasonable steps to investigate and respond to the complaint, but shall inform the Complainant that such a request may hamper its ability to fully investigate an alleged violation of this Policy and/or to take appropriate remedial steps, including disciplinary action. Where an allegation includes the potential of an ongoing threat to the health, safety or security of the College or a potential adverse employment action, the Affirmative Action Officer shall inform the Complainant that it cannot ensure confidentiality and disclosure of their name may likely be required.

d. Anonymous Complaints

To the extent possible, the College is obliged to investigate and respond to anonymous complaints.
e. Off Campus Behavior

The College reserves the right to investigate alleged prohibited conduct under this Policy occurring off-campus when such conduct adversely affects the College Community, poses a threat of harm to the College Community; interferes with the College’s pursuit of its educational objectives and mission, and/or if a student or employee is charged with a serious violation of state or federal law.

f. Interim Action

The College reserves the right to suspend a student on an interim basis or place an employee on paid administrative leave prior to completing an investigation under this Policy when it reasonably concludes that a student or employee: (a) poses a threat to health or safety; (b) poses a threat to College property or equipment; (c) is disruptive or interferes with the normal operations of the College; or (d) is charged with a serious violation of state or federal law. In such cases, the College shall provide the employee or student of the specific reason(s) for the interim action. During a student’s interim suspension or an employee’s leave, the College reserves the right to prohibit the individual from entering upon the College’s property or participating in any College activities absent written authorization from an appropriate official of the College.

g. Joint Investigation

In some circumstances a Responding Party’s conduct may constitute a potential violation of this Policy and/or other conduct policies applicable to employees or students. In such cases, in order to avoid duplicative investigatory efforts, a joint investigation under this Policy may be conducted by the AAO and the administrator charged with enforcing conduct policies. For example, if the Responding Party is a student, the Affirmative Action Officer and Student Code of Conduct Officer may jointly investigate the complaint. Based on the findings of their joint investigation, the student may be subject to disciplinary action for violations of the Affirmative Action Policy and/or the Student Code of Conduct. Where the Responding Party is an employee, a joint investigation may be conducted by the Affirmative Action Officer and the employee’s supervisor. Based on the findings of their joint investigation, the employee may be subject to disciplinary action for violations of the Affirmative Action Policy and/or for inappropriate and unprofessional conduct.

h. Collateral Rights of Employees

Any disciplinary action taken against an employee shall be regarded as an administrative action subject to all terms and conditions of applicable collective bargaining agreements or personnel policies.

i. Complaints of Sex Discrimination, Sexual Harassment or Sexual Violence

The Title IX Coordinator shall have the responsibility for administering this Policy relative to complaints of sex discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual violence.
II. Complaint Procedure

The complaint process is comprised of two procedures - the informal procedure and the formal procedure.

a. Informal Procedure

Where appropriate, the parties to a dispute and/or the Affirmative Action Officer, may attempt to reach an informal and prompt resolution of the potential complaint. Informal resolution is encouraged and any of the parties involved may request the intervention of the Affirmative Action Officer to assist in resolving the matter informally. An informal resolution is achieved through open dialogue between the parties that allows for the airing of any misunderstandings or disputed issues. The informal procedure shall not be used in an effort to resolve allegations of sexual harassment or sexual violence. Further, at no time shall a Responding Party question or confront a Complainant, or engage a third party to do so, as such conduct may constitute intimidation and/or retaliation, which are strictly prohibited under this Policy.

b. Formal Procedure

The following rules apply throughout all phases of the formal complaint process: (1) all parties to a complaint may have a personal advisor (for union employees this may be a union representative); (2) the role of a personal advisor is limited to providing discrete advice and counsel to the party; (3) the filing of a complaint under this Policy shall not preclude a Complainant from pursuing a complaint in a separate legal forum; (4) a complaint involving a grade dispute shall proceed under this Policy when a student alleges that a grade was improper because of discrimination, discriminatory harassment, sexual violence or retaliation; and (5) all findings reached under this procedure must be based on a “preponderance of evidence” (i.e.; more likely than not) standard.

At any point during the formal complaint procedure, either party may request mediation by contacting the Affirmative Action Officer. The purpose of mediation is to resolve the dispute to the satisfaction of both parties. Mediation shall be mutually agreed upon by the parties. The Affirmative Action Officer, or designee, shall select an impartial mediator, who shall be mutually agreed upon and not unreasonably refused by either party, and inform the parties in writing of the mediation process and schedule. The mediator must have training or experience in mediating matters subject to this complaint process. Where practicable, a mediation session shall be conducted no later than thirty (30) days after agreed to by the parties. The timelines presented under the Complaint Procedure shall be tolled pending the outcome of mediation. If mediation is successful in resolving the complaint, the Affirmative Action Officer shall reduce to writing the terms of the mediated resolution, which shall be signed by the parties. The mediation process shall not be used in an effort to resolve allegations of sexual harassment or sexual violence. If mediation does not result in a resolution, all mediation discussions shall remain confidential and may not be used or introduced in this process or any other forum.
Step 1 – Affirmative Action Officer Investigation

When a Complainant believes that he/she has been discriminated against because of his/her race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, veteran status, maternity leave and/or subjected to sexual harassment, sexual violence, or retaliation, the Complainant may file a formal written complaint in writing with the Affirmative Action Officer. For student Complainants, a formal complaint may be filed within thirty (30) days following the end of the instructional period when the Complainant knew or should have known of the grievable act. For employee Complainants, a formal complaint may be filed within thirty (30) days from when the Complainant knew or should have known of the grievable act. The complaint shall contain a statement of all known facts pertaining to the alleged violation and shall be filed preferably on the Affirmative Action Discrimination Complaint Form (see Appendix A), which shall be available from the Affirmative Action Officer. If a student is involved, the Affirmative Action Officer shall notify the Vice President or Dean of Student Services.

During Step 1, the Affirmative Action Officer has the authority to seek to resolve the complaint through an administrative remedy. If the parties accept the administrative remedy proposed, its terms shall be reduced to writing, signed by both parties and the Affirmative Action Officer shall retain the document, with copies to the parties. Thereafter, the matter shall be considered resolved between the parties.

Upon receiving a written complaint, the Affirmative Action Officer will notify the Responding Party in writing, of the complaint (see Appendix B), and provide the Responding Party with a copy thereof. The timeliness of such notification shall be in accordance with the appropriate collective bargaining agreement, if applicable. The Responding Party shall have ten (10) days from receipt of notice to submit to the Affirmative Action Officer a written response to the complaint.

Where practicable, within thirty (30) days from the date the Respondent’s written response is received, or the date it was due if none was submitted, the Affirmative Action Officer shall conduct an investigation and prepare and issue a Report of Preliminary Findings to the parties. The investigation shall include, but is not limited to, an analysis of the allegations and defenses presented, consideration of all relevant documents, including materials presented by the parties, interviews of the parties and other individuals and/or witnesses, and/or reviewing certain documents or materials in the possession of either party that the Affirmative Action Officer has deemed relevant to the complaint. The Affirmative Action Officer’s report shall specify the investigation undertaken and summarize his/her preliminary findings. The report shall be delivered to the parties in hand or by certified mail. If the investigation is not completed within thirty (30) days, status updates shall be provided to the parties every thirty (30) days until its completion.

Thereafter, the parties will have ten (10) days from the date of their receipt of the Report of Preliminary Findings to submit Rebuttal Statements to the Affirmative Action Officer. The parties may present no new allegations at that time. Where practicable, within seven (7) days of receiving the parties’ Rebuttal Statements, the Affirmative Action Officer shall review the
rebuttal Statements and prepare and submit a Report of Final Findings and Recommendations to the President’s Designee for consideration.

**Step 2 – Review and Decision by the President’s Designee**

Where practicable, within ten (10) days of receipt of the Affirmative Action Officer’s Report of Final Findings and Recommendations, the President’s Designee shall issue a written decision to the parties. The written decision shall accept, reject or modify the Affirmative Action Officer’s Final Findings and Recommendations. The Designee’s written decision shall be delivered in hand or by certified mail and shall include the Report of Final Findings and Recommendations. If the President is the Responding Party in an Affirmative Action Complaint, then the Chair of the College’s Board of Trustees shall designate a Board member(s) as Designee to administer Step 2 of the Complaint Process.

**Step 3 – Appeal to President**

A party who is not satisfied with the Designee’s written decision may file an appeal with the President within five (5) days of receiving the Designee’s decision. Where practicable, within five (5) days of receiving the appeal, the President shall issue a written decision accepting, rejecting or modifying the Designee’s decision. The President’s decision is final provided that any corrective action and/or discipline imposed is subject to applicable collective bargaining agreements.

If the President is the Responding Party in an Affirmative Action Complaint, then the Chair of the College’s Board of Trustees shall consider the appeal and issue the written decision.