

Office of Undergraduate Research (OUR) Procedure: Student Complaint About a Research Mentor

Purpose and Scope

- **Purpose:** Provide a fair and timely process for receiving, assessing, and addressing complaints from undergraduate researchers about research mentors (faculty, staff, postdocs, graduate students, or external partners)
- **Not a substitute for:** Title IX/EO/HR, student conduct, academic integrity, lab safety, IRB/IACUC compliance offices, or grievance procedures—but it may coordinate with them.

Guiding Principles

- **Student safety and non-retaliation**
- **Confidentiality with limits** (need-to-know, mandatory reporting)
- **Fairness and due process** for all parties
- **Timeliness** and clear communication
- **Documentation** and consistent case management
- **Least disruptive remedy** consistent with safety, policy, and equity
- **Supportive measures** regardless of whether a formal investigation proceeds

How does the OUR receive concerns? Students typically voice their concerns in the following ways:

- Progress reports from funded programs (such as the First-Year Scholars Program)
- Emails to individuals working in the office (or the OUR resource account)
- Appointments or drop-ins at the OUR office

Minor Concerns: Relatively minor concerns include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Miscommunications
- Unclear expectations
- Mentoring style conflicts
- Professionalism concerns not rising to formal policy violation
- Disputes about workload, feedback, meeting frequency
- Minor authorship/credit misunderstanding (unless coercion/retaliation)

Minor Concerns Procedures:

- The Executive Director of the OUR reaches out to the faculty mentor to let them know what concerns were raised, maintaining confidentiality when possible. If the complaint is about a graduate student or postdoc supervisor, the faculty member overseeing the project is contacted.
- The faculty member responds either by email or in a meeting with their views regarding what occurred and their plans for handling the situation.
- If the concern was raised through a progress report, we check the subsequent progress report to see if the same issue reoccurs.
- If the concern was raised in a meeting or through email, the Executive Director of the OUR asks the student to follow up if the issue persists.
- If the issue is resolved, no further action is needed.

- If the issue persists, then the faculty member receives a follow-up email about the issue.
- If there are persistent complaints, especially from multiple students over multiple semesters, and the issues are not getting resolved, then the OUR ceases providing funding for one (1) year to give the faculty member time to work on the issues (recommendations for professional development options are provided).
- If the faculty member returns for funding after one year but the same issues continue to appear (typically multiple students over multiple semesters), then the OUR will permanently discontinue funding for that faculty member.
- The OUR will assist students in finding a new research mentor if warranted.

Major Concerns: More serious concerns include (but are not limited to) the following:

- **Title IX/Office of Institutional Equity:** sex-based harassment/discrimination; sexual assault; stalking; relationship violence; pregnancy-related discrimination
- **Environmental Health and Safety (EHS)/Risk:** dangerous lab conditions, chemical exposure, unsafe training, weapons
- **Human Resources/Faculty Affairs:** employee misconduct, threats, abusive behavior by mentors, retaliation, extortion, coercion
- **Research Integrity (IRB/IACUC):** research misconduct, human/animal compliance issues, data tampering

Major Concerns Procedures:

- Major concerns like those listed above would be reported to the relevant areas that handle these issues (e.g., IRB, Title IX office). Department chairs may be contacted as well.
- Serious issues may result in a permanent ban on OUR funding.
- The OUR will assist students in finding a new research mentor if warranted.