PURPOSE:

The School of Public Health (SPH) Bylaws charge the SPH Council with establishing a set of grievance policies and procedures for the School. Included in this charge is the formation of a Grievance Committee and Ombudsperson Program (section VI.1.1.5 of SPH Bylaws). Additionally, the Bylaws charge the SPH Student Affairs Committee with establishing and reviewing, “in accordance with policy established by the School of Public Health Council” a grievance and petition protocol for non-academic student grievances (section VII.4.2.3 of SPH Bylaws). Accordingly, the purpose of this document is to:

1) Describe the roles of the various Grievance Review Bodies, including the Grievance Committee, the Ombudspersons, and Student Affairs Committee in handling grievances arising at the School.

2) Outline a policy and set of procedures that can guide the work of the SPH Grievance Review Bodies.

GRIEVANCE REVIEW BODIES

Ombudspersons: The Ombudspersons include a faculty member selected by the SPH Council, the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, and the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs. Any Ombudsperson will provide the first line of action for addressing and resolving grievances by being available for students, faculty, SPH staff, and staff/workers outside of the SPH who have contact with students, faculty, or staff of the SPH (e.g., DOH related speakers, internship mentors, security personnel) to discuss complaints when they are not able to solve issues or problems on their own. Anyone with a grievance may approach any of these three Ombudspersons. If the problem remains unresolved after initial consultation with an Ombudsperson, the conflict can be referred to the SPH Grievance Committee and/or the University Grievance Process. Both groups can be consulted serially as well.

Grievance Committee: This committee is formed by the SPH Council. It is the primary review committee charged with mediating appropriate grievances involving faculty, staff, and students.

This committee serves in a “fact-finding” and issue-clarification capacity, by examining all sides of the issue, presenting recommendations to the Dean and involved parties, and issuing a brief final report.

Student Affairs Committee: This committee will periodically review the student-related grievance procedures and policies carried out at the School and make recommendations for modification to the Council when appropriate.
GRIEVANCE POLICY

It is the policy of the School of Public Health to address grievances in a fair and timely manner, and, when possible and appropriate, within the Public Health School community, in a process that is consistent with University policies and procedures. The grievance procedures and personnel form the core of a system that views all participants as equals and offers fair hearing, mediation where appropriate, judgment when needed, and safety to all members of the SPH at all stages of consideration.

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

1) All grievances involving faculty, staff, or students, staff/workers outside of the SPH who have contact with the students, faculty or staff of the School of Public Health (e.g., DOH related speakers, internship mentors, security personnel) will initially be brought to the attention of the appropriate Department Chair, Center Director, or other supervisor.

If the grievance cannot be resolved after consultation with the appropriate supervisor, it may be brought to the attention of one of the Ombudspersons. If it is not possible to consult with a supervisor, the grievance may be brought directly to any of the Ombudspersons. Further, the grievant also has the option of initially consulting an Ombudsperson when he/she/they have not decided whether or not to grieve, whether a grievance is an appropriate remedy to the issue/incident, and/or when the substance of the issue/incident is of such sensitivity that the grievant prefers to approach an Ombudsperson as a first contact.

2) The Ombudsperson chosen by the grievant will decide if the grievance is one that can be handled by the SPH Grievance Committee, or one that should be referred directly to the University Judicial Affairs Board or other appropriate University level office. Grievances handled by the SPH Grievance Committee typically will involve allegations of unfair treatment, academic dishonesty and other academic grievances.

The Committee will not handle any complaints involving physical threats or sexual harassment. These allegations will be referred directly to the appropriate University-level authority.

3) The standing membership of the SPH Grievance Committee will consist of faculty from each academic department. In addition, staff and students may be added to this committee on an ad-hoc basis to hear grievances involving staff members or students, respectively.

4) Procedures for reviewing cases will typically involve: a) hearing opening statements from all parties involved (referring and referred individuals, and witnesses), either in person or in writing; b) asking questions of any of the parties and reviewing their responses; c) hearing closing statements from all parties involved; and d) discussing the allegations as a committee and presenting a recommendation to the Dean. All parties involved in a grievance that is being reviewed by the committee will be allowed to be accompanied by an advocate or witness as well as linguistic, sign, and/or other interpreters as needed to fully participate.

5) Any complainant has the option of bringing his/her grievance directly to the attention of the University Office of Judicial Affairs or other appropriate University level office at any time during this process (although a University level office may refer the case back to the School Grievance Committee for initial review).
6) All persons, students, staff, faculty, administrators, and others involved in filing and administering these grievance procedures will make a diligent effort to protect the reputations, confidentiality, and positions of involved persons. These persons included those who file grievances, persons who are alleged in the grievance to have undertaken inappropriate actions or activities, department and SPH staff and/or administrators. However, confidentiality regarding information other than the identity of the grievant need not be maintained if the grievance is found to be false, and, in particular, if dissemination is necessary to correct imputations made towards individuals, departments, and/or SPH staff as well as contractors, DOH staff, and outside agency/institutional staff.

7) Each time an Ombudsperson or the Grievance Committee receives and/or reviews a complaint, a written summary of the complaint and any action taken in response to the complaint will be submitted to the Dean. Summaries of cases that are resolved at the level of the Ombudsperson (and are not referred to the Grievance Committee) will be submitted to the Dean within two weeks of the final resolution. Summaries of cases that have been referred to the Grievance Committee will be submitted to the Dean within two months after closing statements are heard. At the end of each semester, the Chair of the Grievance Committee will call a meeting with the Ombudspersons and will review the types of problems encountered over the previous semester and discuss effective and ineffective solutions which occurred.

8) University policies are already in place to handle cases of alleged academic dishonesty. According to the University at Albany Community Rights and Responsibilities, when such allegations arise, the instructor is given the power to decide on a penalty for the student and must inform his/her Dean and the University. If a student wishes to appeal this decision, however, he/she may file a grievance through the appropriate channels as described above.

9) The SPH will be well-informed about these procedures and policies. This should be accomplished by allowing faculty, staff, and student representatives to help revise these procedures. When these policies and procedures are finalized, the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs will coordinate and oversee that the final Grievance document is included in the graduate student handbook and posted on the SPH and individual departments’ websites.