



# Three-Year Outcomes of a Student-Led Disciplinary Committee

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** In 2017, students recommended the formation of a Student Disciplinary Committee as a committee of the Student Government Association. Prior to this, all disciplinary actions were carried out by the administration. The purpose of the Student Disciplinary Committee was to hold hearings for students who were found in violation of policies and professional or academic misconduct. **Methods:** The Student Government Association proposed a process to be followed for any complaint. This did not include issues regarding academic standards which were the responsibility of faculty committees. The members of the newly proposed committee and the chief justice were elected from the student body. Establishment of the committee was approved by the students and faculty. The committee was composed of the chief justice, two student representatives, a faculty representative selected by the students on the committee, and the Associate Dean-Student Affairs. Each hearing consisted of four elements: case presentation, questioning of parties involved, questioning of witnesses, and closing statements. The chief justice provided a formal report to the Associate Dean who informed the accused student in writing of any judgment and sanctioning by the Student Disciplinary Committee along with the procedure for appealing. **Results** From 2017-2019, there were 13 complaints made to the administration. Among these, four agreed to mediation and there were no re-occurrences. Nine resulted in a hearing with the committee. Among these, three students were recommended for dismissal. Four complaints were for harassment, one for disrespect, two for disruption of normal activities, and three for other policy breaches. Only those students who were dismissed appealed a decision. **Conclusion:** The formation of this student-led committee improved student accountability and acceptance of violations to the code of conduct. This was an improvement over administration-directed actions. In some situations, the committee was more stringent than the administration might have been.

## Purpose

Student disciplinary actions are imposed upon students who violate established codes of conduct and policies of the university. In most professional schools, students participate in developing codes of conduct through student governance organizations. In many, students reaffirm compliance at the beginning of academic years and at specific times during the year. However, students found in non-compliance often appeal the actions in a prolonged process. At Trinity Medical Sciences University School of Medicine, the students proposed the Student Disciplinary Committee to review and recommend such actions. The Student Government Association and student body developed the process and it was approved by the faculty. Presented here are the outcomes from the initial three years.

## Methods

Any student, faculty member, or administrator may recommend a student to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs for a violation of the codes of conduct or associated policy. The Associate Dean of Student Affairs reviews the situation and initially talks with the reported student to gain additional information. If the issue is a minor grievance or one that is easily rectified, no additional action is taken. If however, the nature of the situation is more serious or represents a pattern, the student is presented with two options: 1) mediation between the parties involved and 2) referral to the Student Disciplinary Committee.

## Results

Shown here are the policies and professional codes of conduct violations and actions taken by students.

2017 Violations	Action Taken
<u>Harassment Policy violation</u> (3 separate incidents)	Hearing
<u>Code of Conduct violation:</u> Students are expected to demonstrate honesty and dignity in all aspects of their education and in their interactions with faculty, administration, physicians, patients, and fellow students...	Hearing
<u>Code of Conduct violation:</u> Students will not forge documents. They will not alter, possess, duplicate, or use documents, keys, records, or identifications without consent or authorization.	
2018 Violations	Action Taken
<u>Policy violation:</u> Students may not disrupt the normal activities of the School through physical violence or abuse of any person or through conduct which threatens or endangers the health or safety of persons, promotes acts of self-harm, deliberately interferes with academic freedom and freedom of speech, or forcibly interferes with the freedom of movement of any student, faculty, administrator, staff member or guest of Trinity School of Medicine.	Hearing
<u>Code of Conduct violation:</u> Respect the dignity and intrinsic value of every individual. Regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, age, gender, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, religious belief or political affiliation, we will strive to respect our teachers, fellow students, patients, and other members of the medical community.	
<u>Code of Conduct violation:</u> Students are expected to demonstrate honesty and dignity in all aspects of their education and in their interactions with faculty, administration, physicians, patients, and fellow students...	Hearing
<u>Code of Conduct violation:</u> Be honest. We will speak and act truthfully.	
No Smoking <u>Policy violation</u>	Mediation
<u>Harassment Policy violation</u>	Hearing
<u>Testing Policy violation</u> (3 incidents)	Mediation

2019 Violations	Action Taken
<u>Code of Conduct violation:</u> Students may not disrupt the normal activities of the School through physical violence or abuse of any person or through conduct which threatens or endangers the health or safety of persons, promotes acts or self-harm, deliberately interferes with academic freedom and freedom of speech, or forcibly interferes with the freedom of movement of any student, faculty, administrator, staff member or guest of Trinity School of Medicine.	Hearing

## Discussion

The initial proposal from the students to become more involved in violations of student policies and codes of professional behavior was weighed by the faculty and administration over many months. There was skepticism among the faculty and administrators that such a process could impartially address violations of their peers and friends. However, the Student Government Association leadership embraced the challenge and developed very strong processes of due process. Student Disciplinary Committee members were elected from the student body. One of the three students elected was selected by the students to be the Chief Justice. The position of Chief Justice became a highly sought position and students looked to peers of strong personal character to fill the position.

The faculty member selected for each hearing was the faculty member elected "outstanding faculty member" for the class the prior term. The faculty member and the Associate Dean were advisory only.

At the conclusion of any hearing, the Chief Justice composed a brief which was presented to the administration with a recommendation. Through the first three years, no student rejected the recommendation of the committee. In addition, no student was reported a second time. Only one recommendation was appealed and this was after the student accepted the initial recommendation.

The process has been very successful. Previously, there was a culture of mistrust among students who were cited for violations and this could lead to contentious interactions with appeals and threats of litigation. The SDC removed the contentiousness because peers were talking to peers. Faculty and administrators monitored the SDC process and were impressed with the recommendations of the committee to the administration. In some situations, the recommendations were more stringent that might have been selected by the administration. Recommendations were accepted by the administration, including those for dismissal. In cases where mediation was employed, it was very successful. Overall, the number of student violations and interventions decreased significantly.