



# THE ADMINISTRATIVE BOARD OF HARVARD COLLEGE

Information for students considering bringing allegations in a peer dispute case

The College recognizes that the decision about whether to bring allegations against another student to the Administrative Board can be complicated and stressful. This guide is meant to assist you in making this decision by helping you to understand the process by which the Administrative Board resolves allegations in peer dispute cases.

Complaints of sexual harassment, including allegations of sexual assault, will be forwarded to the Office for Dispute Resolution (“ODR”). For more information about this process, please see the [Harvard University Procedures for Handling Complaints Involving Students Pursuant to the Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment Policy](#). In such cases, the Board’s role is to decide any disciplinary response. A number of resources for cases involving sexual misconduct are listed and described in detail on the website of the Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response at <http://www.osapr.harvard.edu> and <https://resourceguide.titleix.harvard.edu/>.

This document provides information about all other cases involving peer disputes. If you have any questions, please contact your Resident Dean, Board Representative, or the Secretary of the Administrative Board ([adboard@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:adboard@fas.harvard.edu); 617-384-7239).

Regardless of whether you decide to pursue a complaint, you should consider your emotional and physical well-being. There are many support services for students that are available at the College. If at any time you would benefit from confidential counseling to help cope with any personal distress, you are encouraged to contact the Bureau of Study Counsel (617-495-2581) or the Harvard University Counseling and Mental Health Services (617-495-2042). While this process can be difficult, please be assured that there are many different people at Harvard who can help you.

A disciplinary case always begins with an *allegation* of student misconduct in the form of a complaint or report. In a peer dispute case, one student makes an allegation against another student (peer). You, the student bringing the allegation, are called the *complainant*. The student against whom your complaint is brought is called the *respondent*. Any ensuing charges, however, must be brought by, and on behalf of, the College. In other words, an allegation begins an initial review which may or may not end with the College issuing a *charge*. A charge triggers further investigation by the Administrative Board. A charge does not assume misconduct has occurred. Once the charge has been investigated, the Board will review the case and issue a *finding* and *outcome*, which is a determination as to whether a student has violated the rules of the College and the College’s response, as appropriate.

You may be concerned that the circumstances under which the incident occurred might compromise your ability to bring an allegation forward or subject you to disciplinary action. The Board’s focus in a peer dispute case is on the allegations. Students are encouraged to come forward if they believe one of their peers has violated the College’s standards of conduct, regardless of the surrounding circumstances.

There are three phases in a peer dispute case:

- (1) Based on an initial review by a subcommittee of the Board and an independent fact finder (if applicable), the Dean of the College determines whether a charge is warranted. The Dean will issue a charge when it is determined that the allegations, if true, might constitute a violation of the rules of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and that further investigation is likely to enable the Board to resolve the case. This determination is based on an assessment of the information that may be obtainable through the Board’s process, which is described in detail below.
- (2) If the Dean determines that a charge is warranted, the subcommittee and fact finder (if applicable) will carry out a further investigation.
- (3) Once the investigation has been completed, the Board will evaluate the case and issue a finding.

The entire process, from start to end, ordinarily takes between four and eight weeks, depending on the complexity of the case and how much information the Board receives during the investigation.

While the disciplinary case is proceeding, you should not attempt to contact, or respond to any communication from, the respondent, either directly or through others. This includes contact by you or through friends or acquaintances, in person or through mail, email, phone, text messaging, instant messaging, social media, or any other means. This directive also includes the expectation that you will take proactive steps to avoid any actions that might be interpreted as violating these instructions.

As with all proceedings of the Board, *any information contained in a case document or otherwise obtained from a student's participation in the complaint process must remain confidential and its disclosure to anyone other than Board Representatives, Resident Deans, family members, legal counsel, licensed mental health professionals, clergy, or Personal Advisers (officers of the University affiliated with the Faculty of Arts and Sciences; see below) is strictly prohibited and may subject a student to disciplinary action. Those people with whom a student has shared disciplinary case materials are prohibited from disclosing them to others without the express permission of the College, and any such disclosure also may subject the student to further disciplinary action.* These confidentiality obligations are intended to help protect your privacy and the privacy of any other students involved in this process and to preserve the integrity of the investigation. They will remain in full force even after the conclusion of the disciplinary case.

Should you have any questions or concerns about your case or about with whom you may discuss the disciplinary case, you should consult with your Resident Dean, Board Representative (if different), or the Secretary of the Administrative Board (adboard@fas.harvard.edu; 617-384-7239) before taking any action.

### **Three Phases of a Peer Dispute Case before the Administrative Board:**

#### **Initial Review**

- Allegation: Your Initial Statement*
- Choosing Your Representation: Board Representative and Personal Adviser*
- Notification of the Respondent*
- Serious Criminal Conduct*
- Respondent's Statement*
- Response Statements*
- Interviews*
- Charge Recommendation*
- Charge Decision*

#### **Further Investigation**

- Additional Interviews and Information Gathering*
- Subcommittee Report*
- Presentation of the Case*

#### **Finding**

- Possible Outcomes*
- Conclusion of the Case*

---

#### **Initial Review**

*Allegation: Your Initial Statement*

Once you have decided to bring a peer dispute complaint to the Administrative Board, you will be asked to submit to the Secretary of the Board a written statement detailing your allegations.

The statement is among the most important documents considered by the Board in a case and is the first opportunity you have to describe the event and your allegations. You must write it yourself; the Board does not accept statements written by others, including parents, advisers, or attorneys. You are, however, encouraged to share a draft of your statement with your Board Representative, who is well-positioned to discuss, among other matters, your

statement's style, organization, length, and clarity, and to anticipate questions it may raise for the Board. In addition, you may wish to share a draft of the statement with your family members or your Personal Adviser.

Your statement should communicate your account of the event and its context, as well as your reflections:

*Tell the story in full.* This is your opportunity to relate in full the facts of the incident as you recall them. You should take care to distinguish between what you know first-hand from what you may have learned later from others.

*Describe the context.* The Board is especially interested in your perspective on the incident, your perception of the respondent's conduct, and the context in which the incident occurred.

*Reflect on the event.* It is helpful for the Board for you to provide any conclusions you have drawn about the incident, stating clearly why you believe the respondent's actions may have violated a rule or standard of conduct in the College.

Attach to your statement a descriptive list of all sources of information (e.g., persons, correspondence, records, etc.) that you believe the Board should investigate, along with a brief explanation of why you believe the inquiries would be relevant and helpful to the investigation. Please identify sources of supporting information, but do not attempt to obtain them yourself; the Secretary, subcommittee chair, or fact finder (if applicable) will solicit any statements or documents sought as part of the investigation. Once your statement is completed, you should sign, date, and submit it directly to the Secretary of the Board.

After receiving your statement, the Secretary of the Board then presents the allegations to the Dean of the College. The Dean, as Chair of the Administrative Board, appoints a small subcommittee of the Board, ordinarily two or three people, whose names and contact information will be given to you. The Dean may also refer the matter to an independent fact finder (typically a professional from outside the University with experience as an investigator and in conflict resolution). Members of the subcommittee, and a fact finder if one has been appointed, will communicate with you directly, through the Secretary, or through your Board Representative.

#### *Choosing Your Representation: Board Representative and Personal Adviser*

Every Harvard College student has an official representative on the Administrative Board who serves as a liaison with the College in any Board matter. Ordinarily, a student's representative to the Board is their Resident Dean. You may choose any other voting member of the Board (except for the Chair and the Associate and Assistant Deans of Academic Integrity and Student Conduct) as an alternate to serve as your Board Representative if you feel that they will be better able to assist you, in which case all communication will be through the alternate rather than your Resident Dean. If both you and the respondent are residents of the same Yard/House, the Resident Dean ordinarily will advise only one of you and a "Board alternate" will be assigned to the other by the Dean of the College. To choose someone other than your Resident Dean to be your Board Representative, contact the Secretary of the Board.

Your Board Representative is an officer of the College and you should be open and honest when talking with them. The role of your Board Representative, whether your Resident Dean or Board alternate, is to represent you to the subcommittee and the Board. Your Board Representative will be present at all meetings and will make certain that you are kept informed throughout the process. Your Board Representative also will present to the Board a full summary of the facts of the case in which you are involved; they will not advocate for you but will make certain that your perspective is clearly presented. Though your Board Representative does not vote on your case, they do speak on your behalf and participate in deliberations about your case.

Students involved in disciplinary cases, including peer disputes, may want to navigate the Administrative Board's process with the support of a Personal Adviser in addition to their Board Representative. Your Personal Adviser is given access to all case information, may attend interviews with you, and can provide general advice and support. A Personal Adviser must be an officer of the University affiliated with the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, such as a proctor or tutor, head coach, teaching fellow, instructor, or faculty member. Undergraduate students and members of your family may not serve as Personal Advisers for these purposes, even if they are affiliated with the Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

### *Notification of the Respondent*

The respondent will be notified by the Secretary of the Board (or other designee of the Dean of the College) that an allegation has been made against them. During that meeting, the Secretary of the Board will outline for the respondent the College's confidentiality policies, disciplinary process, and the allegation. At this point, the respondent will not have access to your statement or any of the details you have provided.

### *Serious Criminal Conduct*

When a complaint involves allegations of serious criminal conduct, we advise students to seek legal counsel before making any written or oral statements to the College. In a peer dispute, this advice is a particularly important consideration for the respondent. The College's disciplinary process is pedagogical rather than judicial, and attorneys for students are not permitted to participate; however, the Board advises students to seek legal advice about how the College's disciplinary process could affect any criminal case in which they may be involved. Ordinarily, if a complaint is being pursued through the criminal justice system, the Board may assess the timing of the investigation so that it does not compromise the integrity of the criminal investigation or the rights of the complainant or the respondent. In some cases, the Board may choose to postpone or suspend its own review of the matter until the criminal case has been concluded.

### *Respondent's Statement*

Prior to seeing your statement, the respondent will be asked to prepare a written statement responding to your allegation. Like yours, this statement will include a descriptive list of sources of information that the respondent believes are relevant to the case and may provide additional information for the Administrative Board.

If the respondent declines to provide a written statement, then they may not view your statement or other statements submitted to the College, except as part of the subcommittee's final report to the Board (see "Subcommittee Report" below).

### *Response Statements*

After the Secretary of the Board receives the respondent's statement, you and the respondent will individually receive a copy of each other's statement and will be allowed to review and respond to them in writing. The initial statements, as well as both of your responses, will be submitted to the subcommittee and, when applicable, to the fact finder by the Secretary. You and the respondent will never be asked to confront each other.

### *Interviews*

You and the respondent will have the opportunity to meet individually with the subcommittee to discuss the alleged incident and to answer questions, if you choose to do so, before a decision about issuing a charge is made. If your case has been referred to a fact finder, the fact finder will be present at all interviews with the subcommittee.

There is no obligation for you to meet with the subcommittee and, if you do, you are free to participate to whatever extent you feel comfortable, within the bounds of standard Board procedures. The Board will draw no conclusions or inferences from your decision. You and the respondent will always meet at separate times with the subcommittee and/or fact finder and will never be asked to confront each other. Ordinarily, all statements, responses, and other documents related to the case will be distributed to the subcommittee members in advance of your interview. *All materials provided to the subcommittee also will be shared with you, your Board Representative, and your Personal Adviser, if you have one, in advance of your interview with the subcommittee.*

Your Board Representative will accompany you to all the meetings with the subcommittee, and you also may choose to include your Personal Adviser. Personal Advisers and Board Representatives participate in the discussion with the subcommittee for two purposes:

- (1) to suspend the subcommittee proceedings momentarily to take you outside the interview room for a brief break; and/or

- (2) to address the subcommittee briefly if there are relevant facts that the two of you previously discussed, but that you failed to raise in the interview.

You and your Personal Adviser, if you have one, should arrive a few minutes before the scheduled time of the interview; you will be provided with a private area outside the meeting room to wait. Once the subcommittee is ready, your Board Representative will escort you and your Personal Adviser into the meeting, where the subcommittee and the fact finder, if there is one, will introduce themselves. The respondent's Board Representative will also be present. This meeting is an opportunity to discuss your memories of the event in question, voice any concerns you may have, and work with the subcommittee and fact finder, if there is one, to determine what information may be available for the second phase of the investigation, if a charge is issued. At the conclusion of the interview, you will have a chance to make a closing statement.

The subcommittee and fact finder, if there is one, also will interview the respondent and may, at their discretion, interview others who were identified as potential sources of information. Your Board Representative, and the respondent's Board Representative, will be present for all interviews so that they can inform you and the respondent about what was said during the interview and about any information that was obtained.

#### *Charge Recommendation*

Once the interviews are complete, if a fact finder has been appointed, they will evaluate the information obtainable through the process as described above and provide an assessment to the subcommittee. In every case, the subcommittee will decide whether to recommend that the Dean issue a charge, and you and the respondent will be notified individually by your Board Representatives of that decision. You and the respondent will have an opportunity (typically one to three days) to respond to the subcommittee's recommendation in writing. After you have had the opportunity to respond, the subcommittee will make its recommendation to the Dean of the College, who ordinarily will make the decision whether to issue a charge.

Prior to the Dean making the charge decision, you can withdraw your allegation. This will, under most circumstances, end the process. Once an allegation is withdrawn, it cannot be filed again at a later time. If your allegations involve conduct that is of a particularly serious nature, or if similar allegations have been brought by others about the same respondent, then the College may decide to move forward with a charge. If a complainant withdraws the allegation, and the College decides to move forward, the case will no longer be a peer dispute. For more information on cases that do not involve a peer dispute, visit [www.adboard.fas.harvard.edu](http://www.adboard.fas.harvard.edu).

#### *Charge Decision*

After the subcommittee makes its charge recommendation, the Dean of the College will read all statements and responses, as well as your and the respondent's responses to the subcommittee's charge recommendation, if any. After reviewing this material carefully, the Dean will take one of three possible actions:

- (1) *Issue a charge and refer the matter back to the fact finder and/or subcommittee for further investigation;*
- (2) *Bracket, or postpone, the decision on issuing a charge pending receipt of additional specific information; or*
- (3) *Decline to issue a charge, because the Dean determines either that further investigation is unlikely to obtain information adequate for the Board to decide the case or it is clear that the alleged behavior is not a violation of the rules of the Faculty. If the Dean declines to issue a charge, they may reconsider should new information become available.*

In all cases, you and the respondent will be informed by your respective Board Representatives whether the Dean issued a charge.

Please note that a charge does not assume misconduct has occurred but simply initiates a full review by the Administrative Board. A decision to issue a charge means only that the Dean has determined both that:

- (1) the allegations, if true, might constitute a violation of the rules of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences; and
- (2) further investigation is likely to enable the Board to resolve the case.

## **Further Investigation**

### *Additional Interviews and Information Gathering*

If a charge is issued, the fact finder and/or subcommittee will conduct additional interviews with you, the respondent, and possibly other relevant parties (including, for example, those identified as potential sources of information by you or the respondent). Witnesses who are no longer on campus or in the Boston area are sometimes interviewed by phone or other electronic means (e.g., Skype, FaceTime, etc.). Your Board Representative will continue to attend all relevant meetings and keep you informed of the progress of the case. They also will provide you copies of all documents and other information obtained by the subcommittee and/or the fact finder at this stage of the process.

### *Subcommittee Report*

At the conclusion of its investigation, the subcommittee will issue a confidential report, called a Subcommittee Report, to all of the members of the Board. The Subcommittee Report describes the facts and circumstances of the case and may include a recommendation for disciplinary action. This recommendation is a starting point for the Board's discussion in your case. In all cases, the Board is not limited in its discussion and has the full range of responses allowed by the Faculty available to it.

Subcommittee Reports include copies of all statements and other documents obtained by the subcommittee or fact finder and deemed relevant to the allegations (such as police reports, court documents, or other records).

You and the respondent will have the opportunity (typically one to three days) to read and respond to the Subcommittee Report in advance of the meeting at which the Board will decide the case. You may respond either in writing or orally to your Board Representative, who will be present when the Board hears the case.

### *Presentation of the Case*

Every Board hearing of a peer dispute case begins with *an oral summary of the allegations* by the subcommittee and/or the fact finder. Members of the Board will have read the Subcommittee Report and the written responses you and the respondent submitted, if any, before discussing and deciding the case. Any member of the Board may offer a recommendation for action, or *motion* (there is sometimes a range of motions offered), and, after the discussion, the Chair of the Board will call for a vote.

The fact finder, Resident Deans, and Board Representatives, if different, of the students principally involved may not vote on the case. If you chose to work with a Personal Adviser and that person is also a member of the Board, your Personal Adviser may not be present for the presentation of the case and may not vote.

## **Finding**

### *Possible Outcomes*

To take any disciplinary action against a student, the Board must be sufficiently persuaded that the student has violated the rules of the Faculty. The Board's disciplinary case decisions generally depend on two criteria:

- (1) the seriousness of the infraction; and
- (2) extenuating circumstances, including the extent to which a student has had similar trouble before.

In peer dispute cases, as in all other disciplinary cases, the Board may take one of a number of actions listed here. The following possible actions are a finding that the student was "not responsible" for the alleged conduct:

*Bracket, or postpone, the decision* pending receipt of additional specific information.

*Scratch.* There are no grounds for action. A decision of scratch is recorded in a student's file to signal that the Board found no fault.

*Take No Action.* A serious accusation was made but was not or could not be substantiated.

The following possible actions are a finding that the student was "responsible" for the alleged conduct. Some of the actions may result in a change to the student's status in the College, meaning that the student is no longer considered to be "in good standing." An outcome that results in a change to the student's status is disclosed to parents or guardians, as well as to graduate or professional schools under certain circumstances.

*Admonish.* A warning from the Board that a student has violated the rules or standards of conduct in the College. The Board may respond to any future instances of misconduct with formal disciplinary action. This action *does not* change a student's status, meaning the student remains "in good standing."

*Place on Probation.* A student on disciplinary probation has displayed behavior that causes considerable concern. Students on probation are expected to pay close attention to their conduct, both during the period of probation and after. The Board will likely respond more seriously (e.g., requirement to withdraw) to further infractions. A student is relieved of probation at the end of the time period set by the Board, typically one or two terms, provided there has been no further misconduct. This action *does* change a student's status, meaning the student is no longer "in good standing."

*Requirements and Restrictions (at the Board's discretion).* When a particular activity contributed directly to the problem for which a student was placed on probation, requirements and restrictions may be placed on that student. Requirements might include, for instance, alcohol counseling in cases of inappropriate conduct while under the influence. Restrictions might include, for instance, barring a student from participating in an extracurricular activity that contributed to or allowed for the misconduct.

*Require to Withdraw.* When a student's conduct is unacceptable and the Board has determined that the student needs to be separated from the College to gain perspective on their actions, or to address and resolve difficulties, then the Board requires the student to leave the Harvard community and to hold a full-time, paid, non-academic job in a non-family situation for at least six consecutive months before petitioning for readmission to the College. The length of withdrawal normally ranges from two to four terms. Readmission to the College after a requirement to withdraw is not automatic and requires a vote of the full Administrative Board. A readmitted student generally returns in good standing, unless the misconduct also resulted in an unsatisfactory academic record. Ordinarily, a second requirement to withdraw, whether for a disciplinary case or academic review, is final, meaning that, should a student petition to return, the petition will ordinarily not be granted. This action *does* change a student's status, meaning the student is no longer "in good standing."

*Recommendation to Dismiss or Expel.* In the most serious cases of misconduct, the Administrative Board may require a student to withdraw with a recommendation that they be dismissed or expelled from the College. Dismissal and expulsion sever a student's connection with the University. A dismissed student can be readmitted only by a vote of the Faculty Council; a student who has been expelled cannot be readmitted. The Administrative Board cannot itself dismiss or expel a student but instead recommends such action to the Faculty Council, which is empowered to impose that response.

Any disciplinary action requires at least a majority vote of those members present and eligible to vote and, in the case of a requirement to withdraw, at least a two-thirds vote of the members present and eligible to vote. (A student's own Resident Dean and Board Representative, if different, are not eligible to vote, and the Chair of the Board ordinarily does not vote.) Ordinarily, a close vote will lead to further deliberation of the case by the Board, after which another vote may be taken.

A degree will not be granted to a student who is not in good standing, or against whom a disciplinary charge is pending. A student on a leave of absence, whether voluntary or involuntary, is ordinarily not allowed to return and register until any pending disciplinary case is resolved.

#### *Conclusion of the Case*

Once an outcome has been reached, the respondent's Board Representative will notify the respondent of the Board's finding. The Board's proceedings and decisions are confidential and communicated only to those with a need to know. In cases involving allegations of physical violence, both you and the respondent will be informed of the Board's decision. In most other cases, you will not be informed of the Board's decision.

After the case has been decided, all materials reviewed by the Board members are destroyed. Regardless of the outcome, a redacted copy of the confidential Subcommittee Report and all other materials will be placed in a sealed envelope in your College file and in the file of the respondent. These documents are part of your educational record as defined and protected by federal law.

If you have questions about the process or the procedures of the Board, you should contact your Resident Dean, Board Representative (if different), or the Secretary of the Administrative Board ([adboard@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:adboard@fas.harvard.edu), 617-384-7239). Further information is also available on the website of the Administrative Board at [www.adboard.fas.harvard.edu](http://www.adboard.fas.harvard.edu) and in the *Handbook for Students* at <http://handbook.fas.harvard.edu>.