Bill of Rights and Responsibilities for Students of Nursing

The NSNA Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities was initially adopted in 1975. The document was updated by the NSNA House of Delegates in San Antonio, Texas (1991); and item #4 was revised by the NSNA House of Delegates in Baltimore, Maryland (2006).

1. Students should be encouraged to develop the capacity for critical judgment and engage in a sustained and independent search for truth.

2. The freedom to teach and the freedom to learn are inseparable facets of academic freedom: students should exercise their freedom in a responsible manner.

3. Each institution has a duty to develop policies and procedures which provide and safeguard the students’ freedom to learn.

4. Under no circumstances should a student be barred from admission to a particular institution on the basis of race, color, creed, national origin, ethnicity, age, gender, marital status, lifestyle, disability, or economic status.

5. Students should be free to take reasoned exception to the data or views offered in any course of study and to reserve judgment about matters of opinion, but they are responsible for learning the content of any course of study for which they are enrolled.

6. Students should have protection through orderly procedures against prejudiced or capricious academic evaluation, but they are responsible for maintaining standards of academic performance established for each course in which they are enrolled.

7. Information about student views, beliefs, political ideation, or sexual orientation which instructors acquire in the course of their work or otherwise, should be considered confidential and not released without the knowledge or consent of the student, and should not be used as a basis of evaluation.

8. The student should have the right to have a responsible voice in the determination of his/her curriculum.

9. Institutions should have a carefully considered policy as to the information which should be a part of a student’s permanent educational record and as to the conditions of this disclosure.

10. Students and student organizations should be free to examine and discuss all questions of interest to them, and to express opinions publicly and privately.

11. Students should be allowed to invite and to hear any person of their own choosing within the institution’s acceptable realm, thereby taking the responsibility of furthering their education.

12. The student body should have clearly defined means to participate in the formulation and application of institutional policy affecting academic and student affairs, e.g., through a faculty-student council, student membership or representation on faculty committees.

13. The institution has an obligation to clarify those standards of behavior which it considers essential to its educational mission, its community life, or its objectives and philosophy.
14. Disciplinary proceedings should be instituted only for violations of standards of conduct formulated with significant student participation and published in advance through such means as a student handbook or a generally available set of institutional regulations. It is the responsibility of the student to know these regulations. Grievance procedures should be available for every student.

15. As citizens and members of an academic community, students are subject to the obligations which accrue to them by virtue of this membership and should enjoy the same freedoms of citizenship.

16. Students have the right to belong or refuse to belong to any organization of their choice.

17. Students have the right to personal privacy in their living space to the extent that the welfare and property of others are respected.

18. Adequate safety precautions should be provided by nursing programs, for example, adequate street lighting, locks, and other safety measures deemed necessary by the environment.

19. Dress code, if present in school, should be established with student input in conjunction with the school director and faculty, so the highest professional standards are maintained, but also taking into consideration points of comfort and practicality for the student.

20. Grading systems should be carefully reviewed periodically with students and faculty for clarification and better student-faculty understanding.

21. Students should have a clear mechanism for input into the evaluation of nursing faculty.

**Grievance Procedure Guidelines**

The following guidelines were developed by the NSNA Board of Directors in January 1975, and updated in April 1991.

1. Before a set of grievance procedures can be discussed, a Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities must be adopted. It is suggested that students use the guidelines developed by NSNA for this. The Bill should be a written statement mutually agreed upon by both faculty and students.

   **Rationale:** The Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities is the guideline on which the grievance committee can depend or to help in making a decision on the issue at hand.

2. The procedure for handling grievances should be a well-defined, written statement consistent with the principles of due process. Both faculty and students should have equal representation in the development of such a procedure.

   **Rationale:** It is necessary to have a procedure that both students and faculty will support.

3. Once grievance procedures are developed, students should be made aware of the existence of these procedures at orientation.

   **Rationale:** Students should know what steps they can take if a situation should develop where their rights are infringed upon.

4. The grievance committee should be composed of an equal representation of students and faculty, with a minimum ratio of four to four.

   **Rationale:** Equal representation with at least eight on the committee provides for broader range, more objective opinions.

   a. Student members on the committee should be composed of at least one representative from each class. These members should be elected by the student body.
**Rationale:** Students from different classes often have differing outlooks and viewpoints on a situation. Election insures that student members have the support of and are representative of the student body.

b. Faculty members on the committee should be chosen by the faculty, except in the situation as described in item 12.

**Rationale:** Committee members should be representative of their group.

5. There should be a written statement, drawn up by student and faculty representatives, which indicates the actions that may be taken by the grievance committee, and the types of situations that fall under the committee's jurisdiction.

**Rationale:** Defining this will help to support the decisions made by the committee.

**Some suggestions:**

- Enforcement of the Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities can be encouraged by including the following statement: “The Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities shall be recognized by administration, faculty and students, and any violations of such bill shall be brought to the attention of the Grievance Committee for action.”
- Review student evaluations of courses and faculty, and make recommendations to the appropriate people.
- Review curriculum and grading system on a yearly basis, and initiate change as necessary.
- Review dress code, if any, every 5 years.
- Review other grievances not necessarily included in Student Bill of Rights.

6. The committee should meet regularly—at least every other month, and all students should be informed as to the date, time, and place of these meetings.

**Rationale:** To give students an opportunity to voice comments and suggestions on a continuing basis.

7. Accurate records, including complete minutes, and in individual cases, a verbatim record, shall be kept on file for all meetings of the committee. Even when tape recordings are used, written minutes to officially document proceedings must be prepared. These minutes should be signed by the two recording secretaries, who shall be one faculty member and one student on the committee.

**Rationale:** To serve as evidence of the committee's action, and as a precedent for future committee action.

8. Any student shall have the right to ask for an "emergency meeting" of the grievance committee on matters that are crucial and cannot wait until the regularly scheduled meeting. The grievance committee shall define whether a matter is crucial, and may postpone consideration of the matter if a majority of the members considers the matter appropriate for a regularly scheduled meeting.

**Rationale:** To provide a means of handling grievances in a "crisis" situation.

9. State and local constituents of the National Student Nurses' Association may request their board members be available for advice and support for any student initiating a grievance.

**Rationale:** Students filing complaints need positive reinforcement in their efforts. Also, nursing students need to know that their Student Nurses' Association is truly interested in and representing them and their concerns.

10. As a preliminary step, the student's case will be heard by a subcommittee of the regular grievance committee. This subcommittee will consist of two faculty members and two students. If the subcommittee cannot satisfactorily solve the grievance, they will report to the main grievance committee, which will then hear the case and take action as necessary.

**Rationale:** Often grievance cases can be adequately handled by persons who are impartial. A subcommittee can conserve the workload of the entire committee, and narrow the issues in the cases that are presented to them.
11. The student appearing before the grievance committee should have the right to have a representative or advisor of his/her choice with him/her at the meeting.

**Rationale:** To allow the student to have the necessary resources he/she needs in order to adequately present his/her case. Also, sometimes students who are emotionally involved with a case are not able to present it in the way they would like.

12. If the grievance is against a member of the committee, the student should have a right to ask the member to abstain from participation in the committee while his/her grievance is being considered. The committee should then appoint someone to take that member’s place.

**Rationale:** To protect the student from a biased decision by the committee, and to allow the student more freedom to express his/her opinion.

13. A mediator should be allowed to sit on the committee. This should be someone who is neither a faculty member nor a student, but is closely associated with nursing. The mediator should be without vote. The purpose of the mediator is to make sure that each member on the committee has an equal opportunity to speak and that full and fair review of the facts takes place.

**Rationale:** To prevent an individual or group on the committee from becoming too powerful and domineering.

14. Reasonable evidence, names of prospective witnesses, and background material concerning the case should be submitted to the committee at least three days prior to the date when the case is to be discussed. The evidence should be relevant to the issues and not discussed by committee members prior to the formal meeting.

**Rationale:** To allow the committee adequate time to examine documentary evidence.

15. Any charges against the student or faculty member should be in writing and be made available to both the committee and the student or faculty member at least seven days before his/her scheduled appearance.

**Rationale:** To give the student or faculty member adequate time to prepare a defense against charges.

16. The student should be given full opportunity to present evidence and witnesses that are relevant to the issue at hand. He/she should also be given the opportunity to question any witnesses against him/her and also be informed of any evidence against him/her and its source.

**Rationale:** To make sure that the facts are being presented fully and fairly.

17. The student should be allowed to continue class as usual until the committee has reached a decision. However, if the student is considered to present immediate danger to patient welfare, he/she should be removed from clinical practice areas.

**Rationale:** To avoid the possibility of falling behind in school while the case is being considered, and avoid any delaying tactics that may be employed to prevent the student from returning to class.

18. Group grievances should be presented to the committee by one representative of that group. That representative may then appoint a consultant to appear with him.

**Rationale:** To provide an organized systematic way of dealing with group grievances.

19. The decision of the committee should be made in writing to the student within two weeks of hearing the case.

**Rationale:** To assure a fair and timely review and conclusion of the student’s case.

20. Decisions made by the committee are final, that is, immediately enforced by both faculty and students, except in cases with legal implications (example, discrimination, in which the student plans to take the case to court).

**Rationale:** To avoid delay in enforcing the decision.
21. Provision should be made for a "right of appeal," in which the student can take his case to the Dean or a governing board of the school. However, until the "appeals board" reaches a decision, the student is still bound by the "grievance committee's" decision.

**Rationale:** To allow the student a solution to take if he feels that his case has been unfairly handled by the committee.