

In its August 26, 2025 university statements launching a comprehensive review of the Student Code of Conduct and the Student Code of Conduct Procedures, Cornell University acknowledged that “much has changed” since the current Code took effect in 2021 and emphasized the need for a disciplinary framework that remains “relevant, equitable, and effective” for the entire community. This moment presents an opportunity and an institutional responsibility to ensure that Cornell’s conduct system is aligned with its core values, responsive to the experiences of its students, and protective of the rights and dignity of every Cornellian.

The Graduate and Professional Student Assembly (GPSA), representing more than 10,000 graduate and professional students across Cornell’s colleges and campuses, submits the following comprehensive, section-by-section recommendations for amendments to both the Code and its Procedures.

Recent disciplinary practices, including the frequent use of temporary suspensions prior to any finding of fact, inconsistent investigative timelines, lack of meaningful review mechanisms, and the documented use of interim measures as de facto punitive sanctions, have exposed significant gaps between the Code’s stated values and the actual experiences of students navigating the conduct process. These gaps have caused serious harm: students have lost enrollment, graduate funding, housing, healthcare access, and immigration status before any adjudication of the underlying allegations. Moreover, multiple findings have shown that in several cases, students subjected to extended suspensions were ultimately found not to have violated the Code at all.

These practices undermine fairness and due process, discourage students from engaging in expressive activity, and raise serious concerns about the content-neutrality of enforcement. The stakes of procedural failure are uniquely severe for international students, whose academic, financial, and immigration status depend on continuous enrollment. A disciplinary system that fails to recognize these vulnerabilities risks institutional complicity in outcomes that extend far beyond campus boundaries.

The purpose of the GPSA’s proposed amendments is therefore fourfold:

Reaffirm Cornell’s core values of free and open inquiry, fairness, and respect for all Cornellians, including those whose participation in expressive activity places them at heightened risk.

Establish robust due-process protections, including prompt hearings, transparent notice requirements, access to evidence, and a multi-member review structure for decisions involving suspension or interim measures.

Ensure content-neutral enforcement of conduct rules, and prevent disciplinary processes from being used, intentionally or inadvertently, to target, deter, or punish specific viewpoints or political expressions.

Protect students’ essential rights and resources, including immigration status, healthcare, funding, and housing, by prohibiting the punitive use of measures labeled as “interim” or “protective.”

Together, the recommendations that follow constitute a coherent framework for modernizing the Student Code of Conduct Procedures in a manner that is fair, transparent, and accountable. They are intended to be constructive, actionable, and aligned with the University's stated commitment to an inclusive, safe, and intellectually vibrant campus community.

The GPSA urges the Code and Procedures Review Committee, the Vice President for Student and Campus Life, and the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards to adopt these revisions promptly and in full, so that the next iteration of the Code reflects the lived realities, rights, and aspirations of Cornell students today.

### **On Student Code of Conduct Procedures**

#### **Section: VIII(A). Temporary Suspension Pending Resolution**

##### **Page 9, Paragraph 1**

"In consultation with appropriate University officials, the Director or other Presidential delegate<sup>3</sup> ("Issuing Official") has authority to temporarily suspend a Respondent pending resolution of the underlying case where immediate action is necessary to protect the Complainant or the University community. Temporary Suspension may include the withdrawal of any or all University privileges and services, including class attendance, participation in examinations, utilization of University premises and facilities, and in the case of an organization, recognition or registration by the University, as determined by the Director."

GPSA Recommended Revision:

- Addition: "Immediate action must be grounded in a documented, imminent, and articulable threat to health or safety. Expressive activity protected under Policy 4.23 may not, by itself, constitute grounds for Temporary Suspension."

#### **Section: VIII(A). Temporary Suspension Pending Resolution**

##### **Page 9, Paragraph 2**

##### **Line 1-3**

"Since the underlying allegation of prohibited conduct has not yet been adjudicated on the merits, a Temporary Suspension may be imposed only when available less restrictive measures are reasonably deemed insufficient to protect the Complainant or the University community."

GPSA Recommended Revision:

- Addition: "The Issuing Official must document, in writing, which lesser restrictive measures were considered and why they were deemed insufficient."

#### **Section: VIII(A). Temporary Suspension Pending Resolution**

##### **Page 9, Paragraph 2**

## **Line 1-5**

“Since the underlying allegation of prohibited conduct has not yet been adjudicated on the merits, a Temporary Suspension may be imposed only when available less restrictive measures are reasonably deemed insufficient to protect the Complainant or the University community. Further, the form of Temporary Suspension imposed shall be the least restrictive option that reasonably affords the necessary protections.”

GPSA Recommended Revision:

- Addition: “In cases involving international students, the Issuing Official must assess potential consequences to visa status and ensure that Temporary Suspension does not inadvertently trigger loss of immigration status before adjudication.”

## **Section: VIII(B). Review of Temporary Suspension of Students and Organizations**

### **Page 9, Paragraph 1**

“The Respondent may file a written request to lift the Temporary Suspension with the VP SCL.”

GPSA Recommended Revision:

- Substitute with: “The Respondent may file a written request to lift the Temporary Suspension with a Temporary Suspension Review Panel consisting of at least three trained members of the Hearing and Review Board (one student, one faculty member, one staff member).”

## **Section: VIII(B). Review of Temporary Suspension of Students and Organizations**

### **Page 10, End of section**

There are currently no immediate review deadlines, allowing months-long suspension without hearing.

GPSA Recommended Revision:

- Addition: “The Review Panel must meet within 5 business days of receipt of the request to ensure timely review in light of potential academic, financial, health, or immigration consequences.”

## **Section: X(A). Notice of Formal Complaint**

### **Page 10, Bulleted List**

“4. Specify any sanctions that may be imposed, including the University’s transcript notation policy;”

GPSA Recommended Revision:

- Addition: “5. Inform the Respondent of the specific interim measures imposed, the justification for each, and how to request modification or review;”
- Shift bullet points 5-12 to 6-13.

## **Section: XVIII(B). Timeframe of Investigation**

### **Page 15, Paragraph 1**

#### **Line 1-2**

“The investigation will be completed as expeditiously as possible, commensurate with its complexity.”

GPSA Recommended Revision:

- Substitute with: “Absent extraordinary circumstances, investigations must be completed within 30 business days of the Formal Complaint. Any deviation must be justified in writing to both parties.”

## **Section: XX(A). Overview of Hearing Process**

### **Page 19, Paragraph 1**

#### **Line 4-6**

“The hearing is intended to provide the parties with a fair opportunity to present relevant information and to enable the Hearing Panel to make informed decisions regarding responsibility and sanctions/remedies.”

GPSA Recommended Revision:

- Addition: “A hearing must be scheduled within 30 business days of completion of the investigation barring extraordinary circumstances. Any delay must be documented in writing and provided to both parties.”

## **Section: XXI. APPEAL OF A HEARING PANEL DECISION**

### **Page 26**

There are currently no written procedures for appeals of temporary suspensions.

GPSA Recommended Revision:

- Addition of a subsection: “Temporary Suspensions are appealable to the Review Panel on the grounds that:
  1. the suspension was not the least restrictive means;
  2. there was no imminent threat;
  3. the suspension was inconsistent with content-neutral enforcement.”

## **Section: XXIII. CONSISTENCY OF INTERPRETATION**

### **Page 28, Paragraph 1**

“Because the student conduct system utilizes the decision of the University Hearing and Review Panels to define or interpret violations, summaries of all decisions of those boards shall be kept on file in the OSCCS, including a brief description of the nature of the case and its disposition, but with names of individuals and other identifying information redacted.”

GPSA Recommended Revision:

- Addition: “The OSCCS shall publish an annual anonymized summary of Temporary Suspension cases, including grounds, duration, and outcomes to support transparency and consistency.”