



September 10, 2020

Dear Ringling College Community,

Earlier this summer, allegations arose on social media regarding the Ringling College Associate Dean of Students for Residence Life, Christopher Shaffer. We take such allegations seriously and asked those who had a complaint or concern to submit their issues to us online through the [Ringling Reporting Form](#). We investigated about two dozen reports received through July 20. Another nearly two dozen reports were received after July 21 that have been reviewed but not yet fully investigated. Although there was no evidence of either violations of law by Mr. Shaffer or any issues of physical harm to students in any of these reports, there were behaviors described by complainants that do not reflect Ringling College's values as an institution.

In early August, before the investigation had ended, Mr. Shaffer filed a lawsuit against the alumnus who had initiated the call for complaints on social media. Although he had been informed that filing a lawsuit would likely be considered an interference with the investigation, he filed this lawsuit without our knowledge or consent, and we did not know about it until the later part of August.

U.S. law generally gives everyone the freedom to file a lawsuit. However, staff of the College also agree to govern themselves by the Ringling College [Staff Code of Conduct](#) and other policies that prohibit retaliation against those filing complaints or raising concerns, engaging in conduct which is adverse or prejudicial to the best interests of the College, or engaging in conduct on or off the job that is unbecoming a Ringling College employee.

Ringling College has a strong and vested interest in ensuring a welcoming campus environment. One mechanism for fostering such an environment is to provide an effective conduit for anyone in the Ringling College community to raise issues and make complaints without fear of retaliation or retribution. This open process allows Ringling College to learn about and address possible problems and provides us the opportunity to improve. People may be less willing to alert Ringling College to any concerns if they knew they might be sued for doing so.

Ringling College expects its employees to act in ways that align with our standards of behavior, our values, and our policies. Mr. Shaffer's lawsuit against a former student creates the type of chilling effect that Ringling College's policies are intended to prevent. Thus, such actions are considered contrary to Ringling's values and beliefs, are adverse to the best interests of the College, and are unbecoming a Ringling College employee. Therefore, Ringling College has ended Mr. Shaffer's employment at Ringling College, effective today.

This situation has provided Ringling College an opportunity to evaluate the structure for the Office of Residence Life and, more importantly, our process for receiving and handling complaints. As a result of this inquiry, we have determined that the current structure in the Office of Residence Life has caused confusion and frustration for students, especially in regards to the complaints process. Ringling College has taken this feedback to heart, and is enacting changes to help clarify roles and expectations.

- The College will change the structure of the Office of Residence Life to more clearly delineate the role of housing administration from the responsibility of residence life management.
 - The restructured role of Associate Dean for Housing and Residence Life will have general oversight responsibility for these areas through two direct reports: The Director of Residence Life, a new position, and the Director of Housing Operations, a revised current position. We will begin work to fill the Associate Dean and Director of Residence Life roles immediately.
 - The Director of Residence Life will be student-facing and will help students with housing issues, oversee housing-related student conduct, and supervise the Resident Coordinators, to whom the Resident Assistants report. This role will also help students through the process of filing any complaints they may have.
 - The Director of Housing Operations will focus on facilities, marketing, assignments, maintenance, and planning for our residential community. This position will be effective immediately.

- The College will improve our communication with those who raise issues or file complaints and enhance our website to better outline the process for raising such concerns and to explain the follow-up that can be expected. While privacy policies and laws protect many details of the process and the outcome, we will work to do better to stay in contact with the complainant throughout the process and let the person know when any investigation has ended.

Our primary goal is to ensure everyone can easily and effectively bring their concerns to the appropriate person to enable them to be addressed. We want to make the process as easy and as transparent as possible. With this foundation, Ringling College can continue to pursue the mission of preparing students to be discerning visual thinkers and ethical practitioners in their chosen areas of art and design.

Sincerely,



Larry R. Thompson
President