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ACCESS RULING

In the matter of the College of William and Mary
Ruling Number 2025-5827
February 12, 2025

On or about February 3, 2025, the Office of Employment Dispute Resolution (EDR) at the Department of Human Resource Management (DHRM) received a dismissal grievance initiated by the grievant to challenge her separation from employment at the College of William and Mary (the “college” or “agency”). In response, the college has challenged the grievance on grounds that the grievant lacks access to the state employee grievance procedure.

It appears that the grievant was hired to her role effective April 15, 2024, by letter describing the position classification as “professional.” As described in the grievance, the issue is “wrongful termination of employment.” On or about January 16, 2025, she received notice that management “intend[ed] to terminate [her] employment based on an overall pattern [of] poor performance”

The General Assembly has provided that all non-probationary state employees may utilize the state employee grievance process, unless exempted by law.¹ Generally speaking, employees who are employed in positions designated as exempt from the Virginia Personnel Act (the “Personnel Act”) do not have access to the grievance procedure.² When the General Assembly adopted the Restructured Higher Education Financial and Administrative Operations Act in 2005, institutions of higher education, like the college, were given approval to designate “positions that require a high level of administrative independence, responsibility, and oversight within the organization or specialized expertise within a given field” as administrative and professional faculty, and this provision was included within the Personnel Act.³ Accordingly, EDR has previously held that “Administrative/Professional Faculty” at institutions of higher education are exempt from the Personnel Act and do not have access to the state employee grievance procedure.⁴

¹ Va. Code § 2.2-3001(A); *Grievance Procedure Manual* § 2.3.

² Va. Code §§ 2.2-2905, 2.2-3002.

³ *Id.* § 2.2-2901(E).

⁴ See, e.g., EDR Ruling No. 2019-4840; EDR Ruling No. 2013-3477; see also DHRM Policy 2.20, *Types of Employment* (defining a “non-covered employee” as a “salaried employee who is not subject to the Virginia Personnel Act . . . [i]nclud[ing] . . . administrative and professional faculty”).

In this case, it appears that the grievant was hired in a position classified as “professional” under the college’s Classification Policy. The Classification Policy defines “professionals” as “full and part-time administrative, technical, academic, clinical, research and professional faculty positions.”⁵ In addition, “professionals” under the Policy “are considered ‘faculty’ for purposes of the Management Agreement between the university and the Commonwealth,”⁶ which generally distinguishes between faculty and non-faculty positions.⁷

Thus, EDR finds that, for purposes of access to the grievance procedure, the grievant’s former position was appropriately considered “Administrative/Professional Faculty.” As such, she lacks access to the state employee grievance procedure. Accordingly, the dismissal grievance submitted by the grievant to EDR cannot proceed, and our file will be closed.⁸

EDR’s access rulings are final and nonappealable.⁹

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⁵ College of William and Mary Classification Policy § III.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ For example, “all salaried nonfaculty College employees . . . shall have access . . . to the State Grievance Procedure”

⁸ This ruling determines only that the grievant is ineligible to pursue her claims through the state employee grievance procedure. Nothing herein should be read to address whether any legal or other remedy may be available to the grievant through another process – *e.g.* a university grievance process for professional faculty – for the issues raised in her grievance.

⁹ Va. Code § 2.2-1202.1(5).