

<b>SUBJECT:</b> Advocacy Services	<b>POLICY NO:</b> SL-3	<b>LAST REVIEWED:</b> March 2023
<b>APPROVED BY:</b> Council	<b>MANAGED BY:</b> Executive Director	<b>NEXT REVIEW:</b> April 2025

**SUMMARY**

**Policy Statement**

BCITSA provides meaningful support services and advocacy initiatives to engage BCIT students in both their academic careers and the broader non-academic environment. BCITSA empowers students to take action and encourages a positive and proactive student community.

**Purpose of This Policy**

The purpose of this Policy is to:

- Clearly define the ways in which BCITSA advocates for students through the Advocacy Specialists and Advocacy Services.
- Provide students with information regarding their rights and responsibilities.
- Outline the procedures for students interacting with Advocacy Specialists.

**Application of This Policy**

This Policy applies to all students of BCIT regardless of status, including prospective students and alumni or former students, as well as all employees involved with Advocacy Services.

**Related Documents and Legislation**

BCIT

- Policy 5101 – Student Regulations
- Policy 5102 – Student Code of Conduct (Non-Academic)
- Policy 5104 – Student code of Academic Integrity
- Policy 7507 – Harassment and Discrimination

BCITSA

- GOV-3 – Advocacy

### **Forms Associated With This Policy**

- Advocacy Services Consent Form

### **Amendment History**

- Created [March 2018]
- Amended [March 2023]

### **DEFINITIONS**

#### **Advocacy Services**

Advocacy Services is defined as all activities or services where Advocacy Specialists work in conjunction either with specific students or with groups of students to enhance the quality of student life.

#### **Advocacy Specialist**

The Advocacy Specialist (formerly referred to as “Advocate”) is an employee responsible for meeting with students, faculty, and staff of BCIT and BCITSA, to help them interpret and navigate issues of academic and non-academic conduct at BCIT.

#### **BCIT Education Council**

The BCIT Education Council is the BCIT entity responsible for setting educational policy, programs, and priorities at BCIT.

#### **Representation**

For the purpose of this Policy, Representation is defined as support, education, and guidance to a student, prospective or former student, or alumni who requests the services of the BCITSA Advocacy office in any academic and non-academic conflict they may experience at BCIT. Under no circumstances does BCITSA consider Representation to be compulsory or mandatory, and Representation shall only be provided at the request of an individual student seeking it. BCITSA respects the right of all students to opt to reject BCITSA Representation and represent themselves in any Advocacy-related activity.

For greater clarity, this definition of Representation pertains to students as individuals. A definition for Representation pertaining to students in terms of their collective membership is in Policy GOV-3 – Advocacy and is distinct and separate from this Policy. All disputes with respect to the definition of Representation shall be resolved by the Executive Director.

## **DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Executive Director**

The Executive Director is responsible for the interpretation and enforcement of this Policy.

### **Vice President Student Experience**

The Vice President Student Experience is responsible for liaising with the Advocacy Specialists on any Advocacy-related matters that relate to discussions or matters at the BCIT Education Council.

### **Wellness and Advocacy Manager**

The Wellness and Advocacy Manager is responsible for providing Advocacy Specialists with guidance and consultation on student-related issues. The Wellness and Advocacy Manager may act as an Advocacy Specialist (see “Advocacy Specialist” below) due to operational need. The Wellness and Advocacy Manager is also responsible for liaising with BCIT personnel on systemic Advocacy issues related to BCIT Policy or Procedures.

### **Advocacy Specialist**

The Advocacy Specialists are responsible for understanding to the best of their abilities all relevant BCIT and BCITSA Policies and Procedures, and for helping students interpret and navigate the same. Advocacy Specialists are also responsible for informing BCIT personnel of any BCITSA Advocacy-related Policy or Procedure.

## **POLICY**

### **1. Advocacy Services**

#### **1.1. Representation**

- a. BCITSA represents the academic and non-academic interests of all students at BCIT.

- b.** BCITSA shall work to ensure that all students can participate fully in their learning environments and understand their rights and responsibilities.
- c.** Advocacy Specialists reserve the right to determine the most effective form of Representation to provide to a student given the situation and shall not be required to adopt a specific form of Representation upon request of the student.

### **1.2. Working with BCIT**

- a.** Advocacy Specialists shall work collaboratively with BCIT, its policies, and officials regarding all Advocacy Services.
- b.** Advocacy Specialist shall work with BCIT to:
  - i.** Educate students about BCIT policies;
  - ii.** Ensure that students have reasonable and timely access to appropriate BCIT personnel and resources;
  - iii.** Educate all students, faculty, and staff about student rights and responsibilities as active agents in the educational process; and
  - iv.** Ensure that all BCIT policies and procedures, and any other pertinent related information such as course outlines, are available for all students.
- c.** Advocacy Specialists shall work directly with students and shall not communicate on behalf of any student without that student's express written consent, except where 2.2.d applies.

### **1.3. Right to Dissent from BCIT**

- a.** BCITSA reserves the right, acting reasonably, to dissent from BCIT, its policies, and officials where it deems that doing so is in the best interest of representing students.
- b.** BCITSA and its Advocacy Specialists reserve the right to dissent from BCIT under any of the following conditions:
  - i.** Where BCIT officials and/or staff act inconsistently with established practices, policies, and procedures;

- ii. Where students are treated unfairly; or
  - iii. Where BCITSA receives a mandate from students through established governance practices.
- c. BCITSA and its representatives shall not dissent from BCIT under any of the following conditions:
- i. Where such dissent would undermine the academic integrity of BCIT;
  - ii. Where such dissent would place the interests of one student and/or group of students in conflict with the interests of all BCIT students.

#### **1.4. BCIT Policies and Procedures**

- a. Advocacy Specialists shall only operate within established BCIT policies and procedures.

## **2. Student Advocacy**

### **2.1. Advocacy Specialists**

- a. Advocacy Specialists shall work with students to educate them about their rights and responsibilities to better engage in the Advocacy process.
- b. Advocacy Specialists shall advise students, but each student shall be ultimately responsible for determining and pursuing their own intended course of action.
- c. Advocacy Specialists shall commit to assisting students in a variety of ways, including but not limited to:
  - i. Interpreting BCIT or BCITSA policy issues;
  - ii. Advising on concerns or issues with instructors, BCIT personnel or other students;
  - iii. Advising on concerns with course outlines and requirements;
  - iv. Grade appeals;

- v. Advising on academic integrity issues;
  - vi. Proof-reading communications to instructors or BCIT personnel; and
  - vii. Upon the request of a student, providing Representation.
- d.** Advocacy Specialists shall not be permitted, nor shall they be expected, to:
- i. Provide legal advice;
  - ii. Make a decision on behalf of a student without the prior express written consent of the student (except where 2.2.d applies);
  - iii. Order or command BCIT to reverse a decision;
  - iv. Circumvent BCIT or BCITSA policy and procedures to resolve students' issues;
  - v. Circumvent any collective agreement or contract to which BCIT or BCITSA is a party to; or
- e.** When the Advocacy Specialist is requested to provide Representation for a student, they shall do so only when deemed appropriate by the Advocacy Specialist, and only as authorized by the student.
- i.** Advocacy Specialists shall honour any request of refusing Representation from a student.
  - ii.** The Advocacy Specialist shall not provide any information that is not already disclosed without the express written consent of the student.

## **2.2. Commitment of Confidentiality**

- a.** BCITSA recognizes and acknowledges the sensitive nature of Advocacy Services and aims to protect the interests of any student that comes forward with an Advocacy-related issue.

- b.** All communications and information supplied by a student for an Advocacy-related activity to an Advocacy Specialist or any other employee or Executive shall be considered confidential and shall only be disclosed with the express written consent of the student.
- c.** An Advocacy Specialist may, at their discretion, share student information with the Wellness and Advocacy Manager for the purposes of guidance or consultation.
- d.** If an Advocacy Specialist has reason to believe that a student may harm themselves or others, they are required to contact BCIT Safety, Security and Emergency Management, as well as the proper authorities, even without the student's express consent.
- e.** Where an Advocacy Specialist has a statutory duty to disclose information to any authority, they shall do so, and shall advise the student of the same.

### **2.3. Referrals for Advocacy Services**

- a.** Any employee, Executive, or student that is working or otherwise interacting with a student that they believe may benefit from utilizing Advocacy Services is encouraged to refer that student to an Advocacy Specialist.
- b.** Any referral to an Advocacy Specialist shall be considered confidential, and the referrer shall not be linked directly to the referral.

### **2.4. Student Resources**

- a.** Advocacy Specialists shall work with BCIT to ensure that students are provided with access to all applicable BCIT policies and procedures that relate to their issue.

## **2.5. Vexatious or Unreasonable Complaints**

- a. Advocacy Specialists reserve the right to deem an issue brought forth by a student vexatious or unreasonable and may discontinue Advocacy Services on that issue. For this policy, a vexatious complaint is one made with the intent to be retaliatory in nature and/or intended to annoy or damage the reputation of the person about whom the complaint was made, where such a conclusion is reasonable in the circumstances based on available evidence

## **PROCEDURE**

### **1. Advocacy Procedures**

#### **1.1. Procedure for Student Concerns**

- a. Each student shall be responsible for determining and pursuing their own intended course of action relating to their educational experience. Advocacy Specialists shall assist students in navigating the advocacy process.
- b. Advocacy Specialists shall provide students with information and resources relating to relevant BCIT policies and procedures.
- c. The Advocacy Specialist shall provide the student with referrals and/or resources to assist them through the advocacy process.
- d. The student shall decide how they wish to proceed.
- e. The Advocacy Specialist may attend meetings as requested by the student, but only in a supporting capacity. The student shall always lead and act on their own behalf.
- f. A student who decides to not proceed any further with their issue reserves the right to end the process and their interactions with the Advocacy Specialist at any time.



**1.2. Appealing an Advocacy Specialist's Decision to Deem an Issue Vexatious**

- a. When an Advocacy Specialist deems an issue vexatious or unreasonable, they shall advise the student of their decision in writing and may cease Advocacy Services regarding the issue in question.
- b. If a student wishes to appeal the decision of an Advocacy Specialist to deem an issue vexatious or unreasonable, they shall submit a written appeal to the Executive Director outlining why they feel their issue is valid.
- c. The Executive Director shall review the appeal and make a final determination on whether to resume Advocacy Services on the issue. The Executive Director may, at their sole discretion, choose to meet with the student or the Advocacy Specialist before deciding.
- d. The Executive Director shall inform the student of their decision, no later than one week after receiving the appeal.
- e. The decision of the Executive Director shall be considered final, with no further recourse for appeal.

**1.3. Student Requesting a Different Advocacy Specialist**

- a. If during their interactions, a student feels that the Advocacy Specialist is not working in their best interest or if the student feels that their needs are not being met, they may request to work with a different Advocacy Specialist.
- b. The student shall submit a written request to the Wellness and Advocacy Manager outlining why they are requesting to work with a new Advocacy Specialist.
- c. The Wellness and Advocacy Manager shall review and determine the validity of the request, and shall inform the student of their decision, no later than one week after receiving the request.

- d. The ability to provide a different Advocacy Specialist is subject to availability, and such requests may be refused due to operational need.
- e. The decision of the Wellness and Advocacy Manager shall be considered final, with no further recourse for appeal.