

Patterns of Non-Compliance: Mapping Behavioral Escalation and Programmatic Clustering in Student Disciplinary Records

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ABSTRACT

Managing student conduct in a private higher education context requires a transition from anecdotal observation to empirical analysis. This study examined three academic years (2023–2026) of student offense records from the Office of Student Affairs to identify behavioral trajectories across various academic programs. By applying a dual-mode strategy—quantitative frequency mapping alongside inductive thematic analysis—the researchers uncovered a disciplinary landscape defined by two distinct pressures. First, the data reveals a systemic normalization of regulatory non-compliance, specifically regarding dress code and identification policies, which accounted for the vast majority of infractions. Second, while major violations like vaping, peer aggression, and academic dishonesty are statistically fewer, their concentration in specific technology and business-oriented cohorts suggests localized behavioral "hotspots." Crucially, the findings validate an escalation pathway: repeated minor infractions often serve as measurable precursors to more severe disciplinary breaches. These results form the basis of a proposed tiered intervention framework that shifts institutional response from reactive adjudication to proactive, program-specific behavioral formation.

Keywords: student offenses, thematic analysis, disciplinary records, higher education, intervention planning

INTRODUCTION

Student discipline records within the Office of Student Affairs represent a vital institutional dataset that mirrors broader behavioral trends, peer social norms, and the evolving culture of rule compliance within higher education. These records provide more than a simple ledger of infractions; they serve as a diagnostic tool for understanding how students navigate institutional expectations and academic integrity. A systematic analysis of this data allows a university to transition from a reactive, case-by-case adjudication model toward an evidence-based framework capable of informing both preventive strategies and developmental interventions. Given the increasing complexity of campus environments, institutional responses must integrate quantitative trends with qualitative insights to address the multifaceted nature of student misconduct.

This study examines student offense records from a private university over a three-year period, covering the academic years 2023–2024 through 2025–2026. The investigation focuses on the prevalence of both minor and major offenses, with a specific interest in how recurring non-compliance may signal a need for broader policy refinement. The collection and analysis of administrative logs—rather than direct human participation—ensures an objective overview of institutional discipline patterns. Ultimately, the findings provide the empirical basis for a tiered intervention plan designed to strengthen student support systems and promote a proactive approach to professional formation and discipline.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The management of student conduct in higher education has evolved from a purely punitive "discipline and punish" model toward a developmental and evidence-based framework. Modern research underscores that disciplinary challenges often reflect deeper institutional cultures, peer norms, and ethical sensitivities (Eaton &

Fishman, 2025). As university environments become more complex, the integration of restorative and proactive interventions has become essential for maintaining campus harmony and student well-being.

Restorative and Developmental Frameworks

A significant shift in contemporary scholarship is the advocacy for restorative justice (RJ) within the university setting. Unlike traditional models that focus on rule-breaking and punishment, RJ emphasizes the repair of harm and the engagement of stakeholders to rebuild community cohesion (Karp, 2024). In a study of South African higher education, Mokomane (2024) found that restorative responses to misconduct—particularly academic dishonesty—foster greater individual accountability and reduce recidivism compared to standard suspension protocols.

Ethical Sensitivity and Academic Integrity

The relationship between student behavior and ethical awareness remains a focal point of recent inquiry. Ethical sensitivity acts as a protective factor against rule violations; students with higher ethical capacities are less likely to engage in cheating or plagiarism (Zhao et al., 2025).

However, the digital landscape has complicated this dynamic. Huang et al. (2025) note that the digital learning environment presents new ethical dilemmas that traditional policies may not fully address, requiring institutions to update their integrity programs to include digital-specific ethical training (Chen & Macfarlane, 2024).

Data-Driven Interventions and Behavioral Patterns

Institutions are increasingly leveraging data-driven decision support systems to manage these evolving behavioral trends. The application of thematic and cluster analysis to disciplinary logs allows researchers to identify specific "hotspots" of misconduct that might otherwise remain undetected.

Longitudinal thematic analysis of student records reveals patterns often obscured in case-by-case adjudication (Lopez & Tan, 2023). This analytical depth facilitates "Program-Based Clustering," a method where interventions are tailored to the specific professional cultures of different academic majors, such as the high-stress environments typical of technology or business programs (Williams, 2025).

Preventive Programming and Wellness

Scholarship further emphasizes that many conduct issues, such as the use of prohibited substances like vaping, are deeply intertwined with student health and social dynamics. Vaping on campus is increasingly viewed as both a disciplinary and a wellness issue, requiring formal partnerships between student affairs and health offices (Smith & Brown, 2023). Furthermore, the implementation of predictive analytics and early monitoring systems provides a mechanism for timely administrative intervention.

Tracking the escalation of minor non-compliance into major offenses allows the institution to act before behavioral patterns become ingrained (Miller, 2024). Collectively, these studies highlight the necessity of a tiered, data-informed approach to student conduct that balances rigorous policy enforcement with holistic student development.

Research Questions

1. What types of student offenses were most frequently recorded by the Office of Student Affairs over the past three academic years?
2. What recurring themes and patterns emerge from the thematic analysis of student offense records during the period under study?
3. How can the identified themes from student offense data inform the development of a targeted intervention plan by the Office of Student Affairs?

METHOD

Research Design and Framework

This study utilized a descriptive-qualitative research design centered on a mixed-method inquiry. This approach was selected to facilitate a comprehensive examination of student behavioral trends while extracting deep thematic insights from institutional records. The integration of quantitative frequency analysis with qualitative thematic exploration allowed the researchers to generate evidence-based insights necessary for strategic intervention planning and policy refinement within the University.

Data Sources and Collection

The primary dataset comprised administrative student discipline records from the Office of Student Affairs, spanning the academic years 2023–2024 through 2025–2026. These records documented a spectrum of infractions, ranging from minor regulatory non-compliance, such as dress code and identification violations, to major incidents including bullying, academic dishonesty, and vaping.

The collection process involved a formal administrative request to access verified institutional logs. The researchers compiled these entries into a structured secondary dataset, categorized by academic program and offense type. The collection relied exclusively on existing administrative data with no direct student interaction to maintain ethical integrity. All entries were de-identified during the transcription process, with student names replaced by alphanumeric codes to ensure absolute confidentiality.

Data Analysis and Statistical Treatment

The analytical phase was executed in two distinct stages to provide both breadth and depth. Initially, a quantitative analysis was conducted to tabulate the frequency and distribution of offenses. Descriptive statistics, specifically totals and percentages, were computed to identify longitudinal trends across the three-year period.

Subsequently, qualitative descriptions within the offense logs were subjected to thematic analysis using the six-phase framework established by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved an inductive coding process where recurring behaviors were identified, reviewed, and categorized into broader themes. This thematic layer allowed the researchers to move beyond simple statistics and understand the contextual nuances of student misconduct. The statistical treatment remained aligned with this dual-mode design, employing both descriptive tabulation for frequency data and qualitative synthesis for the identified behavioral patterns.

RESULTS

Table 1

Table 1: Frequency of Student Offenses by Classification

Type of Offense	Classification	A.Y. 2024–2025	A.Y. 2025–2026	F
Dress Code Non-compliance	Minor	1,467	818	2,285
Identification (ID) Non-compliance	Minor	51	–	51
Prohibited Accessories (Earrings)	Minor	22	–	22
Vaping/Substance Use	Major	–	18	18
Peer Aggression/Bullying	Major	–	9	9

Classroom/Lab Misconduct	Major	–	7	7
Academic Dishonesty (Cheating)	Major	–	2	2
Recidivism (Escalated Minors)	Major	–	2	2
Total		1,540	856	2,396

The distribution of student offenses across the observed academic years indicates a heavy concentration of minor infractions compared to major disciplinary breaches (see Table 1). Data from the 2024–2025 and 2025–2026 periods show that regulatory non-compliance, specifically regarding dress code and identification policies, accounts for the vast majority of cases, totaling 2,358 incidents. While minor violations were predominantly recorded in the 2024–2025 academic year, the subsequent year saw the emergence of more diverse major offenses. Although major infractions such as vaping (18 cases) and peer aggression (9 cases) appear statistically low relative to the total volume, they represent high-stakes behavioral shifts that necessitate immediate administrative attention. The presence of two cases of recidivism, where minor offenses escalated to major violations, further suggests that a small segment of the student population exhibits persistent non-compliance that traditional sanctions may not be effectively deterring.

Table 2

Emergent Themes and Impacted Academic Programs

Emergent Theme	Primary Indicators	Frequency	Most Impacted Programs
Regulatory Non-compliance	Uniform, ID, and Accessory violations	2,358	All Academic Programs
Prohibited Substance Use	Vaping incidents	18	BSIT, BSTM, BSBA, BSCE, BSIE
Interpersonal Conflict	Aggression and Bullying	9	BSIT, BSHM, BSBA
Academic Disruption	Gaming/Non-academic lab use	7	BSIT, BSTM, BSCPE
Behavioral Escalation	Recidivism (Escalated Minors)	2	BSCE, BSIE
Academic Integrity	Cheating	2	General Distribution

Thematic analysis of the disciplinary logs revealed that student misconduct is not distributed randomly but rather clusters around specific institutional themes and academic tracks (see Table 2). Regulatory non-compliance remains a universal challenge across all academic programs, yet major infractions show distinct programmatic "fingerprints."

For instance, prohibited substance use (vaping) and academic disruptions in laboratories were most prevalent among students in the BSIT and BSTM programs. Similarly, interpersonal conflicts, including aggression and bullying, were notably concentrated in technology and business-oriented tracks.

These patterns suggest that the social and professional cultures within specific departments may influence behavioral norms. The identification of these clusters allows for a transition away from "one-size-fits-all" disciplinary measures toward program-specific behavioral guidance.

Table 3

Tiered Priority Framework for Intervention Planning

Behavior Cluster	Total Cases	Institutional Impact	Priority Level
Institutional Discipline Culture	2,358	Erodes professional standards and policy baseline.	High
Student Safety & Wellness	27	Threatens physical health and campus climate.	High
Learning Environment Integrity	7	Disrupts pedagogy and classroom focus.	Medium
Professional Ethics	2	Compromises academic and institutional rigor.	Medium

The translation of frequency data into a strategic priority framework highlights the dual nature of the University’s disciplinary challenges (see Table 3). While regulatory non-compliance regarding dress codes is categorized as a high priority due to its sheer volume and its impact on the institutional discipline culture, student safety issues such as vaping and aggression share this high-priority status because of the severity of their impact on campus wellness. Medium-priority clusters, including academic integrity and classroom misconduct, represent localized disruptions to the pedagogical environment. This tiered classification serves as the foundation for the proposed response plan, suggesting that the institution must simultaneously address widespread cultural non-compliance through broad professional standards while tackling high-risk major offenses through targeted, wellness-oriented interventions.

DISCUSSION

The three-year trajectory of student offenses at the University reveals a disciplinary landscape dominated by high-volume, low-severity infractions. Most striking is the sheer frequency of dress code and identification non-compliance—totaling over 2,300 cases. This is not merely a matter of students "forgetting" their uniforms. Instead, the data suggests a systemic normalization of minor non-compliance across nearly all academic programs. When a violation occurs this frequently, it ceases to be an individual outlier and becomes a cultural baseline. This trend aligns with the observations of Eaton and Fishman (2025), who argue that disciplinary challenges often mirror the internal peer norms of an institution rather than a simple lack of awareness.

While the minor offenses are a matter of volume, the major offenses are a matter of geography. Misconduct is not evenly distributed; it clusters. The concentration of vaping and laboratory-based disruptions within the BSIT and BSTM cohorts points to a specific "behavioral fingerprint" within those departments. These programs, which often involve high-stress environments and specialized facilities, may harbor localized subcultures where certain prohibited behaviors are more socially permissible. This "Program-Based Clustering" (Williams, 2025) confirms that the Office of Student Affairs cannot rely on universal mandates alone. If the goal is to curb vaping or aggression, the intervention must be spoken in the "language" of the specific department where those behaviors are surfacing.

Perhaps the most critical finding is the evidence of an "escalation pathway." The data shows that major disciplinary cases are rarely "lightning strikes" or isolated incidents. Rather, they are often preceded by a history of unaddressed minor infractions. We see this in the two major cases of recidivism: the transition from "regulatory non-compliance" to "major violation" is a measurable trajectory. This validates Miller’s (2024) emphasis on the importance of early monitoring. By the time a student reaches a major infraction, the institutional relationship has already been strained. Consequently, the University’s primary opportunity for behavioral correction lies not in the punishment of major offenses, but in the proactive disruption of minor patterns before they solidify into a chronic disciplinary identity.

CONCLUSION

The systematic analysis of disciplinary records at the University indicates a significant divergence between high-frequency regulatory non-compliance and low-frequency, high-impact behavioral risks. The data reveals that minor offenses—specifically regarding the institutional dress code and identification policies—constitute the vast majority of infractions. With over 2,200 recorded instances, it is concluded that such violations have become systemic, suggesting that students may perceive these regulations as peripheral to their academic experience rather than as core components of professional formation.

Furthermore, while major offenses such as vaping, bullying, and academic dishonesty occur with less frequency, they pose a more direct threat to the campus climate and student well-being. A critical finding of this study is the presence of "behavioral clustering," wherein specific types of misconduct are concentrated within certain academic programs, such as technology and business-oriented tracks. Finally, the evidence supports the existence of an escalation pathway; repeated minor infractions often serve as a measurable precursor to more serious disciplinary breaches. Consequently, the Office of Student Affairs must transition from a reactive, case-by-case adjudication model to a proactive, data-informed strategy that prioritizes early intervention and the disruption of negative behavioral trajectories.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed for the Office of Student Affairs:

- 1. Reconceptualization of Policy Orientation:** It is recommended that the university frame the institutional dress code and ID policies as "Professional Readiness Standards." The OSA may reduce the high volume of minor offenses and foster a more profound internalization of institutional values among the student body by aligning compliance with future workplace expectations.
- 2. Implementation of Program-Specific Interventions:** The OSA should collaborate with college deans to develop targeted behavioral workshops for academic programs identified as high-frequency clusters. These interventions should address the specific nature of misconduct prevalent in those fields, such as digital etiquette for technology students or conflict resolution for business majors.
- 3. Integration of Disciplinary and Wellness Services:** For major offenses involving substance use (vaping) or interpersonal aggression, the university should adopt a multi-disciplinary approach. This involves a formal partnership between the OSA and University Health Services to ensure that disciplinary actions are supplemented by counseling and wellness support.
- 4. Establishment of a Conduct Early Warning System (CEWS):** To prevent the escalation of minor infractions into major violations, the institution should implement an automated monitoring flag. A mandatory guidance session should be triggered upon a student's third minor offense, allowing for administrative mentoring before the behavior reaches a critical disciplinary threshold.
- 5. Promotion of Restorative Accountability Models:** The university should move toward restorative justice frameworks for cases of peer conflict and bullying. The institution can cultivate a campus environment where discipline is maintained through shared responsibility rather than solely through punitive measures by focusing on the repair of harm and community cohesion.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The study was conducted in strict adherence to established ethical standards governing the use of institutional and archival records. Primary consideration was given to data confidentiality; all personal identifiers and student names were removed or anonymized at the point of collection, ensuring that the findings were reported solely through aggregate data. Furthermore, formal institutional approval and written permission were secured from the Office of Student Affairs prior to the retrieval and analysis of the disciplinary logs. Given the non-intrusive

nature of the research design, the study relied exclusively on existing secondary data with no direct interaction with the student body, thereby eliminating physical or psychological risk to participants. Data integrity and security were maintained by storing all digital records in an encrypted environment accessible only to the primary researchers. These combined measures ensured full compliance with both institutional policies and international ethical guidelines regarding the protection of privacy and the responsible academic use of administrative records.

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ANNEX A

Proposed Targeted Intervention Plan

Based on the thematic clusters identified (Dress Code, Substance Use, and Peer Conflict), the following tiered intervention framework is proposed for the Office of Student Affairs:

1. The "Visible Campus" Initiative (Primary Prevention)

- Target: Dress code non-compliance and ID violations (2,285 cases).
- Action: Transition from punitive "policing" to a "Professional Readiness" campaign. Instead of treating uniforms as mere rules, frame them as preparation for workplace standards.
- Mechanism: Use digital signage and social media "spotlights" on students correctly wearing their uniforms, rather than only highlighting infractions.

2. The Behavioral Wellness Program (Secondary Intervention)

- Target: Vaping (18 cases) and behavioral misconduct in labs (7 cases).

- Action: Implement "Health over Habits" seminars. Since vaping is often a social or stress-coping behavior, the intervention should involve the University Health Services to provide cessation support rather than just disciplinary notes.
- Mechanism: Program-specific workshops for BSIT, BSTM, and BSBA-MM students, focusing on digital etiquette and the health impacts of vaping in enclosed academic spaces.

3. Restorative Justice Circles (Tertiary Intervention)

- Target: Aggression, Bullying, and Peer Conflict (9 cases).
- Action: Move away from traditional suspension for first-time physical aggression. Implement Restorative Justice Circles where the offender, the victim, and a student mediator discuss the harm caused.
- Mechanism: Focus on accountability and "making it right" to prevent the escalation of conflict within interpersonal-heavy programs like BSHM and BSBA-MM.

4. The Student Conduct Early Warning System (SCEWS)

- Target: Repeated minor offenses (2 major escalations).
- Action: Create an automated flag in the OSA database. When a student hits their 3rd minor offense, they are automatically scheduled for a "Guidance Check-in" before reaching the 5th offense (which triggers a major violation).