

Grade Appeal Process for Graduate Students (Proposed)

The Graduate School of the University of Arkansas recognizes that there may be occasions when a graduate student questions the fairness or accuracy of a grade. Situations that may result in an appeal include those where an instructor's policy was not applied consistently to all students, the instructor's actions differed substantially from announced policy or the syllabus, or that a policy was not announced. All grievances concerning course grades must be filed within one calendar year after the end of the term in which the grade that is assigned. In such cases, the following process shall apply.

The student should first discuss the matter with the instructor involved, doing so as soon as possible after receiving the grade. If the student chooses to pursue an appeal, the student shall take the appeal in written form to the appropriate department or program chairperson of the program in which the course was instructed. The appeal should present the basis of the appeal with evidence the student may have to support the appeal. If that person determines the case has no merit, that person will inform the student and the instructor. If that person believes the complaint may have merit, that person will discuss it with the instructor. In the case that the department or unit chairperson is the instructor, the student should submit an appeal in written form to the appropriate dean of the college in which the course was instructed.

If the matter remains unresolved, it will be referred to an *ad hoc* committee composed of programmatic or departmental faculty. This committee will be appointed by the department or program chairperson and will have at least three faculty with graduate faculty status representing the program or department in which the course was instructed. In the case where there are fewer than three faculty within the program or department to serve on the committee, graduate faculty members from a closely related discipline will be appointed to serve. In the case where the department or unit chairperson is the instructor of the appeal, the *ad hoc* committee will be appointed by the appropriate dean of the college in which the course was instructed. The instructor whose grade is being challenged shall not serve on this *ad hoc* committee. The committee will examine available written information on the dispute, will be available to meet with the student and with the instructor, and will meet with others as it sees fit.

If by majority vote, the *ad hoc* faculty committee determines, through its inquiries and deliberations, that the grade should not be changed, the committee shall communicate this conclusion to the student, the faculty member, and the chairperson. This will end the appeal unless the student can demonstrate a violation of University policy in the original assessment of the grade or in the deliberation by the *ad hoc* committee. In such cases, the graduate student will have access to the Graduate Student Grievance policy.

If, by a majority vote, the *ad hoc* faculty committee determines that the grade should be changed, the committee will request that the instructor make the change and provide the instructor with a written explanation. Should the instructor decline, he or she must provide to the *ad hoc* faculty committee a written explanation for refusing to do so.

If the *ad hoc* faculty committee, after considering the instructor's written explanation, concludes it would be unjust to allow the original grade to stand, it may then recommend to the department

chairperson, or dean in the case where the department chairperson is the faculty whose grade is being challenged that the grade be changed. That individual (department chair or dean) will provide the instructor with a copy of the recommendation and will ask the instructor to implement it. If the instructor continues to decline, the chairperson or dean is then obligated to change the grade, notifying the instructor and the student of this action. Only the chairperson or dean has the authority to effect a grade change over the objection of the instructor who assigned the original grade, and only after the foregoing procedures have been followed.

Grade Appeal Process for Graduate Students (Current)

1. Individuals should attempt to resolve claimed grievances first with the person(s) involved, within the department, and wherever possible, without resort to formal grievance procedures. The graduate student should first discuss the matter with the faculty member involved, or with the faculty member's chairperson or area coordinator. The student's questions may be answered satisfactorily during this discussion. The student may also choose to contact the University Ombuds Office or, if the grievance is with the departmental chairperson or area coordinator, with the academic dean or the Graduate Dean, for a possible informal resolution of the matter.
2. If a graduate student chooses to pursue a formal grievance procedure, the student shall take the appeal in written form to the appropriate departmental chairperson/area coordinator, and forward a copy to the Graduate Dean. In the case of a grievance against a departmental chairperson or an area coordinator who does not report directly to a departmental chairperson, or in the absence of the chairperson/coordinator, the student will go directly to the dean of the college or school in which the alleged violation has occurred, or to the Graduate Dean. In any case, the Graduate Dean must be notified of the grievance. After discussion between the chairperson/coordinator/dean and all parties to the grievance, option 2a, 2b, or 3 may be chosen.
 - a. All parties involved may agree that the grievance can be resolved by a recommendation of the chairperson/coordinator/dean. In this case, the chairperson/coordinator/dean will forward a written recommendation to all parties involved in the grievance within 20 working days after receipt of the written grievance. The chairperson/area coordinator/dean is at liberty to use any appropriate method of investigation, including personal interviews and/or referral to an appropriate departmental committee for recommendation.
 - b. Alternatively, any party to the grievance may request that the departmental chairperson/area coordinator/dean at once refer the request, together with all statements, documents, and information gathered in his or her investigation, to the applicable departmental group (standing committee or all graduate faculty of the department). The reviewing body shall, within ten working days from the time its chairperson received the request for consideration, present to the department chairperson/coordinator/dean its written recommendations concerning resolution of the grievance. Within ten working days after receiving these recommendations, the department chairperson/area coordinator/dean shall provide all parties to the dispute with copies of the reviewing body's recommendation and his or her consequent written decision on the matter.

3. If the grievance is not resolved by the procedure outlined in step 2, or if any party to the grievance chooses not to proceed as suggested in 2, he/she will appeal in writing to the Dean of the Graduate School. When, and only when, the grievance concerns the composition of the student's thesis/dissertation committee or advisory committee, the Graduate Dean will proceed as described in step 5 (following). In all other cases, whenever a grievance comes to the attention of the Dean of the Graduate School, either as a result of a direct appeal or when a grievance has not been resolved satisfactorily at the departmental/academic dean level, the Dean of the Graduate School will consult with the person alleging the grievance. If that person decides to continue the formal grievance procedure, the Graduate Dean will notify all parties named in the grievance, the departmental chairperson/area coordinator, and the academic dean that a formal grievance has been filed. Within ten working days, the Dean of the Graduate School will: 1) with the consent of the student, appoint a faculty member as the student's advocate, and 2) notify the Academic Appeals Subcommittee of the Graduate Council, which will serve as the hearing committee. The Associate Dean of the Graduate School will serve as the chair of the grievance committee and will vote only in the case of a tie. A voting member of the Graduate Council who is not a member of the Academic Appeals Subcommittee will serve as the non-voting secretary of the committee.

The committee shall have access to witnesses and records, may take testimony, and may make a record by taping the hearing. Its charge is to develop all pertinent factual information (with the exception that the student and faculty member/administrator will not be required to be present in any meeting together without first agreeing to do so) and, on the basis of this information, to make a recommendation to the Graduate Dean to either support or reject the appeal. The Graduate Dean will then make a decision based on the committee's recommendation and all documents submitted by the parties involved. The Graduate Dean's decision, the committee's written recommendation and a copy of its complete written record (excluding those in which other students have a privacy interest) shall be forwarded to the person(s) making the appeal within 20 working days from the date the committee was first convened; copies shall be sent simultaneously to other parties involved in the grievance and to the dean of the college in which the alleged violation occurred. A copy shall be retained by the Graduate School in such a way that the student's privacy is protected.

4. When, and only when, the grievance concerns a course grade and the committee's recommendation is that the grade assigned by the instructor should be changed, the following procedure applies. The committee's recommendation that the grade should be changed shall be accompanied by a written explanation of the reasons for that recommendation and by a request that the instructor change the grade. If the instructor declines, he or she shall provide a written explanation for refusing. The committee, after considering the instructor's explanation and upon concluding that it would be unjust to allow the original grade to stand, may then recommend to the department chair that the grade be changed. The department chair will provide the instructor with a copy of the recommendation and ask the instructor to change the grade. If the instructor continues to decline, the department chair may change the grade, notifying the instructor, the Graduate Dean, and the student of the action. Only the department chair, and only on

recommendation of the committee, may change a grade over the objection of the instructor who assigned the original grade. No appeal or further review is allowed from this action. All grievances concerning course grades must be filed within one calendar year of receiving that grade.