

# Academic Grievance Procedures for Graduate Students

The Graduate School of the University of Arkansas recognizes that there may be occasions when a graduate student has a grievance about some aspect of their academic involvement. It is an objective of this University that such a graduate student may have prompt and formal resolution of his or her/their personal academic grievances and that this be accomplished according to orderly procedures. Below are the procedures to be utilized when a graduate student has an academic grievance with a faculty member or administrator. If the student has a grievance against another student or another employee of the University, or if the student has a grievance which is not academic in nature, the appropriate policy may be found by contacting the Office of Equal Opportunity and Compliance or the office of the Graduate Dean. For policies and procedures pertaining to conduct offenses, consult the Code of Student Life.

NOTE: Master's students in the Graduate School of Business should follow the grievance procedures for that School.

## Definition of Terms

**Academic grievance.** An academic grievance means a dispute concerning some aspect of academic involvement arising from an administrative or faculty decision which the graduate student claims is in violation of his or her/their rights and is the result of a University error, a violation of written campus policies, or constitutes unfair or unequal application of such policies. The Graduate School considers any behavior on the part of a faculty member or an administrator, which the student believes to interfere with their academic progress, to be subject to a grievance. While an enumeration of the students' rights with regard to their academic involvement is not possible or desirable, we have provided a short list as illustration.

However, as in all cases involving individual rights, whether a specific behavior constitutes a violation of these rights can only be decided in context, following a review by a panel of those given the authority to make such a decision.

In general, we consider that the graduate student:

1. has the right to competent instruction;
2. is entitled to have access to the instructor at hours other than class times (office hours);
3. is entitled to know the grading system by which he/she/they will be judged;
4. has the right to evaluate each course and instructor;
5. has the right to be treated with respect and dignity;
6. has the right to be free of retaliation from University employees for filing a grievance under this policy or the grade appeal policy or participation in the investigation of a grievance as a witness of such a claim.

In addition, an academic grievance may include alleged violations of the affirmative action plans of the University as related to academic policies and regulations, as well as disputes over grades, course requirements, graduation/degree program requirements, thesis/dissertation/advisory committee composition, and/or adviser decisions.

**Formal academic grievance.** An academic grievance is considered formal when the student notifies the Graduate Dean, in writing, that he/she is/they are proceeding with such a grievance. The implications of this declaration are: 1) all correspondence pertaining to any aspect of the grievance

will be in writing and will be made available to the Graduate Dean; 2) all documents relevant to the case, including minutes from all relevant meetings, will be part of the complete written record and will be forwarded to the Graduate Dean upon receipt by any party to the grievance; 3) the policy contained herein will be strictly followed; and 4) any member of the academic community who does not follow the grievance policy will be subject to disciplinary actions. Filing a formal academic grievance is a serious matter, and the student is strongly encouraged to seek informal resolution of their concerns before taking such a step.

**Complete Written Record.** The “complete written record” refers to all documents submitted as evidence by any party to the complaint, as subject to applicable privacy considerations.

NOTE: Because the ~~tape~~-recordings of committee meetings may contain sensitive information, including private information pertaining to other students, the recording tape or a verbatim transcription of the recording tape will not be part of the complete written record. However, general minutes of the meetings, documenting the action taken by the committees, will be part of the complete written record.

**Graduate student.** Under this procedure, a graduate student is any person who has been formally admitted into the Graduate School of the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, and who is/was enrolled as a graduate-level student at the time the alleged grievance occurred.

**Retaliation.** Any decision to adversely affect the education environment, which is directed against graduate students for filing grievances under this policy or the grade appeal policy for graduate students as well as graduate students who participate in an investigation.

**Working Days.** Working days shall refer to Monday through Friday, excluding official University holidays.

## Procedures

NOTE: Master’s students in the Graduate School of Business should follow the grievance procedures for that School.

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. If the grievance is with the departmental chairperson or area coordinator, the student may choose to contact the academic dean or the Graduate Dean, for a possible informal resolution of the matter. Grievances based on dismissal for unethical/unprofessional conduct will first follow the appeal policies of the department/program and if unsuccessful, will follow process 5, below, bypassing the Graduate Dean.
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~~ their 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~~ their 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/they~~ 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 ~~54~~ (following below). 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.

a. Within ten working days (excluding the day of receipt), if the Graduate Dean determines that there is evidence of a university error, a violation of written campus policies, or unfair or unequal application of such policies, and 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.

b. If the Graduate Dean determines that there is not evidence of a university error, a violation of written campus policies, or unfair or unequal application of such policies, and the graduate student believes the decision is in error, the graduate student may appeal the Graduate Dean's decision in writing to the Academic Appeals Subcommittee of the Graduate Council within ten working days (excluding the day of receipt). The Academic Appeals Subcommittee shall review the material provided by the graduate student, the decision of the Graduate Dean, and any other materials which have been assembled regarding the matter, and any applicable university policies. The Academic Appeals Subcommittee, within twenty working days of receiving the appeal, shall make a decision, in writing, if the graduate student's grievance shall move forward to a full hearing.

3-c. Within ten working days (excluding the day of receipt) of either the Graduate Dean's decision of evidence of a university error, a violation of written campus policies, or unfair or unequal application of such policies, or a positive appeal decision from the Academic Appeals Subcommittee, 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.

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The committee shall have access to witnesses and records, may take testimony, and may make a recording ~~ing~~ ~~by~~ ~~taping~~ ~~of~~ 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, a student brings a grievance concerning the composition of their thesis/dissertation or advisory committee, the following procedure will apply. The Dean of the Graduate School shall meet with the graduate student and the faculty member named in the grievance and shall consult the chair of the committee, the departmental chairperson/area coordinator, and the academic dean, for their recommendations. In unusual circumstances, the Dean of the Graduate School may remove a faculty member from a student's thesis/dissertation committee or advisory committee, or make an alternative arrangement (e.g. assign a representative from the Graduate faculty to serve on the committee). With regard to the chair of the dissertation/thesis committee (not the advisory committee), the Graduate School considers this to be a mutual agreement between the faculty member and the student to work cooperatively on a research project of shared interest. Either the graduate student or the faculty member may dissolve this relationship by notifying the other party, the departmental chairperson, and the Graduate Dean. However, the student and the adviser should be warned that this may require that all data gathered for the dissertation be abandoned and a new research project undertaken, with a new faculty adviser.
5. When, and only when, a student is appealing a dismissal from a degree program on the basis of unethical and unprofessional conduct, and has followed all appeal options contained within the department/program policy, the following process will apply: If a student's appeal through the department/program process is denied and the student continues to believe the grievance decision is in error, then the student may, within 10 working days after the date of the final written decision from the department/program, appeal the decision in writing to the dean of the academic department within which the degree program resides. The department/program is required to notify the student of the appeal process at the time of the final decision. The academic dean will review the material provided by the student, the grievance decision, any other material which has been assembled regarding the matter, and any applicable university policies and may, at their discretion, gather any additional information that will be helpful to a decision, whether in writing or through meeting or consulting with any individuals deemed necessary in the dean's discretion. The dean reviewing the appeal shall make a decision, in writing, within 10 working days of receiving the student's grievance, or as soon as possible thereafter. This is the sole method for appeal of a suspension or dismissal on the basis of unethical or unprofessional conduct. The decision of the dean shall be final.
6. If a grievance is not satisfactorily resolved through step 3 or 5, an appeal in writing and with all relevant material may be submitted for consideration and a joint decision by the Chancellor of the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, and the Provost/Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. This appeal must be filed within 20 working days of receiving the

decision of the Graduate Dean. Any appeal at this level shall be on the basis of the complete written record only, and will not involve interviews with any party to the grievance. The Chancellor of the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, and the Provost/Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs shall make a decision on the matter within 20 working days from the date of receipt of the appeal. Their decision shall be forwarded in writing to the same persons receiving such decision in step 3. Their decision is final pursuant to the delegated authority of the Board of Trustees.

7. If a grievance cannot be resolved internally within the university, a student may file a complaint with the appropriate authority in their state of residence. Arkansas residents must file complaints in writing with the ICAC Coordinator, Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE), 114 E. Capitol, Little Rock, AR 72201, within 20 days of completing the institution's grievance process. As required by ADHE, the grievant must provide a statement from the institution verifying that the institution's appeal process has been followed. ADHE inquiries are limited to courses/degree programs certified by the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board (AHECB) under Ark. Code § 6-61-103 and so matters related to the criteria for certification. For other states, the Student Complaint Process by State Directory, available on the [State Higher Education Executive Officers Association website](#) [State Higher Education Executive Officers Association website](#) provides a list of appropriate state officials and/or entities for each state. Students may also contact the [Higher Learning Commission](#), which is the university's regional accrediting body, at 230 S. LaSalle St., Suite 7-500, Chicago, IL 60604, or at [info@hlcommission.org](mailto:info@hlcommission.org) or 1-800-621-7440. This information is provided pursuant to 34 CFR § 668.43(b).
8. If any party to the grievance violates this policy, [he/she/they](#) will be subject to disciplinary action. When alleging such a violation, the aggrieved individual shall contact the Graduate Dean, in writing, with an explanation of the violation.