

Academic Appeals Policies and Procedures

Northeastern University affirms that it is essential to provide an appeals mechanism to students who believe that they have been erroneously, capriciously, inappropriately, or otherwise unfairly treated.

If a student feels that they have been the victim of harassment or of discrimination prohibited by law or by university policy, and that this constitutes a substantive basis for the appeal, the appeal shall first be pursued and investigated through the Office for University Equity and Compliance (<https://ouec.northeastern.edu/>). In such cases, the appeal described in Step 2 below is submitted to the appropriate dean(s) and a copy provided to the OUEC. Following a resolution of the harassment/discrimination issues, any remaining academic issues will be addressed, at the request of the student, according to the academic appeals procedures described herein.

Note that these policies and procedures apply to graduate students only.

Individual college appeal procedures can be viewed within the college's section of this catalog.

Academic Appeals

It is the policy of the university that all students shall be treated fairly with respect to evaluations made of their academic performance, standing, and progress. The university presumes that academic judgments by its faculty are fair, consistent, and objective. Students must understand that the substitution of a different academic judgment for that of the original evaluator is a serious intrusion upon academic prerogatives entrusted to the faculty and others involved in academic evaluations. Nonetheless, the university believes it is essential to provide an appeals mechanism to students who believe that they have been erroneously, capriciously, inappropriately, or otherwise unfairly treated in an academic or cooperative education determination. This includes claims of misinterpretation or inequitable application of any academic provision of the *Graduate Catalog* or *Faculty Handbook*.

Decisions concerning admission or readmission into a program, including dismissals, and matters related to co-op employment (other than grades received) cannot be appealed beyond the college level. While program dismissals cannot be appealed beyond the college level, underlying academic judgments that led to a dismissal can be appealed.

Before invoking the appeals procedures, students are always encouraged to speak informally to their instructors or academic advisors about any determination or grade about which they have questions. If students choose to pursue an appeal, the process is described in the appeals section that follows.

A student may appeal an academic determination by submitting a written statement that details the action or judgment and the basis for the appeal. All parties shall cooperate and act expeditiously in processing the appeal to completion. Appeals shall be filed in a timely manner such that they can be considered during the academic year of the student's home unit.

All appeals should be initiated and resolved in a timely manner in accordance with the detailed time limits provided in this document.

Although students are entitled to seek the advice of outside legal counsel, students may not be represented by a lawyer in the informal or formal academic appeal procedures. A student may consult with the provost or their designee at any point in this procedure for advice or assistance.

It is strongly recommended that international students consult as soon as possible with the Office of Global Services to determine the possibility of any repercussion that the timing of an appeal may have on their immigration status.

Scientific or Research Misconduct

Scientific or research misconduct is defined as fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, or other practices that seriously deviate from those that are commonly accepted within the academic and scientific community for proposing, conducting, or reporting research and does not include honest error or honest differences in interpretation or judgments of data. (Further information can be obtained from the U.S. Office of Research Integrity, Department of Health and Human Services (<https://ori.hhs.gov/>)). Possible incidences of misconduct are to be reported immediately to the provost or their designee, who will initiate the appropriate procedures. Findings of scientific or research misconduct cannot be appealed through the process below.

Appeal of Final Grades and Outcomes of Other Academic Evaluative Processes

STEP 1. DISCUSS CONCERNS WITH INSTRUCTOR AND/OR ADMINISTRATOR

In many cases, students may choose to discuss their concerns with the faculty member who taught the course or a member of the qualifying exam committee. If after this conversation the student's concerns remain unresolved, or if the student is not comfortable discussing the issue with the instructor or other faculty member(s) involved, the student should request a meeting with the appropriate administrator (e.g., director, assistant or associate dean, chair, or group leader) to further discuss their concerns. If these initial attempts to address the issue fail to resolve the student's concerns, or the situation precludes a student from pursuing these steps, the student can initiate a formal appeal as follows. Note that this step should occur as soon as possible after the academic determination given the time frame for appeal statement submission described in Step 2.

STEP 2. PREPARE AN APPEAL STATEMENT

A student must initiate a formal appeal of an academic determination by submitting a written statement (the Statement) that specifies the details of the action or judgment that they seek to appeal. The Statement must start with a clear description of the basis for the appeal and should include:

2 Academic Appeals Policies and Procedures

(1) basic facts about the situation leading to the appeal; (2) when the situation occurred; (3) who was involved; and (4) the resolution sought by the student. All relevant supporting materials should be attached as addenda to the Statement. Appeals should avoid unsubstantiated, defamatory, or *ad hominem* accusations regarding the motivations of the faculty member or other persons involved in making the academic determination.

The Statement, and supporting materials, as submitted to and reviewed by the unit (i.e., college, school, department, or group responsible for reviewing the academic determination), will serve as the basis of the appeal throughout the appeals process, including at the university level.

Graduate students shall submit the Statement and all supporting materials to the college/school administrator specified in the college/school procedures.

The Statement must be submitted no later than 28 calendar days from the day when the academic determination is made available to the student. If a student wishes to dispute a grade in their final term, this must be done within 28 calendar days of degree conferral date.

STEP 3. COLLEGE/SCHOOL-LEVEL APPEAL

A copy of this decision shall be sent to the college/school dean or their designee of the student's home college/school.

STEP 4. UNIVERSITY-LEVEL APPEAL

If the student is not satisfied with the college/school's disposition of the matter, or if the appeal is not resolved within 35 calendar days after originally submitted to the college/school pursuant to Step 3, the student may further pursue the matter by requesting in writing within 10 calendar days of the notification from the college/school in Step 3 that the university convene the Academic Appeals Resolution Committee to review the issue. Students may obtain information on this process from the provost or their designee. This committee has been designated as the final authority on these matters.

A. Academic Appeals Resolution Committee

The Academic Appeals Resolution Committee shall be a standing committee consisting of the following:

- The provost or their designee, who shall be the chair of the committee, and nonvoting member.
- Three faculty members and one alternate faculty member (with the alternate serving in instances where there is a conflict of interest or when a member has to be replaced) all from different colleges appointed by the Faculty Senate Agenda Committee. Members will serve a one-year term with no term limits.
- If the appeal had at any point involved a matter of harassment/discrimination, the committee shall include a representative of the OUEC, who shall be a nonvoting member.

B. Preliminary Matters

Upon receiving an appeal, the committee shall obtain copies of all documentation related to the appeal from Steps 1, 2, and 3, including the procedures of the relevant unit and college/school. If the Academic Appeals Resolution Committee determines, by a majority vote, that the appeal is patently without substance or merit, it may dismiss the appeal.

C. Investigation

The Academic Appeals Resolution Committee shall investigate the matter under appeal by studying the relevant documents (the Statement, supporting documents, and additional accumulated documentation), interviewing the parties (especially the student and the involved faculty member), and taking any other action it deems appropriate. A resolution shall be rendered within 35 calendar days of appeal submission. At no time shall the committee be bound by rules of evidence but shall at all times conduct itself in a manner that is not arbitrary or capricious. The Academic Appeals Resolution Committee may, but is not required to, hold a hearing prior to resolving the issues. However, in all instances, the student and the involved faculty member shall have the right to appear separately and privately before the Academic Appeals Resolution Committee. The student shall have the right to have an advocate from the university community present during their testimony to the Academic Appeals Resolution Committee.

D. Authority to Act

The Academic Appeals Resolution Committee has been designated as the final authority on academic matters. At the conclusion of its investigation, the Academic Appeals Resolution Committee shall resolve, by majority vote, the issue by either upholding the finding of the college/school, in which case no further appeal is available, or granting such relief to the student as the Academic Appeals Resolution Committee deems appropriate. The Academic Appeals Resolution Committee shall not render a resolution that contradicts the prior findings or actions of the OUEC.

E. Resolution

All direct parties to the appeal, including but not limited to the student, the faculty member (or others involved in academic evaluations), the dean of the involved college(s), the Faculty Senate, and the Office of the University Registrar, shall be promptly informed in writing of the decisions and actions taken during this academic appeals procedure.

F. Action

The dean(s) or their designee in the involved college(s) shall take whatever action is necessary to implement fully the resolution of the Academic Appeals Resolution Committee.

G. Appeal

Once adjudicated, the matter is considered closed, and no further appeal can be instituted by the student or the involved faculty member with respect to the issue(s) raised at any level of the formal appeals resolutions procedures.

Step 1: Discuss concerns with instructor or appropriate administrator	Time frame: As soon as possible after academic determination (see note 1 below)
Step 2: Student prepares/submits appeals statement to unit or college/school	Time frame: Within 28 calendar days of academic determination
Step 3: Unit/college/school-level appeal process	Time frame: Decision notification within 35 calendar days of student appeal statement submission
Step 4: University-level appeal process	Time frame: Student submits within 10 calendar days of college/school decision; resolution rendered within 35 calendar days of appeal submission

Note 1: Step 1 should occur as soon as possible after the academic determination given the time frame for appeal statement submission described in Step 2.