Student Academic Appeals Procedures

Note: In the academic appeals procedures described herein, “dean” refers to the dean of the appropriate academic program or a designee, and “vice president” refers to the vice president for student affairs or a designee.

It is the policy of the university that all students shall be treated fairly in 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 teaching prerogatives. Nonetheless, the university believes it is essential to provide an appeals mechanism to students who believe that they were erroneously, capriciously, 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 university’s Undergraduate Catalog, Student Reference Guide, or Faculty Handbook.

In most cases, students should first discuss their concerns with the faculty member who taught the course to see if it is possible to reach agreement on the issue(s). If the student is not satisfied with the outcome of this discussion, or if the student is not comfortable discussing the issue with the instructor, the student should request a meeting with the program director to attempt a program-level resolution of the appeal. If these attempts to informally resolve the issue fail, the student can enter the formal procedure at the college level as follows.

Students are encouraged to speak with their academic advisor and obtain a copy of the Academic Complaint form.

Step 1
A student may appeal an academic determination by submitting a written statement (the Statement). If the appeal concerns academic probation, it is submitted to the college’s academic standing committee. If the appeal concerns a grade or course evaluation, it is submitted to the dean of the academic program in which the course was given. All appeals of grades should be initiated and resolved before the student graduates. If a student wishes to dispute a grade in his or her final term, this must be done within 45 days of graduation. If the appeal concerns a cooperative education determination, it is submitted to the dean of the academic program in which the student is enrolled. The Statement must specify the details of the action or judgment and the basis for the appeal. (Note: The Statement shall include when the problem occurred, who made the disputed evaluation, the nature of the evaluation, and what resolution the student would like to see.)

All parties shall cooperate and act expeditiously in processing the appeal to completion. Though students are always entitled to seek the advice of legal counsel, a student’s lawyer cannot be present in the informal or formal academic appeal procedures. A student may consult with the vice president or the vice provost or their designees at any point in these procedures for advice or assistance. University officials may take whatever steps they deem reasonably appropriate to achieve resolution of the problem at any stage of these procedures. The Statement should be submitted within 20 working days (four calendar weeks) of the day when the student learns of the academic determination in question. If a student feels that he or she has been the victim of harassment or discrimination prohibited by law or by university policy, he or she should consult with the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion as soon as he or she becomes aware of alleged prohibited harassment or discrimination and is not required to wait until a term grade or determination is received before seeking advice or redress. If the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion is advised of such alleged prohibited conduct as part of an academic appeal (see below), the appeal shall be pursued and investigated through the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion first. In such cases, the student should submit the appeal to the appropriate dean(s) described in this step, with a copy also given to the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion. 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.

Step 2
The dean shall respond to the student in writing, including specific instructions to the student to seek an informal resolution to the matter, unless such a course of action, as outlined by the student in his or her Statement, is demonstrably futile. The dean’s directions shall include discussing the matter with the person whom the student identifies as involved in the matter. If the student is not satisfied with the informal resolution, the dean shall discuss the matter with the department chair (where one exists) or equivalent supervisor and the dean of the academic program in which the faculty member involved in the matter serves, who shall attempt to effect an informal resolution. The student shall also have the right to discuss the matter with the chair (where one exists) or equivalent supervisor in which department the faculty member involved in the matter serves.

If the appeal involves allegations of prohibited harassment or discrimination, the dean shall consult with the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion before making this response and shall, as part of this response, explain the role that the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion will play in Steps 2 and 3 of this procedure.

A copy of this response shall be sent to the department chair or equivalent supervisor of the appropriate unit.

Step 3
If the appeal cannot be resolved informally within 30 days of the student’s original submission of his or her Statement to the dean, or if he or she is not satisfied with the disposition of the matter at Step 2, the student may proceed with the appeal through his or her college’s established academic appeals procedure. The dean or the academic standing committee, as applicable, must provide the student and the involved faculty member with a written report of his/her/its finding(s) and decision.

• This step involves a review by an academic standing committee making the recommendation to the dean. The student may obtain a copy of the operating rules of the academic standing committee from the dean of the academic program involved.
• In appeals involving allegations of prohibited harassment or discrimination, the dean or academic standing committee shall receive a report of the findings of the investigation of the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion for incorporation into its own report on matters left unresolved by those findings that were referred to it. The dean or committee shall be without authority to reverse or modify the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion finding or resolution.
Step 4
If the student or the involved faculty member is not satisfied with the dean's disposition of the matter, or if the appeal has not been resolved within 30 days after originally being submitted to the dean pursuant to Step 1 (unless the student or faculty member has filed a grievance regarding the same subject matter at the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion), he or she may further pursue the matter by requesting in writing within 14 calendar days that the university convene an academic appeals resolution committee to review the issue. Students may obtain information on this process in either the We Care program (104 Ell) or the provost's office (110 CH). This committee has been designated as the final authority on these matters. This request must be made within 10 working days of the finding of the academic standing committee in Step 3.