

Academic Appeals Policies and Procedures

It is the policy of Northeastern 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* or *Graduate Catalog*, *Student Handbook*, or *Faculty Handbook*.

In all cases, students are encouraged to informally discuss concerns with the faculty member who taught the course to see if it is possible to reach an 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 their academic and career advisor who can help facilitate the process to resolve the issue(s). If these informal attempts to resolve the issue(s) fail, the student can enter the formal procedure at the college level as outlined below.

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 appeals procedures. A student may consult their academic and career advisor 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 issue at any stage of these procedures.

If a student feels that they have been the victim of harassment or of discrimination prohibited by law or by university policy, they should consult with the Office of University Equity and Compliance as soon as they become aware of alleged prohibited harassment or discrimination and are not required to wait until a term grade or determination is received before seeking advice or redress. If OUEC is advised of such alleged prohibited conduct as part of an academic appeal, the appeal shall be pursued and investigated by OUEC first. In such cases, the student should contact their academic and career advisor regarding the next appeal steps. 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.

The Academic Standing Committee may not consider appeals on the basis of medical claims; students are encouraged to meet with their academic and career advisor to determine the best course of action for any disputes on the basis of medical or personal issues.

For Dismissal Appeals

If the appeal concerns academic dismissal, the student should contact their academic and career advisor regarding appealing to the college ASC.

For Grade Disputes

Students are encouraged to contact their instructor regarding all grade disputes within 15 calendar days of the assignment or course grade being awarded. If resolution cannot be achieved within 15 calendar days of initial contact, the student may submit a formal appeal no more than 30 calendar days following the end of the term the grade was awarded. The student must contact their academic and career advisor to start the formal appeal process. Resolution that is not attempted within this time frame is no longer eligible for appeal.

The program level has 30 calendar days to respond with a decision and brief explanation of that decision. If the student does not receive a response within 30 calendar days of their appeal at the program level, the student may appeal to the ASC. If a decision has been rendered at the program level, the student may only appeal to the ASC *if they have new/additional evidence and documentation to present that would not have reasonably been available at the time of the program-level appeal*. The student should contact their academic and career advisor before appealing any decision to the ASC.

Once a grade change has been made in response to an appeal, that change is final.

For All Other Appeals/Disputes

The student should contact their academic and career advisor with questions and information regarding next steps.

Appealing Beyond the ASC

In appeals that arise from a violation, misrepresentation, or inequitable application of the academic provisions of the *Student Handbook* or *Undergraduate Catalog* or *Graduate Catalog*, the ASC serves as the final decision maker within the college.

Issues concerning admission or readmission into a program cannot be appealed beyond the ASC at the college level.

Outside of issues concerning admission or readmission into a program, if the student or faculty member is not satisfied with the ASC's decision at the college level, they may further pursue the matter at the university level by requesting in writing within 14 calendar days that the university convene an Academic Appeals Resolution Committee to review the appeal. Students may obtain information on this process through the Office of the Provost (110 CH). The AARC has been designated as the final authority on appeal matters. This request must be made within 14 calendar days of the finding of the ASC.

1. Academic Appeals Resolution Committee

The AARC includes:

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- The vice provost for graduate education or a designee.
- The student's faculty advisor will be appointed by the appropriate vice provost except in cases where no specific advisor exists or where the faculty advisor is involved in the dispute. In those cases, a faculty member from the student's major college, department, or area of specialization will be appointed.
- Two faculty members appointed by the Faculty Senate Agenda Committee (if the appeal is based on a cooperative education determination, one of the faculty members shall be a member of the cooperative education faculty but not from the student's area of study) and a representative of the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion (if the appeal had at any point involved a matter of sexual harassment/discrimination).
- The chair shall be elected from among the committee's three faculty members but cannot be the student's faculty advisor.

2. Preliminary Matters

If the AARC determines, by a majority vote, that the appeal is patently without substance or merit, it may dismiss the appeal.

3. Investigation

The AARC shall investigate the matter under appeal as quickly as possible by studying the relevant documents, interviewing the parties (especially the student and the involved faculty member), and taking any other action it deems appropriate. 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 AARC 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 and testify separately and privately before the AARC. The student shall have the right to have an advocate from the university community present during their testimony to the AARC.

4. Authority to Act

The AARC has been designated as the final authority on these matters. At the conclusion of its investigation, the AARC shall resolve, by majority vote, the issue by either upholding the finding of the ASC or dean, in which case no further appeal is available, or granting such relief to the student as the AARC deems appropriate.

- a. The AARC may not determine a resolution that contradicts the prior findings or actions of the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion with respect to elements of this appeal.
- b. In the event of a tie vote, the action of the ASC or dean shall be considered upheld.

5. Resolution

All direct parties to the appeal, including but not limited to the student, the provost, the dean, the department chair or equivalent supervisors, graduate coordinator or equivalent supervisor, and the faculty member shall be promptly informed in writing of the decisions and actions taken (i.e., the Report) during this academic appeals procedure.

6. Report

A written Report of the appeal and its resolution shall be submitted by the chair of the AARC to the student, the involved faculty member, the Faculty Senate Agenda Committee, the vice president for student affairs, the appropriate vice provost, the registrar, and the dean, as appropriate.

7. 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 AARC. This includes reporting the change of grade to the registrar.

8. Appeal

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 once adjudicated.