Summary of Graduate Student Appeal and Grievance Procedures

Introduction

Set forth below is a summary of the processes available to graduate students who seek review of academic and non-academic issues. Generally, graduate students are expected to seek informal resolution of all concerns within the applicable department, unit or program before invoking formal processes. When an informal resolution cannot be reached, however, a graduate student who seeks further review of the matter is to follow these formal procedures. To the extent that these processes are set forth in official University policies, links to those statements of policy and more detailed description of processes and procedures are included. Where a graduate student’s concerns implicate multiple policies or processes, the University reserves the right to decide which process shall apply in order to avoid duplicative and potentially conflicting processes and decisions, or in appropriate circumstances, the order in which multiple reviews may occur.

These appeal and grievance procedures shall apply to students in all graduate programs of the University. Students should refer to the online handbooks (or hard copy handbooks if applicable) for their particular programs for more detailed information about the administration and academic policies of the program. To the extent that these policies conflict in any way with policies, processes and procedures adopted at the College, Department or Program level, the policies set forth herein shall govern.

Appealing Final Grades

Final grades will be changed only in exceptional circumstances and only with the approval of the instructor and the department, unit or program. Grading is a matter of sound discretion of the instructor and final grades are rarely changed without the consent of the instructor who assigned the grade. The following circumstances are the unusual exceptions that may warrant a grade appeal: (a) the final grade assigned for a course is based on manifest error (e.g. a clear error such as arithmetic error in computing a grade or failure to grade one of the answers on an exam), or (b) the faculty or staff member who assigned the grade did so in violation of a University policy. A graduate student who believes a final grade was assigned pursuant to (a) or (b) above should first present the case informally to the faculty or staff member responsible for the course in which the student believes an inappropriate grade has been awarded. If the student is not satisfied with the resolution at this first step, the student shall submit a formal, written appeal, with appropriate documentation, within the first fourteen (14) days of the semester following the awarding of the final grade under challenge, to the head of the department in which the course was offered. The department head (or the program head if the department head chooses to delegate the decision to him/her) will issue a written decision on the appeal within 30 days, or as soon thereafter as practical. If the student is not satisfied with the decision of the department head (or program head), the student may submit a formal, written appeal, with appropriate documentation, within seven (7) days to the Dean of the college in which the course is offered. The Dean shall render a decision within 30 days, or as soon thereafter as practical. The decision of the Dean shall be final and not appealable.
Summary of Levels of Appeal for Final Grades:
- Informal discussion with the faculty member
- Formal written appeal to the department head (or the program head if the department head chooses to delegate the decision to him/her)
- Formal written appeal to the Dean
- Dean issues final non-appealable decision

See also Carnegie Mellon University Grading Policies

Appeal of Academic Actions

An “Academic Action” is an action by a program, unit or department based on a graduate student’s academic performance or failure to satisfy academic program requirements. Examples of Academic Actions include, but are not limited to, academic probation, academic suspension, and dismissal/drop. Each college, department, or program may set its own academic requirements and standards for acceptable academic performance. These standards and benchmarks for performance are set forth in the online and/or hard copy handbooks for individual graduate programs.

Graduate students will be notified of an academic action in writing by the applicable department, unit, or program head or director, or designated committee. Graduate students are encouraged to seek informal resolution of any concerns related to academic actions informally within the department, unit or program before filing a formal appeal.

Graduate students who wish to appeal an Academic Action must submit a formal, written appeal, with appropriate documentation, to the Dean of the College within seven (7) calendar days after receipt of written notice of the academic action by the department, unit, or program head or director, or designated committee. The Dean may delegate review of the matter to another individual or committee, including but not limited to one of the Associate Deans, the College Council or a specially constituted grievance committee who shall make a recommendation to the Dean. The Dean shall render a decision on the appeal within thirty (30) days or as soon thereafter as practical.

Graduate students who wish to appeal the written decision of the Dean must submit a formal written appeal, with appropriate documentation, to the Provost within fourteen (14) calendar days after receipt of the Dean’s decision. A copy of the appeal must also be submitted to the Assistant Vice Provost for Graduate Education and to the Dean. The Provost may delegate review of the matter to another individual or committee, including but not limited to the Vice Provost for Education who shall make a recommendation to the Provost. The Provost shall render a decision on the appeal within thirty (30) days or as soon thereafter as practical. Decisions by the Provost are final and not appealable.

Generally, sanctions resulting from an Academic Action (e.g. probation, suspension, or dismissal/drop) take effect immediately, regardless of whether an appeal is filed. In exceptional circumstances, however, the appropriate Dean or the Provost may elect to hold sanctions in abeyance pending the resolution of an appeal.

Summary of Levels of Appeal for Academic Actions:
- Seek informal resolution within department, unit, program
- Formal written appeal to the Dean
- Decision rendered by the Dean
Formal written appeal to the Provost
- Provost issues final non-appealable decision

**Appeal of Academic Disciplinary Actions**

Academic Disciplinary Actions are sanctions and outcomes imposed when any student violates the University Policy on Academic Integrity including cheating, plagiarism an unauthorized assistance.

The [Office of Community Standards and Integrity](https://www.communitystandards.cmu.edu) manages the Academic Disciplinary Process and provides resources to all students, faculty and staff. The process for appealing an academic integrity violation can be found under the [Academic Disciplinary Actions Index](https://www.communitystandards.cmu.edu/academic-disciplinary-actions).

**Community Standards Violations**

As members of the University community, Carnegie Mellon students are expected to respect the rights of all students, faculty and staff and adhere to the policies outlined in the *Student Handbook* contained in *The Word*, the University’s Policy website, and any applicable college, department or graduate program handbooks.

If a student has observed a violation of university policy or law, or feels harmed by another student’s misconduct (e.g. affecting his/her welfare, property, safety or security) he/she should file a report with the Dean of Student Affairs and/or University Police as appropriate.

The procedures for adjudicating community standards violations and for appealing the results are available in *The Word* under Community Standards.

For more information about community standards and disciplinary procedures, please visit the [Community Standards website](https://www.communitystandards.cmu.edu).
Harassment

Carnegie Mellon is firmly committed to intellectual honesty, freedom of inquiry and expression and respect for the dignity of each individual. Acts of harassment or intimidation by a student toward any member of the campus community will not be tolerated. Graduate students with concerns or grievances related to harassment or intimidation by another student should contact the Dean of Student Affairs for resolution. Acts of harassment or intimidation by a student may be referred to the University Committee on Discipline.

Graduate Students with concerns or grievances related to alleged harassment or intimidation by a staff member, faculty member or other member of the campus community should contact the University Ombudsman and Assistant Vice President for Diversity and Equal Opportunity Services (412) 268-1018 for resolution.

Sexual Harassment

Graduate student grievances or concerns relating to sexual harassment will be handled according to the University’s Policy Against Sexual Harassment. Any member of the university community, whether faculty member, student, or staff member, who believes she or he has been subjected to sexual harassment or knows of the occurrence of probable sexual harassment is strongly urged to immediately contact one of the sexual harassment advisors or policy coordinators directly or with the help of the sexual harassment hotline (412-268-7445).

For further information about the processes contemplated by the University’s Policy Against Sexual Harassment, see, Policy against Sexual Harassment and Sexual Harassment Advisors.

Intellectual Property Disputes

Disputes concerning rights to intellectual property must be resolved according to the procedures set forth in the University’s Intellectual Property Policy.

Research Misconduct

Carnegie Mellon University is responsible for the integrity of research conducted at the University. As a community of scholars, in which truth and integrity are fundamental, the University has established procedures for the investigation of allegations of misconduct of research with due care to protect the rights of those accused, those making the allegations, and the University. The procedures for handling allegations of research misconduct are set forth in the Policy for Handling Alleged Misconduct in Research at Carnegie Mellon University.
For graduate students found responsible for research misconduct, the President of the University may impose specific sanctions up to and including expulsion. The imposition of sanctions is subject to the procedures for approval and/or appeal prescribed for community standards violations available in The Word under Community Standards and Procedures.

Return from Leave of Absence

Graduate students who wish to return to Carnegie Mellon following a leave of absence must follow the procedures set forth in the Student Return Policy.

Generally, graduate students must negotiate their return to the University with their home academic department and follow any applicable departmental policies. If a department chooses to deny a student's return from a leave of absence, the student may appeal to the Dean of the College.

Suspension/Required Withdrawal

A University Suspension is a forced, temporary leave from the university. There are three types of suspension for students that apply to both graduate and undergraduate students:

- **Academic Suspension** is the result of poor academic performance or violation of academic regulations and is imposed by the student's college or academic department (see university and college academic policies).
- **Disciplinary Suspension** is the result of serious personal misconduct and is imposed by the Dean of Student Affairs (see The Word/Student Handbook).
- **Administrative Suspension** is the result of failure to meet university financial obligations or failure to comply with federal, state or local health regulations and is imposed by Enrollment Services. (See Student Accounts Receivable Collection Policy and Procedures for financial obligations. Contact Student Health Services for information about health regulations.)

Graduate students who wish to appeal a suspension or required withdrawal may write to the following individuals depending on the type of suspension:

- **Academic Suspension** – The applicable department, unit, or program head;
- **Disciplinary Suspension** – Dean of Student Affairs
- **Administrative Suspension** – Vice President for Enrollment, Vice President for Business and Planning, and the Dean of Student Affairs, in consultation with the student’s Associate Dean

For more details see the Student Suspension / Required Withdrawal Policy.
**General Grievances**

The following grievance procedures are to be used for graduate student problems or concerns that are not covered by any of the policies or procedures set forth above. As such, these grievance procedures may not be used as a substitute for procedures contemplated under any other policy, including but not limited to, policies regarding academic actions; academic disciplinary actions; community standards; harassment; sexual harassment; intellectual property; research misconduct or any other policy.

Graduate students are expected to discuss any concerns or grievances initially with the faculty or staff member(s) involved. Students are strongly encouraged to seek informal resolution of grievances through consultations within the academic unit, department or program. Students may also seek assistance with the informal resolution of a grievance through the designated college ombudsperson or the Assistant Vice Provost for Graduate Education.

If a grievance cannot be resolved informally with the faculty or staff member involved within the academic department, a student may submit a formal, written grievance to the head of the department, unit or program. If there is more than one student with a grievance on a particular matter, each student must submit a separate grievance. The department, unit, or program head, or director or designated committee will issue a written decision on the grievance within thirty (30) days or as soon thereafter as practical.

Graduate students who wish to appeal the written decision of the Dean must submit a formal written appeal to the Provost within seven (7) calendar days after receipt of the Dean’s decision. A copy of the appeal must also be submitted to the Assistant Vice Provost for Graduate Education and to the Dean. The Provost may delegate review of the matter to another individual or committee, including but not limited to the Vice Provost for Education who shall make a recommendation to the Provost. The Provost shall render a decision on the appeal within thirty (30) days or as soon thereafter as practical. Decisions by the Provost are final and not appealable.

**Summary of Levels of Appeal for General Grievances:**
- Seek informal resolution within department, unit, or program
- Formal review by the appropriate department, unit, or program head, or director or designated committee
- Formal written appeal to the Dean
- Formal written appeal to the Provost
- Provost issues final non-appealable decision