

## Graduate Students' Academic Appeal Procedure

The SSU Graduate Students' Academic Appeal Procedure provides students with methods to resolve academic issues. There is an informal process and a formal process for addressing academic appeals. Students must follow the steps outlined in the informal process before pursuing the formal appeal process.

### Appeal Scope

Grounds for an appeal include violation(s) of specific written standards, e.g., computational errors or dismissal from a graduate program. The Graduate Education Council may refuse to hear appeals based on matters protected by academic freedom or for other reasons. GEC reserves the right to decline to hear appeals.

### Informal Resolution of Academic Appeals

*(Must be initiated within the 1st 30 days of the semester following the action being appealed.)*

This procedure is not intended to supersede existing procedures within academic programs or departments for resolving student appeals. If the student's department or program has its own formal,

internal procedure for resolving student appeals, the student must exhaust that procedure before bringing an appeal to the Graduate Education Council; otherwise the student must follow the following informal procedure. A student with an academic appeal must initially take the appeal to the faculty member or administrator directly involved with the appeal. If the student and the faculty member or administrator satisfactorily resolve the appeal, the informal appeal resolution concludes at this point. If the student and the faculty member or administrator cannot resolve the appeal, the student should take the appeal to the appropriate Graduate Program Coordinator, then to the Department Chair. If the appeal involves the Program Coordinator, or the Chair of the Department, the student must first attempt to resolve the appeal with the other. If the student satisfactorily resolves the appeal with any individual in this process, there is no basis for submitting a formal academic appeal to the Graduate Education Council. If the student cannot satisfactorily resolve the appeal through the internal or informal processes, the student may, at his or her discretion, seek resolution via the formal procedure outlined below. In the formal appeal, the student must document that he or she attempted to resolve the appeal expeditiously through the department's or program's internal, formal appeal process or through the informal appeal process, when there is no internal formal process.

### Formal Academic Appeal Procedure

*(Must be initiated before the end of the semester following the action being appealed.)*

*Action(s) during the Spring semester must be formally appealed by the end of the following Fall.*

*Action(s) during the Fall semester must be formally appealed by the end of the following Spring.*

*Action(s) during the Summer semester must be formally appealed by the end of the following Fall.*

The student may request resolution of the appeal by initiating the following formal procedure.

1. A formal appeal is a written request from the student to the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, asking the Graduate Education Council to hear the appeal. (In the event that the complaint is against the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, the appeal goes directly to the Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs.) The student must submit a written and signed request for a formal appeal hearing within two weeks of exhausting the informal appeal process, and the written request should include as appropriate:
  - Statement of the grounds for the appeal.
  - The desired outcome from the appeal.
  - Summary and documentation of the informal appeal procedure
  - Name(s) of faculty member(s) or administrator(s) involved in the appeal.
  - Names of witnesses the student will call to testify.
  - Supporting documents. The presence or absence of supporting documents will not weigh in the decision.
2. After receipt and review of the formal written appeal, the GEC decides to hear or not hear the appeal and communicates this decision to the student.
3. The student's formal appeal is shared with the faculty member or administrator against whom the appeal is being filed and that person may prepare a written response which is shared with the student.

4. The Graduate Education Council schedules to hear accepted appeals at its next scheduled meeting, as long as the appeal is filed at least 20 days before the next scheduled meeting.
5. The Graduate Education Council hears the appeal. This hearing includes, but need not be limited to the following:
  - a. Meeting(s) with the student and the faculty member or administrator and others involved in the appeal.
  - b. Consultation with others as the Graduate Education Council deems necessary to provide a thorough investigation of the appeal, including mitigating or extenuating circumstances that bear upon the situation.

#### **Procedures of the Graduate Education Council hearings:**

The Council will convene in executive session and vote whether to hear the appeal. If the Council votes to approve hearing the appeal it will follow these procedures.

1. The hearing will not be videotaped or audio taped.
2. The Chair of the Council will ask the student and the faculty member or administrator to attend the hearing, at least 14 days in advance.
3. The hearing is intended to proceed with the student in attendance. If after being notified of the hearing date, the student is unable to attend due to excusable mitigating circumstances, the hearing will be rescheduled. If after being notified of the second hearing date, the student is again unable to attend the hearing will proceed without the student.
4. **Opening Statements.** The Chair of the Council will ask the student and the faculty member or administrator to outline the facts they intend to present during the hearing. If present, both the student and the faculty member or administrator must be present through the conclusion of the closing statements.
5. **Presentation of witnesses and evidence by the student.** The student requesting the hearing presents the facts that support his/her appeal, and if applicable, calls witnesses to support the appeal. The Council and the faculty member or administrator may question the student and the witnesses as each finishes his/her testimony.
6. **Presentation of witnesses and evidence by the faculty member or administrator.** The faculty member or administrator presents facts and calls witnesses, if applicable, to respond to the appeal. The Council members and student may question the faculty member or administrator and the witnesses as each finishes his/her testimony. The Council may ask witnesses to remain or leave the hearing room at any time during the hearing.
7. **Closing Statements.** The student and the faculty member or administrator summarize their testimony and highlight any specific information they wish the Council to consider.
8. **Deliberation by the Graduate Education Council.** All people other than the Council members and the recording secretary will leave the hearing room before the Council begins deliberations. If the Council needs more information, it may suspend the hearing in order to seek clarification. The Council will make every reasonable effort to reach a timely conclusion to its deliberations.

*The Council's decision is limited to approving or disapproving the student's appeal.*

1. In instances where more than one student brings a common appeal, the Council may wish to consider the cases at the same time. The Council will take this action only with the agreement of the students.

#### **Procedural Safeguards**

1. All Council members will refrain from discussing appeal hearings outside the Council meetings.
2. The faculty member or administrator involved in the appeal shall receive a copy of the formal appeal and all supporting documents at least two weeks prior to the hearing.
3. All information pertinent to the appeal will be available to the parties at the office of the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, or at the office of the Vice President of Academic Affairs if the appeal is against the Dean.
4. The Office of the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies will send written notification of the date, time and place of any hearing to the student, and faculty member or administrator at least seven days before the hearing to permit a reasonable amount of time to prepare.
5. Union employees have the right to choose a Union member to act as their advisor. Such advisor may be present at any hearing and may counsel the Union employee. This member may not speak or represent the student in any way.
6. Students have the right to choose a non-faculty member to act as their advisor. Such advisor may be present at any hearing and may counsel the student. However, the student must present the appeal. No person may represent the student.
7. All hearings are closed to the public and the press.

8. If any member of the Council is closely connected with the matter of the appeal, he/she must excuse him/herself from the hearing.
9. A student, faculty member or administrator may request the Council to postpone the hearing. To do so, the student, faculty member or administrator must submit a written request to postpone the hearing to the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies at least seventy-two hours before the date and time of the hearing.
10. The Dean of the School of Graduate Studies will mail the results of the Council's decision to the student, and faculty member or administrator within seven calendar days after the conclusion of the Council's deliberations.
11. The Office of the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies or the Office of the Vice President of Academic Affairs will maintain the records involved with the appeal. The Office of the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies or the Office of the Vice President of Academic Affairs will not release the appeal records unless:
  - a. Authorized in writing by the student and faculty member or administrator involved; or
  - b. conditions specified in the Family Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 and its amendments apply; or
  - c. if required by law.
12. The results of an academic appeal hearing will not be placed in a Unit member's personnel file, and cannot be used in his or her evaluation.

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