

Northern Arizona University
Graduate College
Academic Appeal Process
Revision approved by UGC 10/29/08

This appeal process is to be used by graduate students for appeal of an academic matter other than a grade appeal. Examples of matters that would be appropriate for this type of appeal would be appeal of a decision on preliminary or comprehensive exams, or matters related to non-graded lab work or academic research. All appeals must be initiated no later than the end of the next regular semester. No hearings or meetings will be held during semester breaks or summer. Faculty members and administrators must base decisions on university policy and sound academic policy. Generally, this process addresses whether an action may be considered arbitrary, capricious, or contrary to university policy

1. The graduate student who has a specific problem or grievance shall first discuss the problem or grievance with the faculty member(s) in whose class or under whose supervision the problem originated. (If the appeal is regarding a decision of a department or unit—e.g. comprehensive exams—begin with step 2).
2. If the conference with the faculty member does not resolve the issue, or if the matter concerned department or unit policy, the student shall request a conference with the academic unit administrator where the class is offered or the problem/grievance occurred—and the faculty member, if appropriate. The request should be made within three working days of the conference with the faculty member. The conference with the academic unit administrator should take place within five working days of the request. If the faculty member is the academic unit administrator, skip this step and go to step 3. The academic unit administrator shall send a letter within five working days of the conference to the student and faculty member documenting that the meeting occurred, confirming the decision that was made, and describing the next steps if the problem is not resolved.
3. If the student believes that step 2 did not resolve the problem, the student shall submit a written request to the dean (or the dean's designee) of the college where the class was offered or the problem/grievance occurred within 15 working days from the date on the letter from the academic unit administrator. The written request must contain 1) identification of the faculty member or academic unit involved; 2) a description of the action or actions the student considers arbitrary, capricious, or contrary to university policy; 3) a copy of the written response from step 2 above, and 4) an explanation specifying the points on which the student disagrees with the academic unit administrator's decision. The dean (or designee) will issue a written reply to the student within 15 working days of receiving the written request from the student. The dean or designee's reply will document whether a meeting occurred, describe the decision that was made, and include the next steps if the problem is not resolved. Copies of the written reply shall be provided to others who have been involved in the appeal process to this stage.
4. If the student is not satisfied with the results of requests to faculty, academic unit administrator, and dean or designee of the college, the student may file a written request for an appeal with the associate dean of the Graduate College. The request must be submitted within 15 working days of the date of the written reply from the dean (or designee) of the college.

The written request for an appeal must contain 1) the identification of the faculty member or academic unit involved; 2) a description of the action or actions the student considers arbitrary, capricious, or contrary to university policy; 3) a copy of all written response(s); and 4) an explanation specifying the points about which the student disagrees with previous decisions by the academic unit administrator and college dean. Upon completion of the investigation of the grievance, the associate dean of the Graduate College shall determine whether or not the grievance addresses an action that may be considered arbitrary, capricious, or contrary to university policy. Within 15 working days of receiving the written request from the student, the associate dean shall render a decision in writing with justification and reasons for the decision.

Copies of the written decision shall be provided to the student and others who have been involved in the appeal process to this stage along with a description of the next step if the problem is not resolved.

5. The student may appeal the associate dean's decision within 15 working days to the University Graduate Committee Hearing Panel, a subcommittee of the University Graduate Committee. The hearing panel is a five-member panel drawn from members of the University Graduate Committee. The graduate student member of the University Graduate Committee shall be a member of the hearing panel. The panel is chaired by the faculty chair (or designee) of the University Graduate Committee. The chairperson, in consultation with the graduate dean, shall identify the members of the hearing panel as needed, ensuring impartiality for all parties involved in the appeal. Each member of the hearing panel shall declare that no conflict of interest exists between the member and any party involved in the appeal.

The student must provide an additional explanation to the hearing panel regarding the points of disagreement with the decision made by the associate dean of the Graduate College.

The hearing panel will review the written decisions and any written responses to prior decisions to determine whether the action(s) being appealed were arbitrary, capricious, or contrary to university policy. Based on review of those materials, they shall determine whether a formal hearing is appropriate. An affirmative vote by at least three members of the panel will be required to hear the appeal. The hearing panel has 20 working days after receipt of the request to review the materials and decide whether a hearing will be held. (See Hearing Guidelines below). If there is a decision to hold a hearing, the hearing panel has 10 working days to arrange for a hearing. A final recommendation will be made within three working days after review of the materials or following the conclusion of the hearing. This recommendation shall be in writing and shall be transmitted to the graduate dean, whose decision shall be final. The graduate dean shall render a decision in writing within five working days of receiving the recommendation. Copies of the written decision shall be provided to the student and others who have been involved in the appeal process to this stage.

6. If an extension of time is needed during any phase of the process, the party requesting an extension shall petition the graduate dean and present reasons why the deadline cannot be met. The graduate dean will notify all involved parties regarding the granting or denial of the request for an extension with the goal of ensuring fairness and a timely resolution of the problem.

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Hearing Guidelines**

1. The chairperson of the hearing panel will prepare and send a written notice to the student and faculty member no less than seven (7) days prior to the date set for the hearing. The notice shall include:
 - a) A statement of the date, time, location and nature of the hearing;
 - b) A written statement of the purpose of the hearing;
 - c) A copy of the Graduate College Academic Appeal Process and these hearing guidelines;
 - d) A list of the names of all hearing panel members and the university address of the chairperson.
2. Conduct of the Hearing.
 - a) The purpose of the hearing is to determine whether prior actions in the appeal process were arbitrary, capricious or contrary to university policy.
 - b) In order to reserve the confidential nature of the appeal process, and to protect the privacy of the student and faculty member, the hearing conducted by the hearing panel shall be closed.
 - c) The chairperson of the hearing panel shall preside at the hearing and shall rule upon all procedural matters. The formal rules of evidence shall not apply, although objections to the introduction of specific statements or documents may be considered by the chairperson. Irrelevant, immaterial or unduly repetitious information shall be excluded.
 - d) The student and faculty member may each select an adviser to assist him/her during the hearing. The adviser may be a faculty or staff member, student, or other representative of the student. The adviser shall be limited to advising the student and shall not participate directly in the hearing. The adviser may not appear in lieu of a student or speak on behalf of the student. The adviser shall not serve as an attorney.
 - e) Minutes of the hearing shall be made and kept in the office of the Graduate College. Both parties, faculty and student, will be sent copies of the minutes and given an opportunity to propose corrections to the minutes. Both parties should agree that the minutes are an accurate representation of what they said. In case of a disagreement, the decision of the chair of the hearing panel is final.
 - f) The student who has requested the hearing shall present statements or written information in his/her own behalf. A student who fails to appear at the hearing will be deemed to have abandoned his/her request, unless the student can demonstrate that an extraordinary circumstance prevented his/her appearance.
 - g) The order of presentation shall be as follows:
 - 1) The chair of the hearing panel shall present an opening statement summarizing the events to date and outlining the order of the proceedings.

- 2) The student makes an opening statement and presents his/her case. The student may be questioned by members of the hearing panel at the conclusion of his/her presentation.
 - 3) The faculty member makes an opening statement and presents his/her case. The faculty member may be questioned by members of the hearing panel at the conclusion of his/her presentation.
 - 4) Throughout the proceeding, the parties may introduce written documents as evidence. All such documents which are admitted shall be marked as exhibits and may be considered by the Hearing Panel in reaching its decision.
 - 5) Following the presentations and questions, the parties will be allowed to present closing statements which summarize the evidence that has been presented. The student presents his/her closing statement first, followed by the faculty member.
3. Hearing Panel Deliberations and Recommendation
- 1) Following the presentation of evidence and closing statements, the members of the hearing panel shall discuss the evidence that has been presented and the reasonable inferences to be drawn from the evidence prior to reaching its decision. Only the members of the hearing panel may be present during the deliberations.
 - 2) Based upon the evidence presented during the hearing, the Hearing Panel will formulate a recommendation to the Graduate dean. At least three votes are necessary to make any recommendation.
 - 3) The hearing panel shall render its recommendation following the hearing, and shall communicate the recommendation to the student, faculty member and Graduate dean in writing no later than two (2) days following the conclusion of the hearing. The written recommendation shall include findings of fact and a statement of the reasons for the recommendation, and shall be signed by the chairperson.

4. Review and Decision by Graduate dean

Following a review of the Hearing Panel's recommendation, the Graduate dean shall render a decision which either affirms, denies or modifies the recommendation of the Hearing Panel. This decision shall be transmitted to the student, faculty member and members of the Hearing Panel, in writing, and shall be final.

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