

OSU Graduate Student Appeals Policy

Introduction

The fundamental principle of the *Graduate Student Appeals Policy* is that an equitable informal resolution is in the best interests of all parties and that formal Graduate Council Appeals should be reserved for rare situations. The Policy is applicable to all Oklahoma State University (OSU) graduate students in graduate degree or certificate programs and is not applicable to admission decisions.

As part of the application and matriculation process, all graduate students have the opportunity to review OSU graduate education policies, procedures and guidelines, including this Policy governing appeals. It is the responsibility of prospective and current students to read and understand this information, and any questions should be directed to the Graduate College. Matriculation in a graduate degree or certificate program is an implied consent by the student to abide by OSU policies and procedures, such as this Policy.

Students not adhering to their academic program or Graduate College appeal policies and procedures, not meeting appeal deadlines outlined in this Policy or otherwise acting in a manner inconsistent with this or other College or University policies may forfeit their rights to further appeals.

The Policy herein is intended for resolving graduate education issues not related to the *Student Code of Conduct* or grades in nonresearch-related courses. Student Conduct Code violations are addressed by the Student Conduct Education and Administration, Housing and Residential Life, and Fraternity and Sorority Affairs (<http://studentconduct.okstate.edu>). Grade appeals in nonresearch-related courses are reviewed by the Grade Appeals Board (Policies & Procedures, P&P, 2-0821), and issues related to academic integrity are reviewed by the Academic Integrity Panel (P&P 2-0822).

In addition, the University is committed to providing an environment of study and work free from gender discrimination and sexual harassment as prohibited by Title VII and Title IX (P&P 1-0702). Any individual who believes she/he may have experienced gender discrimination, including sexual harassment, or who believes that she/he has observed such actions taking place, may receive information and assistance regarding the University's policies and responsive processes from any of the following offices:

- Director of Affirmative Action /Title IX Coordinator, 408 Whitehurst Hall, 405-744-5371;
- Student Conduct Officer, 326 Student Union Building, 405-744-5470;
- Vice President of Student Affairs, 201 Whitehurst Hall; 405-744-5328; and
- System Senior Vice President, 101D Whitehurst Hall, 405-744-5627.

This Policy herein may apply to situations such as program requirements, plans of study, research grades, formal reports, creative components, program dismissals, qualifying, comprehensive and preliminary exam procedures, and thesis/dissertation defenses. Moreover, typically only procedural issues are considered appealable – appeals must be based upon the

unit/department/program's failure to adhere to their published rules and regulations as well as the Graduate College's or University's published rules and regulations. In general, professional and scholarly assessments made by faculty and advisory committees are not appealable.

Notes:

- The Dean of the Graduate College has the discretion to set other deadlines throughout the appeal process when a time sensitive matter is under consideration.
- In agreement with OSU Policy, written communication includes electronic formats such as email.

Appeals Process

A student wishing to appeal the unit/department/program's failure to adhere to their published rules and regulations should follow the procedures outlined below. During the appeal process, the student should maintain enrollment and continue working on degree requirements. The Graduate College serves as a resource to all parties, including the students, involved in the appeal. Students, Graduate Faculty, and staff are encouraged to reach out to the Graduate College for assistance.

Time Frames

- All appeals at any level whether informal or formal require the student to provide written notification of appeal to the graduate program coordinator within 14 calendar days of the precipitating event, such as a program dismissal. If the graduate coordinator is an involved party, please seek advice from the Graduate College.

Deadlines

- Unless stated otherwise, all deadlines are by 5 pm central time on the day of the deadline or the next regular business day (Monday-Friday) when the deadline falls on a weekend (Saturday-Sunday) or OSU official holiday, such as Labor Day.
- Time frames and deadlines that extend beyond the end of the academic terms (fall and spring semesters and summer sessions) are handled at the discretion of the Dean of the Graduate College.

Documentation

- Written records are important to enhancing all parties' understandings of an issue. The situation being appealed should be documented in writing even during the informal process. The decision on all appeals must be provided in writing to all involved parties, especially the student. When the internal (unit/department/program) appeal processes have been exhausted and a final decision is being communicated to the involved parties, the Dean of the Graduate College should be copied on the correspondence.
 - All appeals, including those to the Dean of the Graduate College, must be in writing and contain the following in no more than two pages (12 point font; single spaced or greater; 1" margins):
 - information on the circumstances of the appeal,

- specific procedural issues involved, and
- remediation action sought.
- Appeals to the Dean of the Graduate College must be delivered to the Graduate College in person or to grad.dean@okstate.edu.

Informal Appeals Process

- A student's first attempt to resolve a situation must be made directly with the involved parties. When not an involved party, the faculty advisor, research mentor, advisory committee member or graduate program coordinator is an excellent resource for the student.

Units/departments/programs organize their own appeals processes. If specified, the student should follow any graduate program or academic unit/department appeal procedures, up to and including the unit/department/program head. For graduate students, any appeal to the "dean" is the Dean of the Graduate College.

- Once unit/department/program-level appeals are exhausted, a written appeal should be submitted to the Dean of the Graduate College.
 - Graduate students are encouraged to receive counsel from the Associate Dean of the Graduate College or her/his designee about the appeals process.
- In the absence of unit/department/program-level appeal procedures, the appeal process is first to the graduate program coordinator (if not an involved party), followed by an appeal to the unit/department head or graduate program director (if not an involved party).
- Once the unit/department/program-level appeals have been exhausted, the Dean of the Graduate College or her/his designee will determine if appropriate grounds for an appeal exist and will first attempt to resolve the issue informally.
 - If grounds for an appeal based on the determination of the Graduate College do not exist, all involved parties will be informed in writing.
 - This decision is final and is not subject to further appeal within the University structure.
 - The outcome of the informal appeals process will be provided in writing to all involved parties by the Graduate College.
 - Every attempt will be made to resolve appeals as quickly as possible, and all involved parties are expected to make themselves available.
 - When possible, the Graduate College will complete the informal appeals process within 60 calendar days.

Formal Graduate Council Appeal Process

A formal appeal to the Graduate Council can be made if all internal informal appeals have failed and the Dean of the Graduate College or her/his designee determines there are grounds for a formal Graduate Council Appeal. As noted above, appeals to the Graduate Council are based upon the unit/department/program's failure to adhere to its, the Graduate College's or the University's published rules and regulations. It would be exceedingly rare for an appeal to the Graduate Council to be beyond such a scope.

The Request to Appeal to the Graduate Council must be received by the Graduate College within 14 calendar days of delivery of the outcome of the informal appeals process.

- The Request to Appeal should contain the aforementioned information and supporting documentation.
- Appeals to the Dean of the Graduate College must be delivered to the Graduate College in person or to grad.dean@okstate.edu.

Once the Request to Appeal is received by the Dean of the Graduate College, the following process begins:

- The Dean of the Graduate College or her/his designee will meet with the student to discuss the situation and the appeals process as soon as possible, typically within seven calendar days. The student may waive this meeting.
- If after the Request to Appeal meeting, the student wishes to make a formal appeal to the Graduate Council, he or she will submit a final document to the Graduate College that will be shared with the involved parties. It should contain the following information in no more than two pages (12 point font; single spaced or greater; 1” margins):
 - information on the circumstances of the appeal,
 - specific procedural issues involved, and
 - remediation action sought.

Beyond the two page limit, the following should also be included:

- listing of the involved parties (names and brief statement of involvement),
- optional witness list (name, contact information and relevance to the appeal),
- name and title of an advisor (optional – see description below), and
- correspondence or other documentation relevant to the appeal.
 - Optional witness statements should be introduced here if relevant. In general, no witness will be permitted to participate in the hearing, if her/his contribution is not documented here.

The involved parties will be given a deadline (typically seven calendar days) by the Dean of the Graduate College to respond in writing to the appeal. Unless otherwise directed, a single response should be submitted that is limited to two pages (12 point font; single spaced or greater; 1” margins). The response will be shared with the student.

Beyond the two page limit, the following should also be included:

- Correspondence or other documentation relevant to the appeal.
- name and title of an advisor (optional – see description below) and
- optional witness list (name, contact information and relevance to the appeal) and witness statements should be introduced here if relevant. In general, no witness will be permitted to participate in the hearing, if their contribution is not documented here.

After receipt of a formal Graduate Council Appeal, the Dean of the Graduate College or her/his designee will form and be the nonvoting, *ex officio* chair of an *ad hoc* Graduate Council Appeals Committee that considers the case. This *ad hoc* committee shall be composed of the following:

- two members from Graduate Council nominated by the vice-chair of Graduate Council – the Dean of the Graduate College may not be one of the nominees, and

- one executive board member from the Graduate and Professional Student Government Association (GPSGA) nominated by the president of the GPSGA.

The chair and three members are required to be present and hear the case. In the case of scheduling conflicts, the vice-chair of the Graduate Council and/or the president of GPSGA will provide alternate nominees.

- The Committee membership is not publicized to the involved parties or the student.
- Potential Committee members will be vetted for conflicts of interest with the student, involved parties and witnesses.

In instances where conflicts arise related to the composition of the Committee as described above, the Dean of the Graduate College may request a variance from the Provost to ensure the formation of an equitable committee.

The Committee will be provided with the documents submitted by the student and the involved parties for review.

Hearing

A hearing will be scheduled by the Dean of the Graduate College, typically within 30 calendar days of receiving the Appeal and Response documents. The Dean of the Graduate College will present a summary statement of the student appeal to the *ad hoc* Graduate Council Appeals Committee. The Committee will entertain separate testimony from the student lodging the Appeal and the individuals named in said Appeal. Neither will be present for the other's testimony. The student and the involved parties will each have five minutes to make an opening statement, if they so choose. In case of several involved parties, one individual should be selected as the representative for the involved parties.

The statement will be followed by investigative questions from the Committee to clarify the information provided by the student, involved parties and witnesses. All parties are dismissed after their time slots, and the Committee adjourns to closed session for deliberations.

A majority vote of this Committee shall determine the outcome of the case. The Committee may vote to deny or support the appeal in whole or in part or impose an alternative resolution. This decision and alternative resolution are binding and shall not be subject to further appeal within the University structure. The Committee has the authority to instruct the Registrar to change a final course grade, if necessary, to carry out the Committee's decision. The student, a representative of the involved parties, and other relevant individuals will be informed of the outcome of the Committee's deliberations by the Dean of the Graduate College – normally within seven calendar days of the hearing.

Witnesses: Individuals with direct knowledge of a situation may provide substantiating evidence to be considered by the Committee. Any party is permitted to have witnesses to assist with establishing the facts in the case. Witnesses are not required, and the *choice* to present witnesses has no bearing on the Committee's decision. Witness statements should be included in the documentation submitted to the Dean of the Graduate College for review by the Committee. Witnesses may accompany the student or involved party in the hearing. Witnesses typically do

not give prepared statements, but generally are asked to respond to Committee member questions.

Advisors: Any party is welcome to have an advisor present. This individual is a silent observer, does not participate in the hearing process and has no direct communication with the Committee or other parties, but may be consulted with by her/his advisee during the hearing process.

- Within the time frame allotted, the student or involved party may call a short recess inside or outside the hearing room to consult with an advisor.

Scheduling: While every attempt to schedule all parties will be made, the focus of scheduling is on the student, Committee, and representative involved party. It is the responsibility of the student and representative involved party to ensure any other involved parties, witnesses and/or advisors are available for the hearing.

Confidentiality: Except as noted above, the appeals process is confidential and all documents, conversations and identities should be treated as such, to the extent allowed by law.

Originally Approved (Replacing Previous Policy) – September 2012
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