

The University of Tennessee Graduate Council Appeal Procedure

(Effective Fall 2017)

Approved by Graduate Council: 2005

Revised: 2009

Revised: October 2017

General admission, continuation, and graduation requirements are established by the Graduate Council and administered and monitored by the Dean of the Graduate School. Basic requirements of graduate education are outlined in the Graduate Catalog. Additional admission, continuation, and graduation requirements may be established by and are made available through the department or program office.

Graduate Student Rights

All graduate students are entitled (1) to be provided with a published statement of all university, college, and department requirements for continuation and graduation, and (2) to have access to the procedures and criteria for evaluation of academic performance, and the schedule and requirements for diagnostic, qualifying, comprehensive, and final examinations.

Graduate Student Responsibilities

A graduate student must abide by the Standards for Conduct outlined in the published student handbook called *Hilltopics*. *Hilltopics* and the *Graduate Catalog* present the Honor statement for students concerning academic honesty. All graduate students are required to acknowledge these standards of integrity and honesty in all learning, teaching, and research. A graduate student can, in turn, expect the same degree of integrity and honesty from all teachers, mentors, and advisors. Students with grievances concerning the interpretation of and adherence to university, college, and department policies and procedures or grades can file a formal appeal. Appeal procedures in regard to allegations of misconduct or academic dishonesty are presented in *Hilltopics* under [Student Code of Conduct](#) and at the

graduate council's website at gradschool.utk.edu/documents/2016/02/student-appeals-procedures.pdf

Graduate Student's Right of Appeal

A graduate student may appeal two types of academic decisions to the Graduate Council through the Graduate Appeals Committee: (1) grievances concerning the interpretation of and adherence to university, college, and department policies and procedures and (2) grievances concerning grades.

1. Students with grievances concerning the interpretation of and adherence to university, college, and department policies and procedures as they apply to graduate education should file a formal complaint with the Graduate Council through the office of the Assistant Dean of the Graduate School, but only after grievances have been duly processed, without resolution, through appropriate appeals procedures at the department and college levels. The initial appeal at the lowest level must be filed no later than 30 days after the incident that occasions the appeal. If the department head or dean of college does not respond within 30 days of receiving the student's written appeal, the student should take the appeal to the next level.
2. Students with grievances concerning grades should file a formal complaint with the Graduate Council through the Graduate Council Appeals Committee, but only after grievances have been duly processed, without resolution, through appropriate appeals procedures at the instructor, department and college levels. Students may appeal grades only on the basis of one or more of the following allowable grounds: (1) A clearly unfair decision (such as lack of consideration of circumstances clearly beyond the control of the student, e.g., a death in the family, illness, or accident); (2) Unacceptable instruction/evaluation procedures (such as deviation from stated policies on grading criteria, incompletes, late paper examinations, or class attendance); (3) Inability of the instructor to deal with course responsibilities; or (4) An exam setting which makes concentration extremely difficult. The initial grade appeal must be filed no later than 30 days after the after the final grade has been issued.

Students with grievances related to race, gender, religion, national origin, age, or handicap should file a formal complaint with the Office of Equity and Diversity with a copy to the appropriate academic department head.

The Appeals Procedure

The student with a grievance to be appealed concerning grades, policies, or procedures must abide by the following three step procedure.

1. The student must first follow and exhaust the appeal procedures at the departmental level. At a minimum, the student must confer with the appropriate faculty member, advisor and/or major professor, the Director of the graduate program, and finally the department head.
2. If the issue remains unresolved with the department head, or if the appeal is denied or is determined to be outside the purview of the department, the student may appeal in writing to the dean of the college within 30 days of the department head's decision.
3. If the student wishes to appeal the decision of the college, he or she may file a formal appeal with the Graduate Council Appeal Committee through the office of the Assistant Dean of the Graduate School within 30 days of the college dean's decision.

The formal appeal to the Graduate Council Appeals Committee must include the following written documentation:

1. Name of student filing the appeal.
2. Program in which the student is enrolled.
3. Name of student's major advisor.
4. Current contact information for the student.
5. Brief statement of the decision being appealed and the grounds for the appeal.
6. Name and position (title and relationship to student) of the person(s) to whom the original appeal was made and date of the original appeal.
7. Copies of the original statement of appeal, supporting documents clearly stating the reasons on which the appeal is based, and a statement of what remedy is being sought.
8. Copies of all official statements concerning the grievance proceedings held at the departmental and college levels and the decisions rendered in these earlier appeals, including the response by the person(s) to whom the appeal was first made.
9. Statement of why the previous decisions are in error.

10. Release signed by the student to allow the appeal documents to be shared with members of the Appeals Committee.

It is the student's responsibility to make the case for the appeal. That is, the student should clearly indicate in the matter of a grade appeal one or more of the allowable reasons for appeal listed above and in the matter of an appeal of policies and procedures one or more indications of how proper policy or procedure was not followed.

To initiate the formal appeals procedure at the Graduate Council level, the student must submit a letter of appeal containing all the above information to the Assistant Dean of the Graduate School with copies to the department head and dean of the student's college. The Assistant Dean will promptly forward the material to the Chair of Appeals of the Graduate Council. The Chair will then appoint two other members of the Graduate Council Appeals Committee to serve on an appeals panel along with a graduate student member. The Assistant Dean will distribute all materials to these members of the Appeals panel, and will convene the members at the earliest opportunity. The Appeals Panel will at this meeting record by majority vote whether or not a hearing concerning the appeal should be held or if the appeal should be denied. The Appeals Committee will notify the Dean of the Graduate School of its decision in a timely manner.

The appeals committee does not meet during the summer months. When an appeal is filed during the summer, the chair of the appeals committee will form a panel upon recommendation from The Dean of the Graduate School and convene the membership "within three weeks" of the start of fall semester.

Composition of Appeals Hearing Panel

The Dean of the Graduate School appoints for each mandated hearing a hearing panel of five members, four of whom are elected members of the Graduate Council and the fifth the graduate student representative to the Council or her/his designee. Each panel is comprised of members not of the same college as the student filing the appeal. The Dean will send a specific charge to the hearing panel, defining the subject matter of the appeal, that may indicate the need for a new review of the merits of the grievance. The Chair of Appeals of the Graduate Council will facilitate the meeting of the hearing panel but will not vote on the matter.

The Appeals Hearing

The Chair of Appeals will schedule a hearing within 30 days of the Dean's appointment of a hearing panel and will distribute material to all members of the panel. The parties involved in the appeal are entitled to the following procedural rights: (1) a written notice of the time and place of hearing, and (2) the opportunity to present all pertinent evidence, including witnesses. The student involved in the appeal may be assisted at the hearing by a member of the faculty or a student representative of choice.

The hearing panel may require the student and appropriate university officials to provide, in advance of the hearing, further written statements, records, reports, and other documentation bearing on the issue under consideration.

The hearing panel will (1) conduct a hearing in closed session, (2) prepare a summarized record of the hearing to be forwarded to the Dean of the Graduate School and presented to the Graduate Council, (3) make findings of facts and a recommendation concerning disposition of the appeal to the Dean, (4) and report a summary on the activities without identifying student or department information to the Graduate Council at the next appropriate meeting.

The Dean will review all documents and either accept or reject the panel's recommendation. The Dean's decision and reasons for it, as well as any action that should be taken, will be sent to all involved parties. Per Board of Trustees bylaws, Article V, Section 5, "Any employee or student of the University who feels that he or she may have a grievance against the University shall have the right of appeal through the appropriate Chancellor or Vice President to the President of the University, except as otherwise provided by University policy." In the case of UT students, they may appeal the decision of the Dean of the Graduate School to the Provost and then the Chancellor.