

Academic Appeals Policies and Procedures

Academic appeals are submitted when a student disagrees with an academic determination, such as a change in academic status or a grade in a class. Students who would like to submit an academic appeal should complete the steps listed below.

Students who have other academic concerns should submit an academic complaint.

Students may find the following resources useful. More information about these resources is below.

- Office for University Equity and Compliance (<https://ouec.northeastern.edu>)
- Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution (<https://osccr.sites.northeastern.edu>)
- We Care (<https://we-care.studentlife.northeastern.edu>)
- Graduate Ombuds (<https://graduateombuds.northeastern.edu>)
- Northeastern University Anonymous Reporting Hotline (<https://compliance.northeastern.edu/anonymous-reporting-hotline/>)

Academic Appeal Process

INTRODUCTION

Northeastern University is committed to ensuring that all graduate students are evaluated fairly concerning their academic performance, standing, and progress. The university presumes that its faculty's academic judgments are fair and objective. Any substitution of a different judgment for that of the original evaluator is a serious intrusion upon academic prerogatives entrusted to the faculty and others involved in academic evaluations.

Students who believe they have been erroneously, capriciously, inappropriately, or otherwise unfairly treated in an academic determination may submit an academic appeal. This includes claims of misinterpretation or inequitable application of any academic provision in the Graduate Catalog or Faculty Handbook.

All appeals should be initiated and resolved in a timely manner in accordance with the detailed time limits provided in this policy. Although students are entitled to seek the advice of outside legal counsel, students may not be represented by a lawyer in the informal or formal academic appeal procedures. A student may consult with the provost or the provost's designee at any point in this procedure for advice or assistance.

It is strongly recommended that U.S.-based F-1/J-1 international students and Canadian-based international students holding a study permit consult as soon as possible with the Office of Global Services (<https://international.northeastern.edu/ogs/>) to determine the possibility of any repercussion that the timing of an appeal may have on their immigration status.

SCOPE

Academic appeals are submitted when a student disagrees with an academic determination, such as a change in academic status or a grade in a class. Decisions concerning admission or readmission into a program, including dismissals, and matters related to co-op employment (other than grades received) cannot be appealed beyond the college level. While program dismissals cannot be appealed beyond the college level, underlying academic judgments that led to a dismissal can be appealed.

Scientific or research misconduct is defined as fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, or other practices that seriously deviate from those that are commonly accepted within the academic and scientific community for proposing, conducting, or reporting research and does not include honest error or honest differences in interpretation or judgments of data. (Further information can be obtained from the U.S. Office of Research Integrity, Department of Health and Human Services.) Possible incidences of misconduct are to be reported immediately to the provost or their designee, who will initiate the appropriate procedures. Findings of scientific or research misconduct cannot be appealed through the process above.

If a student feels that they have been the victim of harassment or of discrimination prohibited by law or by university policy, and that this constitutes a substantive basis for the appeal, the appeal shall first be pursued and investigated through the Office for University Equity and Compliance (<https://ouec.northeastern.edu/>). In such cases, the appeal described in Step 3 below is submitted to the appropriate college and a copy provided to the OUEC. Following a resolution of the harassment/discrimination issues, any remaining academic issues will be addressed, at the request of the student, according to the academic appeals procedures described herein.

APPEAL OF FINAL GRADES AND OUTCOMES OF OTHER ACADEMIC EVALUATIVE PROCESSES

Step 1: Discuss with faculty member

Students are encouraged to discuss their concerns with the faculty member who made the academic determination. This step should occur as soon as possible after the academic determination, given the time limit on college-level appeals described in Step 4. If a student is not comfortable discussing the matter with the faculty member, the student should proceed to Step 2.

Step 2: Discuss with program or department administrator

If the student wishes to appeal the decision of the faculty member, or if the student is not comfortable discussing the issue with the instructor or other faculty member(s) involved, the student has the option of requesting a meeting with the appropriate administrator (e.g., program director, department chair, or group leader) to further discuss their concerns. This step should occur as soon as possible after the academic determination, given the time

limit on college-level appeals described in Step 4. If students need assistance identifying an appropriate program or department administrator, they should ask the college contact listed in Step 4 to identify the appropriate person.

Step 3: Prepare appeal statement

If the student wishes to appeal the decision of the program or department administrator, or if the situation precludes a student from pursuing these steps, the student should prepare a written statement. The statement must start with a clear description of the basis for the appeal and should include basic facts about the situation leading to the appeal, when the situation occurred, who was involved, and the resolution sought by the student.

All relevant supporting materials should be attached as addenda to the statement. Statements should avoid unsubstantiated, defamatory, or ad hominem accusations regarding the motivations of the faculty member or other persons involved in making the academic determination.

The statement and supporting materials will serve as the basis of the appeal throughout the appeals process, including at the university level.

The statement must be submitted no later than 28 days from the day when the academic determination was made available to the student. If a student wishes to dispute a grade in their final term, the statement must be submitted within 28 calendar days of the degree conferral date.

Step 4: Submit appeal to college

Graduate students shall submit the statement and all supporting materials to the college by sending it to the college email address linked here (<https://graduateeducation.sites.northeastern.edu/college-contacts-for-academic-appeals-and-academic-complaints/>). The appeal will be handled in accordance with the applicable academic appeals process within the relevant college, which may include appeals processes at multiple levels within the college. For academic appeals related to courses, appeals should be sent to the college that offers the course.

The statement must be submitted no later than 28 calendar days from the day when the academic determination is made available to the student. If a student wishes to dispute a grade in their final term, the statement must be submitted within 28 calendar days of degree conferral date.

Step 5. Submit university-level appeal

If the student is not satisfied with the college's disposition of the matter, or if the appeal is not resolved within 42 calendar days after originally submitted to the college pursuant to Step 4, the student may further pursue the matter by requesting in writing within 10 calendar days of the notification from the college in Step 4 that the university convene the Academic Appeals Resolution Committee to review the issue. This committee has been designated as the final authority on these matters. Students may obtain information on this process by sending email to otp-grad-education@northeastern.edu.

A. Submission

To submit a university-level appeal, graduate students shall submit a request for an academic appeal to the Office of the Provost at otp-grad-education@northeastern.edu. Upon receiving the request, the Office of the Provost will obtain the student's appeal statement, supporting documentation, and the responses from earlier appeals from the college.

B. Academic Appeals Resolution Committee

The Academic Appeals Resolution Committee shall be a standing committee consisting of the following:

- The provost or the provost's designee, who shall be the chair of the committee, and nonvoting member.
- Three faculty members and one alternate faculty member (with the alternate serving in instances where there is a conflict of interest or when a member has to be replaced) all from different colleges appointed by the Faculty Senate Agenda Committee. Members will serve a one-year term with no term limits.

If the appeal had at any point involved a matter of harassment/discrimination, the committee shall include a representative of the OUEC, who shall be a nonvoting member.

C. Preliminary Matters

If the Academic Appeals Resolution Committee determines, by a majority vote, that the appeal is patently without substance or merit, it may dismiss the appeal.

D. Investigation

The Academic Appeals Resolution Committee shall investigate the matter under appeal by studying the relevant documents (the statement, supporting documents, and additional accumulated documentation), interviewing the parties (especially the student and the involved faculty member), and taking any other action it deems appropriate. A resolution shall be rendered within 35 calendar days of appeal submission. At no time shall the committee be bound by rules of evidence but shall at all times conduct itself in a manner that is not arbitrary or capricious. The Academic Appeals Resolution Committee may, but is not required to, hold a hearing prior to resolving the issues. However, in all instances, the student and the involved faculty member shall have the right to appear separately and privately before the Academic Appeals Resolution Committee. The student shall have the right to have an advocate from the university community present during their testimony to the Academic Appeals Resolution Committee.

E. Authority to Act

The Academic Appeals Resolution Committee has been designated as the final authority on academic matters. At the conclusion of its investigation, the Academic Appeals Resolution Committee shall resolve, by majority vote, the issue by either upholding the finding of the college/school, in which case no further appeal is available, or granting such relief to the student as the Academic Appeals Resolution Committee deems appropriate. The Academic Appeals Resolution Committee shall not render a resolution that contradicts the prior findings or actions of the OUEC.

F. Resolution

All direct parties to the appeal, including but not limited to the student, the faculty member (or others involved in academic evaluations), the dean of the involved college(s), the Faculty Senate, and the Office of the University Registrar, shall be promptly informed in writing of the decisions and actions taken during this academic appeals procedure.

G. Action

The dean(s) or their designee in the involved college shall take whatever action is necessary to implement fully the resolution of the Academic Appeals Resolution Committee.

H. No Further Appeal

Once adjudicated by the Academic Appeals Resolution Committee, the matter is considered closed, and no further appeal can be instituted by the student or the involved faculty member with respect to the issue(s) raised at any level of the formal appeals resolutions procedures.

APPEALS PROCESS TIMELINE

Step 1: Discuss concern with faculty member	Time frame: As soon as possible after academic determination (see note below).
Step 2: Discuss with program or department administrator	Time frame: Within 10 calendar days of academic determination.
Step 3: Prepare appeal statement	
Step 4: Submit college-level appeal	Time frame: Within 28 days of academic determination. Decision notification within 42 days of appeal submission.
Step 5: Submit university-level appeal	Time frame: Within 10 calendar days of college/school decision. Resolution rendered within 35 calendar days of appeal submission.

Note: Colleges and schools will endeavor to expedite appeal responses when warranted by the circumstances.

RESOURCES

Students may find the following resources useful:

- Office of Global Services: U.S.-based F-1/J-1 international students and Canadian-based international students holding a study permit are encouraged to contact OGS to discuss potential impacts to their status.
- Office for University Equity and Compliance (<https://ouec.northeastern.edu/reporting-options/>): Students can make complaints regarding discrimination or harassment by contacting OUEC.
- Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution (<https://osccr.sites.northeastern.edu/>): Students can make complaints regarding student code of conduct violations by contacting OSCCR.
- We Care (<https://we-care.studentlife.northeastern.edu/>): Students can obtain support for unexpected challenges to maintaining academic progress by contacting We Care.
- Graduate Ombuds (<https://graduateombuds.northeastern.edu/contact/>): Graduate students seeking confidential, impartial, and informal assistance regarding concerns related to their university experience can contact the Graduate Ombuds.
- Students may use the Northeastern University Anonymous Reporting Hotline (<https://secure.ethicspoint.com/domain/media/en/gui/32115/>).