

# Grade Appeal Policy

It is the policy of Northeastern University that all students shall be treated fairly in evaluations made of their academic performance, standing, and progress. The university presumes that academic judgments by its faculty are fair, consistent, and objective. Students must understand that the substitution of a different academic judgment for that of the original evaluator is a serious intrusion upon teaching prerogatives. Nonetheless, the university believes it is essential to provide an appeals mechanism to students who believe that they were erroneously, capriciously, or otherwise unfairly treated in an academic or cooperative education determination. This includes claims of misinterpretation or inequitable application of any academic provision of the university's *Graduate Catalog*, *Student Handbook*, or *Faculty Handbook*.

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.

The steps below are for academic appeals. In the academic appeals procedures described herein, "dean" refers to the dean of the college or a designee. If a student feels that they have been the victim of harassment or of discrimination prohibited by university policy, they should consult with the Office for University Equity and Compliance (<https://ouec.northeastern.edu/>) as soon as they become aware of alleged prohibited harassment or discrimination. A student is not required to wait until a term grade or determination is received before seeking advice or redress. If the OUEC is advised of such alleged prohibited conduct as part of an academic appeal (see below), the appeal shall be pursued and investigated through the OUEC first. In such cases, the student should submit the appeal to the appropriate dean(s) described in Step 2, with a copy also given 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.

Before invoking the appeals procedures, students are always encouraged to speak informally to their instructors or graduate program coordinator/director about any determination or grade about which they have questions. If students choose to pursue an appeal, the process is described in the appeals section that follows.

A student may appeal an academic determination by submitting a written statement that details the action or judgment and the basis for the appeal. All parties shall cooperate and act expeditiously in processing the appeal to completion.

All appeals should be initiated and resolved in a timely manner in accordance with the detailed time limits provided in this document.

Though students are always entitled to seek the advice of legal counsel, a student's lawyer cannot be present in the informal or formal academic appeal procedures. A student may consult with the provost or their designee at any point in these procedures for advice or assistance. University officials may take whatever steps they deem reasonably appropriate to achieve resolution of the problem at any stage of these procedures.

It is strongly recommended that international students 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.

## Scientific or Research Misconduct

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 (<https://ori.hhs.gov/>).) 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 below.

## Appeal of Final Grades and Outcomes of Other Academic Evaluative Processes

- Step 1: Discuss Concerns with Instructor and/or Graduate Program Coordinator/Director
- Step 2: Prepare an Appeal Statement
- Step 3: Associate Dean of Graduate Programs-Level Resolution
- Step 4: College-Level Appeal
- Step 5: University-Level Appeal

### STEP 1: DISCUSS CONCERNS WITH INSTRUCTOR AND/OR GRADUATE PROGRAM COORDINATOR/DIRECTOR

In most cases, students should first discuss their concerns with the faculty member who taught the course to see if it is possible to reach agreement on the issue(s). If the student is not satisfied with the outcome of this discussion, or if the student is not comfortable discussing the issue with the instructor, the student should request a meeting with the appropriate administrator (e.g., program coordinator/director or chair) to further discuss their concerns. If these attempts to informally resolve the issue fail, the student can enter the formal procedure at the college level as follows. Note that this step should occur as soon as possible after the academic determination given the time frame for appeal statement submission described in Step 2.

**STEP 2: PREPARE AN APPEAL STATEMENT**

A student appeals an academic determination by submitting a written statement (the Statement). The Statement shall include when the problem occurred, who made the disputed determination, the nature of the determination, and what resolution the student is requesting. All relevant supporting materials should be attached to the Statement. The Statement should be submitted no later than 28 calendar days from the day when the academic determination is made available to the student. If the appeal concerns academic probation, a grade, or course evaluation, it is submitted to the associate dean of graduate programs in the college. If, however, the appeal concerns a grade or course evaluation for a course taken in a college other than CAMD, refer to and follow the grade appeal policy for that college (individual college appeal procedures can be viewed within the college's section of this catalog). If a student wishes to dispute a grade in their final term, this must be done within 28 calendar days of degree conferral date.

**STEP 3: ASSOCIATE DEAN OF GRADUATE PROGRAMS-LEVEL RESOLUTION**

The associate dean of graduate programs shall respond to the student in writing, including specific instructions for the student to seek an informal resolution to the matter, unless such a course of action as outlined by the student in the Statement is demonstrably futile. A copy of this response shall be sent to the graduate program coordinator/director and department chairperson of the appropriate unit. If the student has failed to achieve relief through an informal resolution, the associate dean of graduate programs shall discuss the matter with the department chairperson or equivalent supervisor, who shall attempt to affect an informal resolution. In this case, the student shall also have the right to discuss the matter with the chairperson, or equivalent supervisor, in which department the faculty member involved in the matter serves.

If the appeal involves allegations of prohibited harassment or discrimination, the associate dean of graduate programs shall consult with the OUEC before responding and shall, as part of this response, explain the role that the OUEC will play in Steps 4 and 5 of this procedure.

**STEP 4: COLLEGE-LEVEL APPEAL**

If the student is not satisfied with the disposition of the matter at Step 3, they may proceed with the appeal through the college's established academic appeals procedure. The dean or the academic standing committee, as applicable, must provide the student and the involved faculty member with a written report of their/its finding(s) and decision.

- This step involves a review by a college academic standing committee making the recommendation to the dean. The student may obtain a copy of the operating rules of the academic standing committee from the dean or their designee.
- In appeals involving allegations of prohibited harassment or discrimination, the dean or academic standing committee shall receive a report of the findings of the investigation of the OUEC. The dean or committee shall be without authority to reverse or modify the OUEC finding(s) or resolution and, instead, shall work to resolve the remaining academic appeal issue(s).

**STEP 5: 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 35 calendar days after having been submitted to the associate dean of graduate programs pursuant to Step 2, they may appeal the matter to the university level. The student shall submit a request in writing, within 10 calendar days of the finding of 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. Please refer to Academic Appeals Policies and Procedures (<https://catalog.northeastern.edu/graduate/academic-policies-procedures/appeals/>) in the graduate section of this catalog for information about this process.