

Academic Appeals Policy

Northeastern University affirms that it is essential to provide an appeals mechanism to students who believe that they have been erroneously, capriciously, or otherwise unfairly treated. Information about the university appeals process and procedures can be found in this catalog (<https://catalog.northeastern.edu/graduate/academic-policies-procedures/appeals/#text>).

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, 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, and they are 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, the appeal shall first be pursued and investigated through 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 encouraged to speak informally to their instructors or academic advisors about any determination or grade about which they have questions. If students choose to pursue an appeal, the Mills College at Northeastern process is described in the appeals section that follows. The Mills College Curriculum Committee serves as the Academic Appeals Committee for MCNU.

Graduate Academic Appeals Committee

The Academic Appeals Committee for MCNU is an ad hoc committee composed of the voting members of the MCCC. If the faculty member is a member of the MCCC at the time of the appeal, the dean of MCNU will appoint a replacement committee member for purposes of the appeal.

The chair of the Academic Appeals Committee is the associate dean of curriculum for MCNU, who can be contacted at otp-mcnu-grad-education@northeastern.edu.

The Academic Appeals Committee is convened in order to determine whether a fair and due process was used to determine the student's grade.

The role of the committee is:

- In the instance of an appeal of dismissal, to determine whether a fair and due process was used.
- In the instance of a grade appeal, to conduct a review when a grade appeal is filed by a student for one of the following reasons:
 - The course grading policy was not applied consistently to all students within a class and/or section.
 - The instructor's method of assigning grades differed from the method outlined in the instructor's course syllabus.
 - The instructor failed to provide a clear policy on how grades would be assigned.

Grade Appeals

If a graduate student wishes to dispute a grade in a course taught by a member of the MCNU faculty, the first step is for the student to 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 able to resolve their issues with the faculty member who taught the course, the student should work with the program director to attempt a department-level resolution.

If these informal attempts to resolve the issue fail, the student can enter the formal procedure at the college level.

The student should meet with the associate dean for curriculum, who will attempt to resolve the issue by working with the instructor and the department/program. Contact the associate dean for curriculum at otp-mcnu-grad-education@northeastern.edu to schedule the meeting. If it is not possible for the associate dean to resolve the issue with the department/program, the associate dean will determine whether or not there is just cause to convene the Academic Appeals Committee.

The decision to convene the Academic Appeals Committee will be based upon the following:

- The student sincerely attempted to resolve the complaint with the professor and the department/program.
- The complaint is substantive in nature (adjudication could affect student's course grade and/or academic record).
- The complaint has been brought forward in a timely manner.
 - 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, this must be done within 28 calendar days of degree conferral date.

If the associate dean determines the appeal should be brought to the Academic Appeals Committee, the student must provide a formal written complaint to the associate dean within one week of the student's meeting with the associate dean.

- The written complaint should provide a detailed timeline as well as all available evidence supporting the student's complaint.
 - It is the student's responsibility to make their case. Students may submit any evidence such as emails, quizzes, examinations, etc.
 - Information about the statement can be found under *Step 2 Prepare an Appeal Statement* in the Academic Appeals Policies and Procedures (<https://catalog.northeastern.edu/graduate/academic-policies-procedures/appeals/#text>) in this catalog.
- Once the associate dean receives a formal written complaint, the associate dean will provide a copy of the complaint to the faculty member and to the program director and convene a meeting of the Academic Appeals Committee.
- If the student fails to provide a thoughtful and well-reasoned written summary of the case, then the matter will be considered closed at the college level.
- The associate dean will make a good faith effort to identify a date and time for the meeting within 35 calendar days of the student's original submission of their statement.

Appeals Meeting

The student and the faculty member have the right to attend and present their case orally to the committee. The faculty member and the student are not required to attend; however, it is usually quite helpful to make an oral presentation and answer any questions that the committee may have. If the complainant indicates that they will present their case in person and then fails to attend the scheduled hearing, the case will be dismissed. The complainant and the faculty member both have the right to testify privately and separately before the committee. Lawyers are not permitted in these proceedings. Generally, the faculty member and complainant are each given a 15-minute period to present their case.

The student usually presents their complaint to the committee first. The committee may then ask the complainant any questions they have based upon either the written statement submitted by the complainant or the complainant's oral presentation. The faculty member then presents their case, which is followed by questions from the committee. After both the complainant and faculty member have addressed the committee, the committee then reviews the evidence, summarizes the case, and makes a recommendation to the associate dean concerning the resolution of the complaint.

If the committee believes it cannot resolve any issues without additional information, the committee may request any information needed from either the complainant, faculty member, or department/program. This information must be provided to the committee within one week of the meeting. If the requested information is not provided in the required time frame, then the committee may weigh this failure in making its final determination regarding the original complaint.

Committee Process

- All decisions of the committee will be made based on a simple majority (51%) vote.
- The chair of the committee only votes when there is a tie.
- The student bringing the complaint to the committee carries the burden of proof based on the weight of the evidence in demonstrating that the grade is incorrect or unjustified.
- If the committee decides that the grading process was unfair, the committee can request that the instructor changes the student's grade.
 - If an acceptable agreement involves a change of grade, the instructor is responsible for submitting a change of grade to the Office of the University Registrar in a timely manner following notification of the committee's decision.

The student shall be notified within 3 business days of a decision being reached. If the student or the faculty member is not satisfied with the committee's disposition of the matter, or if the grade appeal is not resolved within 35 calendar days after the written statement is submitted to the college, they may further pursue the matter by requesting in writing that the university convene an academic appeals resolution committee to review the issue. This must be submitted within 10 calendar days of the notification from the college. This committee has been designated as the final authority on these matters. Students may obtain information on this process by contacting the Office of the Provost.

Academic Dismissal Appeal

If a student wishes to dispute an academic dismissal, the first step is to consult the associate dean for curriculum about appealing to the department/program. If and when all departmental appeals are exhausted, the student can enter the formal procedure at the college level.

The student will meet with the associate dean, who will attempt to resolve the issue by working with the department/program. Contact the associate dean at otp-mcnu-grad-education@northeastern.edu to schedule the meeting. If it is not possible for the associate dean to resolve the issue with the department/program, the associate dean will determine if the complaint is substantive and there is just cause to convene the Academic Appeals Committee.

The student must provide a formal written complaint to the associate dean within one week of the student's meeting with the associate dean. The statement must be submitted no later than 10 calendar days from the day when the academic determination is made available to the student. The written complaint should provide a detailed timeline as well as all available evidence supporting the student's complaint. Once the associate dean receives a formal written complaint, the associate dean will provide a copy of the complaint to the department/program director and convene a meeting of the Academic Appeals Committee. If the student fails to provide a thoughtful and well-reasoned written summary of the case, then the matter will be considered closed at the college level.

The associate dean will make a good faith effort to identify a date and time for the meeting within 35 calendar days of the student's original submission of their statement.

Appeals Meeting

The student has the right to attend and present their case orally to the committee. The student is not required to attend; however, it is usually quite helpful to make an oral presentation and answer any questions that the committee may have. If the complainant indicates that they will present their case in person and then fails to attend the scheduled hearing, the case will be dismissed. Lawyers are not permitted in these proceedings.

The student usually presents their complaint to the committee first. The committee may then ask the complainant questions based upon either the written case submitted by the complainant or the complainant's oral presentation. The committee then reviews the evidence, summarizes the case, and makes a recommendation to the associate dean concerning the resolution of the complaint.

If the committee believes it cannot resolve any issues without additional information, the committee may request any information needed from either the complainant or department/program. This information must be provided to the committee within one week of the meeting. If the needed information is not provided in the time frame required, then the committee may weigh this failure in making its final determination regarding the original complaint.

Committee Process

- All decisions of the committee will be made based on a simple majority (51%) vote.
- The associate dean is chair of the committee and only votes when there is a tie.
- The student bringing the complaint to the committee carries the burden of proof based on the weight of the evidence in demonstrating that the dismissal is incorrect or unjustified.
- If the committee decides that the academic dismissal should be revoked, the committee can request that the department reinstate the student immediately.

Decisions concerning dismissals 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.