

# Academic Appeals Policies and Procedures

It is the policy of the 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 *Undergraduate Catalog*, *Student Handbook*, *Faculty Handbook*, or *Cooperative Education Handbook*.

The steps below are for academic appeals. In the academic appeals procedures described herein, "dean" refers to the dean of the appropriate 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.

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 vice provost for curriculum and programs or the senior vice chancellor for student life or their designees 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.

For Northeastern University nonmatriculated undergraduate students and matriculated students in temporary study-away program status on any of the university's campuses, academic appeals may be made first through the established, location-specific appeal process. If a student is not satisfied with the results of that appeal, they will have the right to appeal to the University Academic Appeals Resolution Committee, which will make a final determination on the appeal. The Office of the Provost will be responsible for implementing any resolution from the appeal process, if any.

## Step 1: Discuss Concerns with Instructor and/or Unit Head

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 department chair, or a person named by the chair, to attempt a department-level resolution. 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, it is submitted to the dean of the college in which the student is enrolled. If the appeal concerns a grade or course evaluation, it is submitted to the dean of the college in which the course was given. 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: Dean's-Level Resolution

The dean 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 department chairperson or equivalent supervisor of the appropriate unit. If the student has failed to achieve relief through an informal resolution, the dean shall discuss the matter with the department chairperson or equivalent supervisor and, if applicable, the dean of the college in which the faculty member involved in the matter serves, who shall attempt to effect 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 dean 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 their 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 of the college involved.

- 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 dean 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, to the vice provost for curriculum and programs that the university convene an academic appeals resolution committee to review the issue.

The academic appeals resolution committee includes:

- The vice provost for curriculum and programs or a designee
- A faculty member (not involved in this dispute) appointed by the dean or the dean's designee from the student's major college(s), department(s), or area(s) of specialization
- Two faculty members appointed by the Faculty Senate Agenda Committee (if the appeal is based on a cooperative education determination, one of the faculty members shall be a member of the cooperative education faculty but not from the student's area of study)
- If the appeal had at any point involved a matter of prohibited harassment or discrimination, the committee shall include a representative of the OUEC, who shall be a nonvoting member

The chairperson shall be elected from among the committee's three faculty members.

### **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.

### **INVESTIGATION**

The academic appeals resolution committee shall conduct a prompt investigation. This investigation may include studying the relevant documents, interviewing the parties involved, and taking any other action it deems appropriate. If the committee chooses to interview the student or the involved faculty member, they both shall have the right to appear and testify separately and privately before the committee. The student shall have the right to have an advocate from the university community present during their testimony. 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.

### **AUTHORITY TO ACT**

The academic appeals resolution committee has been designated as the final authority on these matters. At the conclusion of its investigation, the academic appeals resolution committee shall by majority vote resolve the issue(s) by either upholding the finding of the college, 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 may not determine a resolution that contradicts the prior findings or actions of the OUEC
- In the event of a tie vote, the action of the college academic standing committee shall be considered upheld

### **REPORT**

All direct parties to the appeal including, but not limited to, the student, the involved faculty member, the Faculty Senate Agenda Committee, the vice provost for curriculum and programs, the senior vice chancellor for student life, the dean(s), and the the Office of the University Registrar shall be promptly informed in writing of the decisions and actions taken during this academic appeals procedure.

### **ACTION**

The dean(s) or their designee(s) in the involved college(s) shall take whatever action is necessary to implement the resolution of the academic appeals resolution committee. This includes, where applicable, reporting the change of grade to the Office of the University Registrar.

### **APPEAL**

Once adjudicated, 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 undergraduate academic appeals procedure.