

Appeals Against Academic Decisions

General: Academic problems sometimes arise because of misunderstandings that can be resolved by informal discussion. The general approach of the University is to encourage the speedy resolution of academic problems informally and through the normal administrative routes i.e., co-ordinators of graduate studies and department heads, before pursuing formal appeal processes. If you are concerned about academic problems, it is wise to first seek advice and support from your supervisor, a friend, colleague or University Grievance Advisor, whom you feel will be sympathetic and fair minded. If this informal approach to the resolution of academic problems does not lead to a resolution, then you may request that your academic appeal be heard by the Academic Appeal Board. Academic assessments, decisions or regulations may be appealed only on procedural grounds. Course marks or exam committee decisions cannot be overturned; however alternative actions (including the possibilities of further exams) may be ordered. If you appeal to the Academic Appeal Board, you should be aware that material you submit in support of your appeal will be distributed to other parties participating in the appeal. Those individuals may include the course instructor, the department's co-ordinator of graduate studies and the head of the department.

Structure of the Academic Appeal Board: For any appeal, the Appeal Board shall comprise the Chair, who is a faculty member, another faculty member and a graduate student. At least one faculty member and the graduate student shall be from the same general domain as the appellant, with the three domains comprising Humanities and Social Sciences, Life Sciences, Physical Sciences and Applied Sciences. The Chair will be appointed for a three year term. The chair, the other faculty member and the graduate student will be selected from a panel of five faculty members and five graduate students. One faculty member and one graduate student will be elected by each of the five Division Councils at an annual meeting. Faculty members will be elected for a three year term and student panel members for a one year term. Both terms are renewable.

Normal Steps in the Appeal Procedures

NOTE The appeal procedures for a thesis examining committee decision is described below. The appeals procedures for reviewing an allegation of academic dishonesty are described elsewhere in the *General Regulations (Academic Dishonesty)*.

Step 1: If a student wishes to question an academic decision, other than those relating to thesis outcomes or an allegation of academic dishonesty, an appeal must first be made informally to the instructor or body whose decision is being questioned. The students must ensure that the instructor or body is aware of all the facts which the student believes should bear upon the reconsideration of the decision. This should be done within two weeks of the receipt of the decision. If the student is reluctant to approach the instructor or body personally, he or she may seek the assistance of a University Grievance Advisor to do so on his or her behalf.

Step 2: If the student is unable to resolve the problem by informal discussion, and the student is not satisfied with the outcome of Step 1, an appeal may be lodged with the department Head or Co-ordinator of Graduate Studies who will immediately inform the department Head. The Head must respond to the appeal within two weeks of receiving the appeal.

Step 3: If the student is not satisfied with the outcome of Step 2, he or she may seek the assistance of an Associate Dean of the School of Graduate Studies and Research for a further attempt at informal resolution. The student may also proceed directly to Step 4. If the student opts for Step 3, any request to subsequently proceed to Step 4 must take place within two weeks of receiving the Head's written response in Step 2.

Step 4: If the student is still not satisfied, he or she may, within two weeks of receiving the Head's written response, ask the Registrar of the School of Graduate Studies and Research to convene an Academic Appeal Board to hear his or her appeal. The student must submit a written statement of appeal within one week of such a request to the Registrar of the School of Graduate Studies and Research, attaching the written decision of the Head. The Registrar of the School of Graduate Studies and Research shall inform the Head of the department of the request for a hearing by the Academic Appeal Board and give a copy of the student's written statement to the Head.

Step 5: The Registrar of the School of Graduate Studies and Research shall distribute the student's statement to the members of the Academic Appeal Board. Within one week of receiving this statement, the Board shall convene to review the written material. The Board shall, within two further weeks, meet with all the parties to the appeal. The student may be accompanied by a Grievance Advisor, legal representation or other support person. Under normal circumstances, it is anticipated that the appeal can be heard in its entirety at this meeting and that the Academic Appeal Board shall issue its report within a further two weeks. Each party to the appeal shall be given the opportunity to present his or her case to the Board. Although neither party is precluded from having legal counsel, such counsel is not usually desirable or necessary at this stage of the appeal procedure. The intent is to provide a fair hearing in an atmosphere of relative informality. The student should notify the Appeal Board at least one week prior to the meeting if he or she is to be legally represented. The disposition of appeals and resulting options for the student is set out in Disposition of Appeals below.

Appeal of Thesis Examination Committee Decision

If the appeal is concerned with the decision of a thesis examination committee the appeal should be made in writing to the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies and Research or, if the Dean was a member of the examining committee, to an Associate Dean of the School of Graduate Studies and Research or the Chairperson of Graduate Council. The appeal should be made in writing and within two weeks of the examination. If the person appealed to is unable resolve the problem within two weeks and the student is not satisfied, he or she must within one further week submit a written request to the Registrar of the Graduate School to convene an Academic Appeal Board to hear the appeal. The appeal procedure will then continue as described in Step 5 above.

Disposition of Appeals

Upon completing its review, the Academic Appeal Board may make one or more of the following dispositions:

- a. **Uphold the Appeal:** If the Academic Appeal Board upholds the student's appeal, it shall refer the matter back to the Department or body concerned with specific recommendations for settlement of the appeal. The Department shall report back to the Academic Appeal Board on the resolution of the appeal. The Academic Appeal Board shall retain jurisdiction over the appeal pending receipt of a report from the Department.
- b. **Deny the Appeal:** If the Academic Appeal Board denies the appeal, it shall report to the parties to the appeal that no action shall be taken with respect to the appeal and dismiss the appeal. The decision of the Academic Appeal Board shall be final, unless the appeal is based on grounds of unfair procedures or allegations of bias. In this event, the student may appeal further to the Senate Grievance Board.
- c. **Make Recommendations or Policy, Procedures and Principle to the Graduate Council:** If the Academic Appeal Board, in hearing a case, identifies matters of policy, procedure or principle that have broad implications for the Graduate School, it should draw these to the attention of the Dean and the Graduate Council.