



University Community (faculty, graduate students, and University Graduate School Administration)

SUBJECT (R*)	EFFECTIVE DATE (R*)	POLICY NUMBER (O*)
GRADUATE STUDENT ACADEMIC GRIEVANCE GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURE	May 1, 2010	380.047

POLICY STATEMENT (R*)

Preamble

Quality graduate education, especially at the doctoral level, is most likely to occur in academic environments that include the following elements: effective student mentoring, informal and accessible student-faculty relations, mutual respect and collegiality, cooperation, as well as open communication and transparency. Since working and supervisory relations between graduate students and faculty have many unique features, students in graduate programs not only must satisfy University and departmental standards for their programs of graduate study, but also the professional standards and expectations of faculty members.

Often grievances grow out of misunderstandings or misperceptions between faculty and students regarding expectations for performance or behavior. Faculty and advisors have an obligation to ensure that graduate students are aware of academic and professional expectations. Graduate students have a concomitant obligation to pursue diligently and to satisfy those standards. They are bound to observe and respect the policies, rules and regulations of the University, of their respective departments, and of their professors. Many grievances related to student-faculty relations should be settled informally, via open and transparent processes of communication.

Occasionally, however, a disagreement develops and persists despite the application of informal procedures to resolve the matter. Although graduate students have the right to seek redress for academic grievances, they often forgo their rights so as not to offend professors involved in those disagreements. Students should be aware that bringing a formal grievance may have the consequence of changing working relationships with professors involved with the grievance, and that may impact the learning environment within the academic unit. When all means of informal resolution have been exhausted, the parties involved must have an impartial and transparent forum in which to seek review and resolution of the academic grievance.

Scope of Guiding Principle

This guideline and procedure addresses grievances by graduate students in which the complaint or controversy alleges: a) arbitrary and capricious awarding of grades; b) unprofessional conduct by a professor that affects adversely either the student’s ability to satisfy academic expectations, whether in the classroom, a field setting, a laboratory or other setting, or the student’s actual performance; c) inappropriate or inadequate academic advising concerning requirements not published in official University documents; d) arbitrary dismissal from a graduate course or program except as described below; and e) irregularities in the implementation of policies or procedures in grievance hearings at the college or school level.

This policy and procedure does not address:

- a) Issues related to sexual harassment, or discrimination based on age, sex, sexual orientation, religion, race, marital status, national origin or disability. The Equal Opportunity Programs (EOP) Office is responsible for handling such issues in accordance with procedures developed to comply with the Florida Equity Act;
- b) Issues related to research misconduct. If the graduate student alleges unauthorized utilization of thesis, dissertation or research materials by a professor, resolution of the issue must be sought using the University Research Misconduct policy;
- c) Issues related to professional misconduct. If the student is dismissed from a course or program due to violation of a professional code of conduct, those decisions are addressed at the school or college level; and,

d) Issues related to grading, except arbitrary and capricious awarding of grades. Students who dispute a grade received must follow the grade appeals process established by the applicable college. The student may request further discussion at a department conference with the instructor and the department chair. The department chair issues a written "Statement of Action" within seven (7) calendar days from the date of the conference and delivers it to the student and the dean of the college involved. The student shall not proceed beyond the department chair's decision except when the department chair is the subject of the complaint in which case the grievance continues to the college or school dean.

REASON FOR POLICY (O*)

The purpose of this guideline and procedure is to provide a means for graduate students to seek investigation and possible resolution of academic grievances, as defined below.

PROCEDURES (O*)

Informal Grievance Procedure

Graduate students must attempt to resolve informally an academic grievance as soon as possible. A student must initiate informal resolution procedures by contacting the professor (or administrator as the instructor of record) no later than ten (10) business days* after classes begin in the semester following that in which the complaint arose, or the grievance will be deemed untimely. The student must first attempt to resolve the academic grievance through an informal meeting with the professor. If the matter cannot be resolved, or if the professor cannot be reached, the student must meet next with the department chair. If the student's grievance is against a committee, the student must meet with the committee chairperson. If the matter cannot be resolved, the student must meet next with the department chair. The informal grievance process is terminated at the department level except when the department chair is the subject of the complaint in which case the grievance continues to the college or school dean. A mutually agreeable resolution shall be formalized through a notation in the student's file/record, which is initialed by the student and the professor or college or school dean.

Formal Academic Grievance Procedure

The academic grievance procedure within the University Graduate School is initiated by filing a written complaint with the Faculty Fellow for Academic Integrity. The complaint must be filed within fifteen (15) business days* of the date the informal resolution process ends, or within twenty (20) business days* after classes begin in the semester following that in which the complaint arose, whichever is later. After receipt, the Faculty Fellow for Academic Integrity, in consultation with the Chairperson of the Graduate Student Academic Grievance Committee, will review the complaint to determine whether it falls within the scope of this policy and whether a formal hearing is warranted. When there are disputed issues of material fact, which must be determined, a formal hearing is warranted. If the complaint does not fall within the scope of this policy, then the student shall be so notified in writing.

A. Graduate Student Academic Grievance Committee

Where a complaint falls within the scope of this policy and there are disputed issues of material fact to be determined, the Faculty Fellow for Academic Integrity will refer the matter to the Graduate Student Academic Grievance Committee. The Grievance Committee will be composed of five members, two of whom should be graduate students selected by the Faculty Fellow for Academic Integrity from a list of names supplied by the President of the Graduate Student Association (GSA) and/or deans of other colleges and schools. The other members of the Committee shall be three graduate faculty. They will be selected from lists supplied by deans of other colleges and schools and/or the Faculty Senate. The faculty members of the Committee will include two faculty from academic units outside of the school/college where the student is enrolled and where the grievance has been filed. The Chairperson of the Committee will be jointly selected by the Faculty Fellow for Academic Integrity and the Chairperson of the Faculty Senate.

B. Procedures

A hearing shall be scheduled as soon as possible but no later than 45 business days* after receipt of the grievance. The grieving party and the professor shall be notified by the Faculty Fellow for Academic Integrity in writing, of the date and time in which to appear for the formal hearing. The hearing shall be conducted with such formality as is necessary to ensure the proceeding is fair and in a manner that allows both sides of the dispute to be presented. The hearing shall be recorded. At the conclusion of the hearing, the members of the Committee shall have the opportunity to deliberate outside the presence of the parties. A written report including findings of facts, conclusions and recommendations shall be prepared and forwarded to the Faculty Fellow for Academic Integrity.

The Faculty Fellow for Academic Integrity shall issue a written decision within fifteen (15) business days* of receipt of the Committee's report. The student and the professor will be sent copies of the Fellow's determination by mail.

C. Appeals

Any decision of the Faculty Fellow for Academic Integrity may be appealed by either the grieving student or the professor where there is evidence that a significant impropriety occurred in the review process. The appeal must be in writing, specify in detail the alleged procedural impropriety, and must be filed in the Office of the Provost within ten (10) business days*, of the date of receipt of the Fellow's decision. The Provost or a designee shall review the appeal and the record of the formal hearing and issue a decision within twenty (20) business days*. The decision of the Office of the Provost is final.

* "Business Day" is defined as day when university administrative offices are open.

HISTORY (R*)

Effective Date: March 29, 2010; Revision Date(s): May 1, 2010 and May 24, 2016.

RESPONSIBLE UNIVERSITY DIVISION/DEPARTMENT (R*)

Office of the Provost
Florida International University

RESPONSIBLE ADMINISTRATIVE OVERSIGHT (R*)

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***R = Required *O = Optional**