

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, University of Houston College-Level Grievance Procedure

In the normal conduct of education at the University of Houston, justifiable grievances may arise concerning the violation of university, college, or department academic policies or procedures. The College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences is committed to resolving these grievances in a fair, orderly, and expeditious manner. To that end, the college has established informal and formal procedures, beginning at the department level, for settling academic grievances.

An academic grievance refers to an action taken against a student by a member of the faculty (including part-time instructors and teaching assistants), staff, or administration that either violates a university, college, or department academic policy or procedure or prejudicially treats the student on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, handicap, veteran status, or any other non-academic status or characteristic. Because assigning a grade or evaluating a student's work performance involves the faculty's professional judgment and is an integral part of the faculty's teaching responsibilities, disagreement with an instructor concerning a grade or evaluation per se is not a justifiable grievance to be considered under this policy unless factors such as those mentioned in the previous paragraph can be shown to have affected that grade or evaluation.

A student with a justifiable grievance that can be substantiated should initiate academic grievance proceedings as soon as possible after the action in dispute occurs. Any student who believes he or she has an academic grievance in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences must initially try to resolve the matter in the local unit (department or program). The student should first attempt to resolve the grievance informally with the faculty member or other involved parties. If the informal discussions do not resolve the academic grievance, the student may, within 10 days, initiate a formal grievance process by filing a formal written complaint with the department chair according to departmental policies and procedures.

In the event that a resolution of a student grievance at the department or program level is not possible or is not satisfactory to the parties, the decision on the grievance may be appealed to the College, as follows:

1. Appeal to the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies

The grievant may submit an appeal to the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies of the College for a decision. The grievant should submit a written appeal stating his/her complaint and including the chair's or director's written decision to the associate dean's office within 60 days of the decision of the chair or director. The documentation in the complaint should state (a) when he/she discovered the issue being grieved, (b) what issue is (or issues are) being grieved and the evidence to support the grievance, (c) the desired resolution, (d) the email address and postal address to which written communication may be sent. The grievant may include in his or her notice of appeal copies of any documentation he or she considers germane, but shall retain possession of the originals.

The associate dean shall review all materials submitted by the grievant and request information from the relevant faculty member(s) or administrator(s) in the department or program, as appropriate. The associate dean may suggest to the parties informal solutions that might resolve the matter without resort to a formal procedure. If all parties agree in writing to this informal resolution, the associate dean shall notify both parties in writing that no further action is being taken.

If the associate dean does not resolve the matter informally, as described above, he or she shall undertake a formal review and make a determination within 10 business days of the receipt of the appeal. The determination shall be communicated in writing to both the grievant and the chair or director of the department or program. The grievance will be considered completed at this point, unless further appeal is requested as described below, within 5 working days from the date of the letter of notification.

2. College Grievance Committee Review

If the grievant, involved faculty member, or department does not concur with the decision of the associate dean in step 1, above, any of those parties within five working days of receiving that decision may request that the grievance be referred to a college grievance committee for consideration. The request for referral to the college grievance committee should be submitted in writing to the Dean of the college.

As soon as possible but within 10 working days of receiving the notice from the student grievant, the Dean shall refer the appeal to the CLASS Grievance Committee. The Grievance Committee shall operate as specified in the College Bylaws. For the purposes of hearing the graduate grievance, the CLASS Grievance Committee will designate three of its current members, with the addition of two (2) current CLASS graduate students, to serve as a Grievance Panel (hereafter "the Panel") to review the grievance. The Panel shall not include any faculty member or graduate student major from the involved department or the major department of the student who filed the grievance. The Panel may work by its own established procedure, as guided by the chair of the college Grievance Committee.

Once the Panel is constituted, the members shall review all written materials submitted by all involved parties, meet with the other members of the Panel (three members constituting a quorum) at least once to discuss the appeal, and make a recommendation regarding the outcome of the appeal. The recommendation may be to uphold the decision of the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies or to overturn it, with a recommendation for a specific alternative resolution.

The Panel shall send its recommendation in writing to the Dean of the College within 15 working days of their designation as members of the Hearing Panel, or within 20 working days, if part of that time period falls within the break between semesters or during the summer. The Dean shall make his or her decision, taking into consideration the recommendation of the grievance committee's Panel, within five working days from the receipt of the recommendation from the Panel.

The Dean shall inform all parties of a decision in writing within five working days after the receipt of the Panel's recommendations. The Dean's decision shall be the final action at the college level.

The Dean's decision may be appealed further to the Graduate School as specified in university procedures. These procedures can be found online in the Policies section of the University of Houston Graduate Catalog.

CLASS policy approved 2002; revised 2006, 2010