

Auburn University

Student Academic Grievance Policy

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this procedure shall be to resolve academic grievances of students, which result from actions of faculty or administration. This resolution should be achieved at the lowest level and in the most equitable way possible. The burden of proof rests with the student complainant who is filing the academic grievance against the faculty/administrator respondent.
- 1.2. The Student Academic Grievance Committee does not have the authority to change or direct changes in student grades, faculty conduct, or other disputed areas. The Committee does have the responsibility to evaluate each case carefully and make specific recommendations to the Office of the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs.
- 1.3. During the student academic grievance process, student complainants and faculty/administrator respondents should not contact the Office of the Provost/ Vice President for Academic Affairs regarding academic grievance issues. Complainants and respondents may contact the Vice President for Academic Affairs following the closure of the academic grievance case or the rendering of the committee's judgment following the formal academic grievance hearing. Likewise, student complainants and faculty/administrator respondents should not contact the President of Auburn University regarding academic grievance issues.

2. Steps Toward Redress

- 2.1. When a student believes he or she has an academic grievance, he or she should first seek to resolve that grievance by discussions with the faculty member or administrator involved. If these discussions are not satisfactory, the complaint should be taken to the next highest level listed in the following procedure. If the grievance arises from a classroom situation, the student should take the following steps in seeking redress.
 - 2.1.1. The student should consult with the faculty member involved, in person or by written contact, no later than within the first five working days of the semester following that in which the grievance occurs.
 - 2.1.2. If agreement on or compromise of the problem is not achieved, the student should take the grievance to the department head or department chair.
 - 2.1.3. If the student is still not satisfied that a fair and equitable solution has been found, he or she should take the grievance to the academic dean of the respondent's school or college (for undergraduate students). Graduate students must concurrently contact the academic dean of the respondent's school or college and the dean of the graduate school.
 - 2.1.4. In the case of University courses (UNIV-1000, UNIV-1050, and any other undergraduate course with a UNIV designation), the student should contact the UNIV course coordinator/director in lieu of the department head and the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Studies in lieu of the academic dean.

- 2.1.5. As a last resort and only after steps 2.1.1-2.1.3.1 have been carried out, or have been conscientiously attempted, the student should take the grievance in writing to the Auburn University Student Academic Grievance Committee, specifically appointed to hear such complaints.
- 2.1.6. The student should read this entire “Student Academic Grievance Policy” carefully before contacting the chair of the Student Academic Grievance Committee.
- 2.2. The Committee chair must be notified of the filing of a grievance no later than the 20th class day of the semester following that in which the grievance occurred.
- 2.3. No faculty member or administrator shall be allowed to delay the resolution of a grievance by failing to hold a consultation with a student within a reasonable length of time of the initial request. Normally such consultation should occur within two weeks after the student request unless bona fide reasons such as illness, personal emergency or campus absence for professional reasons make this time limit unreasonable.
- 2.4. In some instances when the personalities or problems involved would make starting at the lowest level of the complaint too awkward or embarrassing, the student may initiate a complaint at the next higher level listed, e.g., for a faculty member within an academic department, the department’s head or chair.
- 2.5. A faculty member may ask that a student grievance be submitted to the Auburn University Student Academic Grievance Committee if, in his or her professional opinion, the resolution procedure suggested by the department head or department chair and academic dean is not educationally sound.

3. Types of Grievances

- 3.1. No list of types of grievances can cover all contingencies. The following common types of student grievances, however, are within the Committee’s jurisdiction.
 - 3.1.1. Errors in calculations or recording of quizzes or other grades.
 - 3.1.2. Lowering of the grade on the basis of attendance if this contradicts the attendance policy established and communicated in writing by the faculty member at the beginning of the course.
 - 3.1.3. Failure of a faculty member to follow University policies in the conduct of classes or examinations.
 - 3.1.4. Failure of a faculty member to recognize properly authorized excuses of absence.
 - 3.1.5. Capricious, unreasonable, intimidating, or arbitrary actions that harm the student’s performance.
 - 3.1.6. Failure of a faculty member to grade, return and discuss assigned work within a reasonable time (e.g., before subsequent assigned work is scheduled for completion or before a subsequent examination).

- 3.1.7. Failure of a faculty member to announce testing procedures, grading policies, and the various requirements for successful completion of the course; also, changes in announced policies without due notice and explanation.
 - 3.1.8. Discriminatory action among students within a class by a faculty member (e.g., singling-out specific students for either preferential or adverse treatment).
 - 3.1.9. Failure of a faculty member to honor a specific commitment to a student concerning completion of work delayed because of illness, accident, or other justified reason.
- 3.2. Certain types of grievances, though common, should not be brought before this Committee, although they may be referred to the department head or department chair and, if necessary, the academic dean of the school for administrative review. Grievances outside the jurisdiction of this Committee include the following:
- 3.2.1. Differences in grading by faculty members teaching separate sections of the same course.
 - 3.2.2. Personal habits of the faculty member, however distracting.
 - 3.2.3. Fine distinctions between any two grades, which may be appealed only to the faculty member.
 - 3.2.4. Unannounced quizzes.
 - 3.2.5. Questions concerning academic dishonesty, which should be referred to the Academic Honesty Committee.

4. University Student Academic Grievance Committee

4.1. Membership

- 4.1.1. There shall be nine (9) voting members of the Committee to be appointed by the President of the University as follows:
 - 4.1.1.1. Three (3) students [two (2) undergraduate students and one (1) graduate student] two (2) alternates [one (1) undergraduate and one (1) graduate alternate], to be recommended to the University President under procedures established by the Student Government Association. Not more than one (1) of the voting members may be a graduate student. Undergraduate students serving on this Committee must be regularly enrolled students in good standing and must have attained sophomore ranking at the time of appointment. Graduate students must have been admitted to an authorized advanced degree or certificate program. Student members shall be appointed in May of each year and serve a one (1) year term. Their terms of service shall begin with the summer semester each year and continue through the spring semester.
 - 4.1.1.2. Four (4) full-time faculty members and one (1) alternate to be recommended by the Rules Committee of the University Senate. Department heads or department chairs and members of the administrative faculty shall not be

named to these positions. Faculty members shall serve three (3) year terms, and their appointments shall be arranged so that at least one (1) faculty member and not more than two (2) faculty members will be replaced each year. Their terms of service shall start in fall semester of the year of their appointments. The chair of the Committee shall be appointed from among these faculty members nominated by the Senate Rules Committee in consultation with the President of the University. No person shall serve as the chair for more than three (3) years.

- 4.1.1.3. One (1) full-time member of the Administration (i.e., central administration, deans, associate deans, or assistant deans) and one (1) alternate to be appointed by the President.
- 4.1.1.4. One (1) representative of the Administrative and Professional employee group, who is currently teaching or has taught a class at AU within the past two years, and one (1) alternate, who shall meet the same requirements, to be recommended by the Nominations and Elections Committee of the Administration and Professional Assembly, in consultation with the Steering Committee of the University Senate. The Administrative and Professional representative shall serve a three (3) year term. The term of service shall start in the fall semester of the year of the appointment.
- 4.1.2. Five (5) voting members shall constitute a quorum. Decisions shall be reached by a majority of those present and voting.
- 4.1.3. The chair of the Committee shall be the administrative officer of the Committee. His or her duties shall include:
 - 4.1.3.1. Arranging for appropriate times and places for Committee meetings and hearings;
 - 4.1.3.2. Informing, in writing, those individuals listed in 4.2.3.2 of the times and places of Committee hearings that they are requested to attend, and supplying them with a statement of alleged grievances;
 - 4.1.3.3. Informing those listed in 4.2.3.2 that a grievance is pending;
 - 4.1.3.4. Securing and distributing to the Committee written materials or other documentation appropriate for its consideration;
 - 4.1.3.5. Arranging for the recording of Committee proceedings;
 - 4.1.3.6. Maintaining Committee records that are to be kept on file according to the guidelines established by the University Archivist in the Office of the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs; and
 - 4.1.3.7. Informing, in writing, the Office of the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs of the recommendations of the Committee.
- 4.1.4. Any member of the Committee may at any time disqualify himself or herself from consideration of any given case or cases because of personal bias.

- 4.1.4.1. Should a Committee member be unable to hear a particular case, for any reason, the alternate shall be appointed by the chair to serve for the course of the particular grievance.
- 4.1.4.2. Should the Committee be involved in a specific case at the time of the return of an absent member, the replacement member shall continue as a member of the Committee in all sessions dealing with the specific case until it is concluded. The returning member shall resume membership on the Committee in any new cases brought before the Committee.
- 4.1.5. Should any member of the Committee be unable, for any reason, to complete a term for which he or she has been appointed, the alternate shall fill the balance of the term. Resignations shall be submitted in writing to the chair of the Committee. The chair of the Committee shall then inform the appropriate person of a vacancy and request the appointment of a new alternate.
- 4.1.6. No member of the Committee may be reappointed upon the expiration of a full three-year term. However, a former student member may be appointed as an alternate. If the Committee is involved in any specific case at the time of the expiration of the term of any member, that member shall continue to function as a member of the Committee in its dealings with that specific case only, until such time as the case is concluded. No newly appointed member shall be considered as a member of the Committee in relation to any case continuing from a time prior to his or her term. He or she shall, however, serve as a member of the Committee for all other matters, beginning with the first day of his or her designated term of service.
- 4.1.7. Either party to the hearing may request of the chair in writing that any member or members of the Committee be excluded from consideration of a case. Such a request must be for cause and be brought to the chair's attention as the first step in the hearing. In the event a member is disqualified by majority vote of the Committee from consideration of a case, the chair shall appoint the Committee alternate as a replacement.

4.2. Procedures for Hearings

- 4.2.1. Grievances must be filed with the Committee chair no later than the 20th class day of the semester following that in which the grievance occurred.
- 4.2.2. Where previous efforts for redress have failed, the student should file a grievance in writing to the chair of this Committee, accompanied by any initial documentary evidence.
 - 4.2.2.1. Complainants and respondents are encouraged to communicate and cooperate with the chair of the Student Academic Grievance Committee regarding the preparation of support materials related to the allegations of academic grievance.
 - 4.2.2.2. At no time (outside of the formal hearing process) should any person directly or indirectly involved in the academic grievance case communicate with any of the voting or alternate members (with the exception of the chair) of the Committee about the grievance.

- 4.2.3. The following (4.2.3.1 - 4.2.9) represents general guidelines regarding hearing procedures. However, additional guidelines will be made available to the parties at least one week prior to the hearing.
- 4.2.3.1. Upon receipt of the stated grievance, the chair shall forward a copy of the grievance to the faculty member, who is invited to submit a written response.
 - 4.2.3.2. The only persons present at reviews of complainant and respondent academic grievance materials by this Committee shall be Committee members, either voting members or alternates.
 - 4.2.3.3. The only persons present at full academic grievance hearings of this Committee shall be committee members, the complainant and the respondent(s), and material witnesses actually testifying before the Committee.
- 4.2.4. The Committee, as a whole, shall arrange for a swift and comprehensive review of the grievance and may request from the parties involved and from resource persons additional information. It shall then decide, on the basis of this evidence, whether there are sufficient grounds to hear a case or not, and whether it will accept written statements in lieu of personal appearances or not. If the Committee decides that there are not sufficient grounds to hear a case and closes the case, it shall notify the complainant and respondent in writing as to the reasons for its actions.
- 4.2.4.1. Written statements by material witnesses in lieu of personal appearance will not be allowed except under justifiable circumstances.
- 4.2.5. If the Committee determines that the case merits further consideration in the form of a hearing, the parties involved shall be informed in writing and be advised of the scheduled time and place of the hearing. Complainants will be given copies of the respondent's academic grievance materials. Respondents will be given copies of the complainant's academic grievance materials. The complainant's and the respondent's academic grievance materials will be returned to the Committee chair at the close of the formal hearing.
- 4.2.6. At the hearing, the complainant, respondent, and material witnesses may testify and may be questioned by the opposite party and Committee members. Only evidence previously presented to the committee and presented in the hearing may be considered in the final judgment.
- 4.2.7. Below is the procedure to be followed during the hearing:
- 4.2.7.1. Complainant will state the grievance(s) and introduce as evidence any documentation he/she feels supports his/her claim. Testimony may be questioned by respondents and Committee members.
 - 4.2.7.2. Respondent will state the response to the charges and introduce as evidence any documentation he/she feels supports his/her counterclaim. Testimony may be questioned by complainants and committee members.

- 4.2.7.3. Any material witnesses the complainant wishes to introduce to give verbal testimony may be presented. Testimony may be questioned by complainants, respondents, and Committee members.
 - 4.2.7.4. Any material witnesses the respondent wishes to introduce to give verbal testimony may be presented. Testimony may be questioned by respondents, complainants, and Committee members.
 - 4.2.7.5. Complainants and respondents may make additional comments and may be questioned by complainants, respondents, and Committee members.
 - 4.2.7.6. All parties except the Committee will be dismissed.
 - 4.2.7.7. The Committee will develop recommendations and transmit said recommendations to the Office of the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs.
- 4.2.8. A record of the hearing, tape recorded or otherwise preserved, shall be preserved for references and may be reviewed until the case has been finally resolved. However, Committee deliberations will not be subject to this requirement.
- 4.2.9. Proceedings shall be conducted in accordance with the AAUP's Joint Statement on Rights and Freedoms of Students proposed in 1967 and revised and updated in 1992. The AAUP's Statement on Graduate Students, which was adopted in 2000, will serve as an additional reference source for complainants who are graduate students.

4.3. Judgment

- 4.3.1. Committee members shall arrive at a judgment in consultation among themselves after the parties have been dismissed. Only members of the committee who have been present during all the meetings and who have heard all testimony relating to the alleged grievance may vote on the case.
- 4.3.2. A majority vote of such qualified members shall constitute a judgment.
 - 4.3.3.1. A decision of the Committee relating to redress of a particular case is final. The Committee does not have the authority to change or direct changes in student grades, faculty conduct, or other disputed areas. The Committee does have the responsibility to evaluate each case carefully and make specific recommendations to the Provost/ Vice President for Academic Affairs. A course of action deemed appropriate by the Committee will be recommended.
 - 4.3.3.2. The Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs has the power to veto the proposed course of action. However, in the case of such veto, the case must be returned promptly to the committee for further consideration.
- 4.3.3. Should not be reported and should remain confidential to the committee.
- 4.3.4. The Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs should transmit only the final decisions to the appropriate persons. The results of the intermediate steps in decision-making outlined under

- 4.3.5. The decisions reached by this committee shall take precedence over decisions reached by student grievance committees within individual departments, colleges or schools.
- 4.3.6. If redress requires a policy change, or if a policy change appears advisable or necessary, the committee shall refer its recommendations to the Executive Committee of the University Senate, or President of the University, as appropriate.
- 4.3.7. Should any person, whether directly involved in a complaint or not, allegedly suffer some disadvantages, discrimination, or reprisal as the direct or indirect result of any complaint, testimony, or statement in connection with committee action, the committee shall, upon request or upon its own motion, exercise original jurisdiction and take all necessary steps to verify the facts and render justice.

5. Revisions in the Procedures

During the spring semester of each year, the committee may propose revisions of these procedures which will become effective upon ratification by the Student Senate, University Senate, and the President of the University.