



EAST TENNESSEE STATE
UNIVERSITY

Graduate School Grade Appeal Policy

Policy Name: Graduate School Grade Appeal

Policy Purpose

This policy specifies how a graduate student may file an appeal of a final course or comprehensive exam grade that is not related to academic misconduct or integrity. Appeals related to academic misconduct or integrity are processed under the Academic Integrity and Misconduct Policy.

Applicability

This policy is applicable to graduate students. This policy does not apply to students who are exclusively enrolled in Quillen College of Medicine for the M.D. degree or the Gattton College of Pharmacy for the Pharm.D. degree.

Responsible Official, Office, and Interpretation

The Dean of the Graduate School and Graduate Council are responsible for the review and revision of this policy. For questions about this policy, please contact the Dean of the Graduate School. The Provost in consultation with the Office of University Counsel, has the final authority to interpret this policy.

Defined Terms

A defined term has a specific meaning within the context of this policy.

Comprehensive Exam

A comprehensive (oral and/or written) exam given in graduate programs to test a broad base of material and demonstrates capacity to complete a thesis, dissertation, or graduate coursework. These exams may also be called “comps,” “preliminary exams,” “prelims,” “qualifying exams” or “qualifiers,” or the like.

Graduate Appeal Hearing Panel

Consists of three graduate faculty members and three graduate students appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School. All hearing panel members must be outside of the academic college of the instructor and student. All hearing panel members have voting privileges. The Hearing Panel select a chair from among its members.

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A student may file an appeal of a course grade or comprehensive exam grade. The student must follow the procedures of this policy for an appeal to be considered at each level of review. The student has the burden of proof in a grade appeal proceeding. The committee will be provided guidelines for reviewing the case and the threshold for the burden of proof. If the student is otherwise eligible for graduation in the semester in which the grade is issued, the appeal will be considered as soon as possible. It is the student's responsibility to contact the Office of Financial Aid about the implication of a grade change on their financial aid package.

If a student fails to meet a procedural deadline, the appeal will not move forward, unless the student provides evidence of extraordinary circumstances as soon as practically possible (e.g. car accident, hospitalization, family emergency, etc.) to the Dean of the Graduate School. The decision of the Dean or designee on whether to grant an exception to a deadline is final. If a faculty member or department chair fails to meet a procedural deadline, the appeal automatically moves to the next step. A student may withdraw a grade appeal at any level without prejudice. However, the deadlines outlined in this policy continue to apply if the student decides to continue with the process at a later time.

A Grade Appeal Hearing Panel member who discusses the grade appeal with the involved faculty member or the student outside of the formal hearing panel proceedings shall be automatically disqualified from any further proceedings of the case.

The decision of the Dean of the Graduate School or designee on a grade appeal is final.

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Procedures

1. Level One- Instructor Review.

A student contacts the instructor or committee (in the case of a comprehensive exam) to schedule a meeting (in-person, phone, or video) within ten (10) business days of the official start of the following semester, not including Summer terms. If the instructor is no longer employed at ETSU or is on leave, the student moves directly to Level Two.

If the grade is assigned during the Fall, the timeline begins in the following Spring semester. For grades assigned during the Spring or Summer, the timeline begins in the following Fall semester.

The student explains their position to the instructor and attempts to understand the instructor's reasons for assigning the grade.

If an agreement/understanding is reached, the process ends. In the event of an impasse between the student and faculty member, the student may move the appeal forward by following the procedure outlined in Level Two.

2. Level Two- Department Review.

2.1. Student Responsibility.

The student files a written appeal with the department chair or appropriate unit head of the department in which the course is offered within ten (10) business days of the date of the conference with the faculty member in Level One or within a ten (10) business days of learning the faculty member is no longer at the institution; the Dean may make exceptions to the (10) business day limit in the Dean's discretion due to extenuating circumstances. The written appeal should be concise and specific and limit itself to citations of evidence pertaining to valid grounds for an appeal. The written appeal includes the following:

- 2.1.1. The student's name, E#, course name and number, semester, and year the course was taken, instructor, and grade assigned;

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- 2.1.2. A brief description of Level One action taken including date(s) (unless the faculty member is no longer employed at ETSU);
- 2.1.3. Specific reason(s) the student believes the grade was assigned in a malicious, capricious, erroneous, or arbitrary manner;
- 2.1.4. Statement of special circumstances or considerations, if any;
- 2.1.5. Resolution sought;
- 2.1.6. Course requirements completed, including documentation (e.g. exams, papers) if available;
- 2.1.7. A list of any items used in evaluation for which the student cannot provide documentation (e.g. unreturned exams, grades on class participation, attendance records), if any;
- 2.1.8. Course syllabus; and
- 2.1.9. Other pertinent information.

2.2. Review of Appeal.

The student files a written appeal with the department chair or appropriate unit head of the department in which the course is offered within ten (10) business days of the date of the conference with the faculty member in Level One. The written appeal should be concise and specific and limit itself to citations of evidence pertaining to valid grounds for an appeal. The written appeal includes the following:

2.2.1. Finding in Favor of the Student.

If the Department Chair/Unit Head determines that the grade is inappropriate, the finding will recommend that the faculty member change the grade. The faculty member may or may not concur with this recommendation.

The faculty member has ten (10) business days to submit a written response indicating whether the grade will be changed, and if not, provide reasoning for not changing the grade. If the faculty member does not respond by the deadline, the Department Chair/Unit Head may change the grade.

The Department Chair/Unit Head notifies the student in writing within ten business (10) days of receiving the faculty member's written response, informing the student if the faculty member will change the grade. If the grade is changed to the student's satisfaction, the matter is concluded. If the faculty member objects to the grade change, the Department Chair/Unit Head notifies the student of the right to move the appeal to Level Three.

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2.2.2. Finding Not in Favor of the Student.

If the finding is not in favor of the student, the Department Chair/Unit Head includes in the written notice that the student's options to either accept the decision and end the appeal or move to Level Three.

3. Level Three- Graduate Appeal hearing Panel and Graduate Dean Review.

3.1. Student's Responsibility.

Within ten (10) business days of receiving the Department Chair/Unit Head's written statement, the student files a written appeal to the Dean of the Graduate School. This appeal includes all the elements submitted to the Department Chair/Unit Head in Level Two and includes all written statements from the Department Chair/Unit Head that were issued in Level Two.

3.2. Notification and Scheduling.

The Dean of the Graduate School: (1) notifies the student, faculty member, and Department/Unit Head that a grade appeal hearing will occur; (2) forms a Graduate Appeal Hearing Panel; and (3) schedules and notifies the parties of the hearing date. A hearing should occur within thirty (30) business days of the student's written appeal to the Dean of the Graduate School.

3.3. Review of Appeal.

All written documentation is provided to the Graduate Appeal Hearing Panel for review prior to the hearing.

3.3.1. Hearing.

A hearing can proceed with one missing panel member if both the faculty and student agree to continue. Without an agreement to continue, the hearing is rescheduled.

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At the hearing, all relevant material is presented by the student, faculty member, department chair, and any others who may be called to assist the Graduate Appeal Hearing Panel.

Following the hearing, the panel presents its recommendation for a specific course of action regarding the student's appeal to the Dean of the Graduate School within fourteen (14) business days. The recommendation includes a tally of the vote taken and reasoning to support the recommended course of action.

3.4. Final Decision.

The Dean of the Graduate School reviews the Graduate Appeal Hearing Panel's recommendation and reasoning. The Dean of the Graduate School may also confer with any of the parties involved. After consideration of all appropriate information, the Dean or designee provides a written statement that accepts, rejects, or modifies the recommendation. The decision of the Dean is final.

The Dean of the Graduate School notifies the student, the faculty member, the chair of the Hearing Panel, the department chair, and any other relevant individuals of the outcome of the appeal.

3.4.1. Finding in Favor of the Student.

If the Dean of the Graduate School or designee finds in favor of the student, the Dean or designee will notify the Registrar to change the student's grade within fourteen (14) days, if applicable. Other resolutions will be addressed as appropriate.

3.4.2. Finding Not in Favor of the Student.

If the Dean of the Graduate School or designee does not find in favor of the student, the Dean or designee notifies the student in writing within fourteen (14) days that the grade shall stand.

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Applicable Forms and Websites

N/A

Authority and Revisions

Authority: TCA § 49-8-203, et seq.

Previous Policy: N/A

The ETSU Board of Trustees is charged with policy making pursuant to TCA § 49-8-203, et seq. On March 24, 2017, the Board delegated its authority to ETSU's President to establish certain policies and procedures for educational program and other operations of the University, including this policy. The delegation of authority and required process for revision to this policy can be found on the [Policy Development and Rule Making Policy webpage](#).

To suggest a revision to this policy, please contact the responsible official indicated in this policy. Before a substantive change to the policy section may take effect, the requested changes must be: (1) approved by the responsible office; (2) reviewed by the Office of University Counsel for legal sufficiency; (3) posted for public comment; (4) approved by either Academic Council or University Council; and (5) approved by ETSU's President.