

College of Engineering and Computing - Graduate Programs

Grievances, Appeals, and Petitions

I. Introduction

Graduate students sometimes face an academic issue or problem that requires assistance to resolve. These issues or problems are categorized as grievances, appeals and petitions. In general, ***Grievances*** are alleged violations of the teaching responsibilities of the faculty, free expression policies, or other violations of responsibilities as stated in the USC Faculty Manual or of the official policies or procedures of the University. ***Appeals*** are requests to reconsider decisions that have been rendered. ***Petitions*** are requests to make individual exceptions to written requirements imposed by the department/program, the College of Engineering & Computing, or by the Graduate School. For further discussion, refer to the Graduate Bulletin concerning Academic Exception Petitions and Appeal of Academic Decisions (<https://academicbulletins.sc.edu/graduate/policies-regulations/graduate-academic-regulations/#text> accessed December 2020).

This policy follows the procedures set forth in STAF 6.30, Academic Grievance Policy for the University of South Carolina, and STAF 6.27, Student Grievance Policy-Non-Academic.

Note: Grievances, Appeals and Petitions do not extend to matters of grading student work, where the substance of the complaint is simply student disagreement with the mark or grade placed upon the work. Such matters are to be discussed between the student and course instructor. Final authority for grade assignment shall remain with the course instructor.

Note: This policy does not refer to issues involving allegations of harassment or discrimination. For such issues, students are referred to the UofSC Office of Equal Opportunity Programs and the associated policies.

II. Graduate Grievances, Appeals, and Petitions Committee for CEC

The College of Engineering and Computing will convene as needed an ad hoc Graduate Grievances, Appeals, and Petitions Committee (GGAP). GGAP will consider grievances, appeals, and petitions when issues or problems cannot be satisfactorily resolved with the faculty member, with the assistance of the Graduate Director or Department chair, or within the department or program according to its Graduate Handbook. The committee will be constituted by the CEC Associate Dean who has primary responsibility for graduate programs within the college. If the problem or issue is with this Associate Dean, then the committee will be convened by a designee of the Dean of the College. The Dean and Associate Deans of the College will not serve on GGAP.

III. Procedure for Grievances, Appeals, and Petitions

1. If a student wishes to make a Petition (defined above), the student must consult and reference the relevant policies and requirements of the department's Graduate Student Handbook or the Graduate School Bulletin. Petitions will be considered according to the procedures specified in the department's Graduate Student Handbook. The department's (or program's) Graduate Student Handbook must be followed for Petitions and other matters concerning departmental policies and procedures. If the student's Petition is denied, the student may Appeal that decision to the department, or may proceed to Step 4 below and request GGAP to consider the Petition.
2. When faced with a problem other than a Petition, students must begin by trying to find a satisfactory resolution directly with the faculty member before proceeding to subsequent steps—unless there is an issue of harassment or threat to student safety.
3. If satisfaction is not achieved at step 2, the student should approach the department (or program) chair or graduate director for assistance in mediation of the problem. If the problem involves the department chair or

graduate director personally, mediation by another faculty member may be sought. Alternatively, the student may proceed to Step 4.

4. If satisfaction is not achieved by step 2 or 3, the next step is for the student to submit a written request for consideration by GGAP. This request must be received by the Associate Dean for graduate programs within 60 days of the last day of classes for the semester associated with the stated grievance.
5. GGAP may decide, based solely on the written request, whether there are sufficient grounds to hear a case or not. GGAP may invite a representative from the department to present a response to the student's request. GGAP may request additional information from the student. GGAP will determine whether it will accept written statements in lieu of personal appearances or not. If GGAP decides that there are not sufficient grounds to hear the request, the case is considered closed and the request is denied. If GGAP determines that the request should properly be heard by a different authority, it shall so recommend. GGAP shall notify the complainant, the respondent and the Associate Dean for graduate programs in writing as to the reasons for its actions.
6. If after step 5 GGAP decides to hear the student's request, the Committee may ask for additional information from the student. The committee may invite the faculty member(s) or departmental representative to submit a written response to the grievance. The student and the faculty member (or department) may request to appear in person before the committee. GGAP will then make its recommendation on whether to support or deny the request.
7. All recommendations of GGAP will be transmitted to the student, the faculty member, the department chair, and the Associate Dean for graduate programs.
8. The Associate Dean for graduate programs is responsible for transmitting to the Graduate School any actions, decisions, and recommendations emanating from CEC that require further consideration or action by the Graduate School.
9. If satisfaction is not achieved in consultation with the CEC GGAP Committee, the next step is to pursue consideration with the Grievances, Appeals and Petitions Committee of the Graduate School (see <http://gradschool.sc.edu/forms/G-GAP.pdf>, accessed Dec. 2020).

IV. Composition of the ad hoc CEC Graduate Grievances, Appeals, and Petitions Committee

1. GGAP shall normally comprise the graduate directors of the graduate academic programs of the College of Engineering and Computing. A department or program may designate another member of its faculty to serve on the ad hoc committee if circumstances warrant; for example, if by reason of timing the graduate director is unavailable to serve, if another faculty member has expertise relevant to the student request, or if the graduate director is a subject of the student grievance. The Dean and Associate Deans of the College will not serve on GGAP.
2. When constituted, the members of GGAP will select a chair to preside over necessary meetings and to implement the procedures described in this policy.
3. The College may appoint a member of its staff to facilitate the timely workings of GGAP and to assist with documentation of the proceedings. This staff member may attend meetings of the GGAP but will be non-voting.
4. The student's home department or program will be notified when the GGAP has been constituted and the student's request is presented to GGAP. The faculty member representing the home department or program shall be recused from internal deliberations, discussions and voting of the GGAP. However, in keeping with steps III.5 and III.6 above, GGAP may invite a departmental representative to present a response to the student's petition.

Commentary and Guidance for Students and Faculty Concerning Grievances, appeals and Petitions

The following paragraphs provide commentary and guidance, based on information available at the UofSC website and in relevant university and graduate school policies. These comments are not exhaustive. If there are conflicts between these comments and university policies, the university policies govern.

I. Petitions

Petitions are requests to make individual exceptions to written requirements imposed by the department/program, the College of Engineering & Computing, or by the Graduate School. For further discussion, refer to the Graduate Bulletin concerning Academic Exception Petitions and Appeal of Academic Decisions (<https://academicbulletins.sc.edu/graduate/policies-regulations/graduate-academic-regulations/#text> accessed December 2020).

Petitions deal with academic requirements (for example, required coursework, required examinations). The assignment of a course grade or the grade on an exam cannot be petitioned. However, if the determination of a grade was made in violation of the stated course syllabus (for example), this would be the basis for a Grievance (see below).

Academic requirements are established primarily by the department or program, with the goal of establishing and explaining the standards and expectations of the discipline, and with a further goal of providing consistency of guidance for all students.

A student petition should identify the specific academic requirement of the program, identify the specific alternative to the requirement that the student proposes, and provide the academic justification for the exception.

If a petition is denied by the program, the student may appeal the decision (see Appeals, below) to the department (essentially, file a new petition) provided there is additional academic information and justification in support of the petition.

A student may appeal the departmental decision on a petition to the CEC Graduate Grievances, Appeals, and Petitions Committee (GGAP). However, the student should recognize that the members of GGAP are from disciplines other than the home department and are not custodians of the home department discipline. It would be very difficult indeed for GGAP to uphold an academic petition that was declined by the home department. GGAP cannot over-rule an academic policy that is established by the Graduate School; the Graduate School is the authoritative unit in this case.

II. Grievances

Grievances are alleged violations of the teaching responsibilities of the faculty, free expression policies, or other violations of responsibilities as stated in the USC Faculty Manual or of the official policies or procedures of the University. Grievances may be academic in nature, or non-academic.

Academic policies and procedures should be applied uniformly to all students. An academic grievance could be warranted if, for example, it is alleged that a faculty member or department did not follow its written policies and procedures or adhere to the manner of determining grades as specified on the course syllabus. Students should first try to resolve academic grievances with the faculty member with whom the student has a grievance. If satisfaction is not realized, the student should approach the department chair or graduate director to help resolve the grievance. If satisfaction is still not achieved, the student may then file a grievance with the CEC GGAP.

The university has a policy concerning student grievances for non-academic matters (STAF 6.27). For non-academic grievances, the policy encourages student should begin by attempting to resolve the grievance with the individual with

whom the student has a grievance. The policy furthermore encourages students to engage the Student Ombudsman for assistance, for instance by engaging with the department chair or graduate director in resolving the grievance. The Graduate Student Ombudsman is identified on the Graduate School web site. If satisfaction is not achieved within the department and with the aid of the Graduate Student Ombudsman, the student may choose to file a Grievance with the CEC GGAP. Alternatively, the matter may be referred to other offices (directly to the Graduate School, or directly to the Vice President for Student Affairs). As stated in STAF 6.27 “Grievances relating to discrimination by reason of race, sex, or handicap will be referred to the Office of Equal Opportunity Programs.”

III. Appeals

Appeals are requests to reconsider decisions that have been rendered. A student may appeal a decision regarding a petition, or a decision regarding a grievance. Appeals may be filed with the department, or with CEC GGAP. If satisfaction is not achieved at the college level, appeals may be filed with the Graduate School. In all cases, the student should specify the action or decision in question, and provide documentation supporting their request.