Introduction

A general principle at MSU is the right to appeal a decision that impacts you as a student, staff member or faculty. Students could appeal academic decisions in the current policy, but it was not clear that students could make such an appeal.

In this draft proposal, graduate students can appeal; 1) exceptions to academic policy, e.g. age of courses, makeup of a graduate committee etc. and 2) academic decisions such as being suspended from a graduate program. Appeal processes for findings arising from the student code of conduct or research misconduct are described in existing policies in those areas.

A key part of this proposed policy is who should hear the appeal. In the proposed policy, appeals on academic decisions first goes to the department head, then the Graduate Dean.

The proposed policy does not change how students appeal exceptions to academic policy, e.g. age of courses.

The proposed policy also clarifies the existing university-wide process on how prospective students appeal graduate admissions decisions. For many years the Graduation and Admission Requirements Committee (GARC) hears these appeals. Adding this to the graduate handbook helps clarify this route. Recent history (~2 GARC graduate admission appeals in the past 5 years) suggests this is a very rare event.

Proposed policy

**7.1 Appeals**

**A. Appealing Academic Policies**

Graduate students seeking exceptions from established Graduate School academic policies such as program of study or graduation requirements may do so by submitting an appeal packet to The Graduate School for review.

The appeal packet must include all the following before submission:

* A letter from the graduate student stating the policy or decision that is being appealed and the reasons you believe the decision should be changed or policy be waived.
* A letter from graduate student’s committee chair stating either approval or disapproval of the appeal and reasons to support their decision.
* A letter from graduate student’s department head stating either approval or disapproval of the appeal and reasons to support their decision.

Appeal approval or denial will be made by The Graduate School Dean. Packets can be submitted to [Graduate Student Success office.](mailto:degreesandcertificates@montana.edu%20?subject=)

1. **Appealing Academic Decisions**

Graduate Students may appeal decisions related to suspension from an academic program, based upon Academic Standing (policy 6.2), failure of comprehensive exams (policy 5.2.8 and policy 5.3.5), or failure of thesis and dissertation defenses (policy 5.2.9 and 5.3.6), or academic sections of their graduate program handbook. This process does not apply in cases where a student has received due process through another University policy and process, e.g., Code of Student Conduct, Research Misconduct, or professional conduct in graduate programs that lead to licensure, etc. Academic decisions governed by the [Code of Student Conduct](http://catalog.montana.edu/code-conduct-policies-regulations-reports/), such as specific course grades or academic misconduct, must be appealed as outlined in the [Code of Student Conduct](http://catalog.montana.edu/code-conduct-policies-regulations-reports/).

Graduate students wanting to appeal a decision made within the scope of this policy must comply with the following procedure:

1. Initial Appeal to the Department Head
   1. Appeals must first be made to the student’s department head within 10 business days of the student receiving written notification of the decision. The appeal must include a signed letter from the student specifying the basis for the appeal and the requested outcome along with any relevant documentation.
   2. The department head will review the appeal and any relevant documentation. If the student has a graduate committee on file with The Graduate School, the department head shall consult with the student’s graduate committee. The department head may also consult with the Assistant Dean of The Graduate School, or any other individuals with information relevant to the appeal. The department head may request additional documentation from the student or other individuals on campus with information relevant to the appeal, as appropriate.
   3. The department head will provide a written response to the appeal within 10 business days that includes a determination with a rationale for the decision. If the department head upholds the appeal, the student must complete a Plan of Action. A template is available on the form’s page of the Graduate School’s website. The student works with their committee chair to complete the Plan of Action. The plan must enumerate the items to be completed for the student to return to good standing and must be approved and signed by the student, the student’s committee chair, department head, and The Graduate School.
2. Appeal to the Graduate School Dean
   1. Students that have already completed the Initial Appeal to the Department and that are not satisfied with the decision may appeal the decision to the Graduate School Dean.
   2. Appeals to the Graduate School Dean must be made within 10 business days of the student receiving the appeal response from the department head. The appeal must include a signed letter from the student, the department head’s determination, and any other documentation the student believes is relevant to the appeal.
   3. The Graduate School Dean shall review the appeal request and any provided documentation. The Graduate School Dean can request additional documentation relevant to the appeal from the student or others within the university. In conducting a review, the Graduate School Dean must consult with the Dean of the academic college, the department head, and the graduate committee, and may consult with any other individuals with information relevant to the appeal. The appealing student has a right to meet with the Graduate School Dean during this review process.
   4. After making a thorough review of an appeal and conducting the required consultations with parties relevant to the appeal, The Graduate School Dean will issue a final decision on the appeal within 15 business days of first receiving it, unless good cause exists to extend the deadline. The decision will be sent to the student, the student’s committee chair, and the department head. The Graduate School Dean has the final responsibility per the role and scope of the position.

If the appeal is upheld, outcomes can include re-instatement in the academic program with the opportunity to continue making progress towards degree completion, e.g. another semester to demonstrate research progress, or another opportunity to take a comprehensive exam or a thesis or dissertation defense.

1. **Appealing Admissions Decisions**

Prospective students may appeal admissions decisions to the Graduation and Admission Requirements Committee (GARC). GARC considers petitions from students seeking waivers of established admission and graduation requirements. Any appeals to GARC must be submitted using the GARC petition form as detailed on the GARC website.

Current policy

**7.1 Policy Appeals**

Graduate students seeking exceptions from established Graduate School academic policies such as program of study or graduation requirements may do so by submitting an appeal packet to The Graduate School for review.

The appeal packet must include all of the following before submission:

* A letter from the graduate student stating the policy or decision that is being appealed and the reasons you believe the decision should be changed or policy be waived.
* A letter from graduate student’s committee chair stating either approval or disapproval of the appeal and reasons to support their decision.
* A letter from graduate student’s department head stating either approval or disapproval of the appeal and reasons to support their decision.

Appeal approval or denial will be made by The Graduate School Dean. Packets can be submitted to [Graduate Student Success office.](mailto:degreesandcertificates@montana.edu%20?subject=)

For academic suspension appeals, see [Re-admission to Graduate Degree Standing](https://catalog.montana.edu/graduate/policiestext-enrollment-registration-residency/index.html#readmission).