

Graduate Student Grievance Procedure

1 Purpose:

To establish a simple and expeditious process for resolution of graduate student grievance issues.

2 Scope:

Grievances brought forward under this policy are those based on a claimed violation of any university rule or established practice such as the UNMC Code of Conduct, and grievances related to conditions that adversely impact the student's ability to successfully complete the graduate program. Examples of the types of grievances covered by this policy include, but are not limited to: inappropriate conduct in the workplace (e.g. verbal abuse, threatening behavior, harassment, or favoritism); unreasonable policy interpretation of time-off and excessive work hours; inappropriate delay of student progression toward degree attainment due to student's career interests and choices, reductions in funding or awards, and laboratory personnel changes (e.g. departure of supervising faculty). **This policy deals exclusively with graduate student grievances against UNMC faculty.**

If you are unsure if a grievance falls within the scope of this policy you can receive additional information and guidance from any of the persons listed below:

Terri Vadovski, Director of Graduate Administrative Services

(terri.vadovski@unmc.edu, 402 559 6532)

Dr. Philip D. Covington, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Success

(philip.covington@unmc.edu, 402 559 2792)

Dr. David Carver, Student Ombudsman

(dcarver@unmc.edu, 402 559 7276)

If the student requests confidentiality or asks that the complaint not be pursued, UNMC will take all reasonable steps to investigate and respond to the complaint consistent with the request for confidentiality or request not to pursue an investigation. If a student insists that his or her name or other identifiable information not be disclosed to the alleged perpetrator, the school should inform the student that its ability to respond may be limited.

Grievances by graduate students that may fall outside the scope of this policy can be handled through other avenues, some of which are listed below:

2.1 Academic decisions:

Academic decisions such as awarding of grades, comprehensive exam results, dissertation defense results, suspension, or dismissal are to be managed through the processes found in the UNMC Graduate Studies Bulletin. Students may contact the Director of Graduate Administrative Services, Terri Vadovski (terri.vadovski@unmc.edu, 402 559 6532) for more information and assistance.

2.2 Sexual harassment:

All allegations of sexual harassment for which the student wishes the University to officially acknowledge and investigate, including sexual violence are to be reported to the Title IX Coordinator, Carmen Sirizzotti, (csirizzotti@unmc.edu, 402 559 2710) or the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Success, Dr. Philip D. Covington (philip.covington@unmc.edu, 402 559 2792).

2.3 Grievances against Staff:

Grievances against UNMC or TNMC staff are managed through the relevant policy/procedures by the UNMC Division Director, Employee Relations, Linda M. Cunningham (lcunning@unmc.edu, 402 559 7394)

2.4 Research Integrity:

Issues regarding research integrity and research misconduct are managed through the relevant policy/procedures by the Research Integrity Officer, Dr. Rowan Zetterman, (rzetterman@unmc.edu, 402 559 5018)

2.5 Violations of Law:

Violations of federal, state, or local laws may be managed through the relevant policies and procedures by the Office of Compliance and/or departments having oversight over the applicable law/regulation. UNMC Chief Compliance Officer: Sarah Gloden Carlson (sarah.glodencarlson@unmc.edu, 402 559 9576).

See: <http://www.unmc.edu/academicaffairs/compliance.htm>

2.6 Campus Security and Safety:

Campus security and safety issues are managed by the UNMC Campus Security (Charlotte Evans, 402 554 2772, gsvanda@unmc.edu) or the Omaha Police Department.

3 Policy:

Students have the right to file a grievance against faculty for violations of the UNMC Code of Conduct or other relevant policies, and grievances related to conditions that adversely impact the student's ability to successfully complete the graduate program. Examples of the types of grievances covered by this policy include, but are not limited to: inappropriate conduct in the workplace (e.g. verbal abuse, threatening behavior, or

favoritism); policy interpretation of time-off and excessive work hours; inappropriate delay of student progression toward degree attainment due to student's career interests and choices, or reductions in funding or awards, and laboratory personnel changes (e.g. departure of supervising faculty). Resolutions in situations where the grievance has been upheld may include student reinstatement, student reassignment to another class or lab, or other corrective action(s) for the benefit of the student.

Corrective action against graduate faculty is under the purview of the UNMC Dean of Graduate Studies in coordination with the department/division Chair or Dean of the faculty member's primary unit. This policy does not supersede the policies contained in the UNMC Faculty Handbook, and any corrective action will be consistent with those policies. Appropriate corrective action will be taken where the grievance has been upheld by a preponderance of evidence. Graduate students have the right to file a written complaint to the UNMC Faculty Professional Conduct Committee chair if they are not satisfied with the grievance panel resolution.

Retaliation against student complainants or others involved in the grievance process is strictly prohibited. Incidents of retaliation by faculty members will be referred to the Faculty Professional Conduct Committee for further investigation and disciplinary action.

Any intentionally false accusations and/or misleading complaints against University faculty by graduate students will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action.

4 Procedure:

Students may at any time contact the Student Counseling Center (402 559 7276) for confidential counseling by male/female licensed mental health care providers for any of the aforementioned cases.

At any stage in the informal process the Student Ombudsperson (Dr. David Carver, 402 559 7276, dcarver@unmc.edu) can be consulted as an independent, neutral, informal and confidential consultant. The Ombudsperson can provide additional information and clarification on University policies and proceedings, assistance in facilitating difficult conversations, and guidance in prioritizing options for dealing with the problem. The Ombudsperson will also report ongoing trends in graduate student grievances, while maintaining students' confidentiality, to campus administrators including the Dean of Graduate Studies and the UNMC Chancellor.

In most cases an initial attempt should be made to address the issue through an informal resolution process. This may include talking to the advisor, Graduate Student Association (President or Vice President), Director of Graduate Studies, or another member of the supervisory committee.

4.1 Informal Resolution:

4.1.1 First Course of Action:

It is recommended that the first course of action involve a discussion between the graduate student, the faculty member involved, and/or the supervisory committee to resolve the issue.

4.1.2 If Discussion with Faculty Member Is Not Possible or Effective:

If discussion with the involved faculty member is not possible or is not effective, the student should discuss the issue with the Graduate Program Director of their individual department or the Director of Graduate Administrative Services, Terri Vadovski (terri.vadovski@unmc.edu, 402 559 6532).

4.1.3 If Discussion with Departmental Graduate Program Director is Not Possible or Effective:

If discussion with the Departmental Graduate Program Director is not possible or is not effective the student should discuss the issue with their Department Chair.

4.1.4 Without Proceeding to Formal Complaint:

If the issue cannot be resolved informally, and the graduate student wants to summarize the incident without proceeding to a formal complaint, this may be done through one of two mechanisms. However, the Student Ombudsperson and/or Director of Graduate Administrative Services will inform the student that the recourse will be limited without filing a formal complaint.

4.1.4.1 Unwritten Summary:

Student Ombudsperson

(Dr. David Carver, dcarver@unmc.edu, 402 559 7276)

OR

4.1.4.2 Written Documentation:

Director of Graduate Administrative Services

(Terri Vadovski, terri.vadovski@unmc.edu, 402 559 6532)

4.1.5 Proceeding to Formal Complaint:

If the issue cannot be resolved informally, and the graduate student wants to proceed with an investigation of the incident(s), then the complaint may move to the formal level as outlined in Section 4.2 of this Policy.

4.2 Formal Resolution:

4.2.1 Filing a Complaint:

- 4.2.1.1 The complaint must be submitted [electronically](#) and will be automatically submitted to the Dean of Graduate Studies (Dr. Dele H. Davies) and Director of Graduate Studies (Terri Vadovski).
- 4.2.1.2 The complaint should attempt to identify the following information: the student grievant; the respondent faculty member or administrator; any other person involved; the incident, including approximate date and time, and whether the incident is ongoing; the policy claimed to have been violated or the limitation imposed on the graduate student's ability to complete their degree; and a brief statement of the remedy sought.
- 4.2.1.3 Graduate students are encouraged to submit their complaint within 60 class days after the incident occurred or 60 class days after informal resolution procedures have failed. "Class days" are defined as days when the University is open for classes, examinations, or administrative office activities on the academic calendar from the College of Graduate Studies.
 - 4.2.1.3.1 If the grievance is ongoing or involves a particularly sensitive matter, the grievant is encouraged to submit their complaint as soon as possible.
- 4.2.1.4 Every complaint will be acknowledged by email correspondence from the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies within 5 class days.

4.2.2 Preliminary Resolution Procedure:

- 4.2.2.1 The Dean of Graduate Studies (or designee) will meet with the student and the faculty or administrator involved separately to determine first whether a preliminary resolution can be reached. If a preliminary resolution cannot be achieved, the Dean shall notify both parties that the grievance will be referred to the Graduate Student Grievance Committee under Section 4.2.3 below. The Dean will inform the faculty member that s/he may prepare a statement in response to the allegations for review by the grievance panel, due within 10 class days. "Class days" are

defined as days when the University is open for classes, examinations, or administrative office activities on the academic calendar from the College of Graduate Studies. This timeline may be adjusted by the Dean of Graduate Studies if there are compelling reasons for delay.

4.2.3 Graduate Student Grievance Committee Constitution:

- 4.2.3.1 The Graduate Student Grievance Committee consists of eight members (four faculty and four students) each elected for a term of two (2) years, in a rotating fashion. Half of the committee members (two faculty and two students) are elected in years ending in an even number, the other half (two faculty and two students) are elected in years ending in an odd number.
- 4.2.3.2 The faculty members will include no more than one member from any one graduate department.
- 4.2.3.3 The student members will include no more than one member from any one department, all in good academic standing as per college regulations.
- 4.2.3.4 The Graduate Student Association will elect two student members each year, one male and one female. Members of the Grievance Committee need not be serving on the Graduate Student Association Executive Board.
- 4.2.3.5 The Graduate Council will elect two faculty members each year, one male and one female. Members of the Grievance Committee need not be serving on the Graduate Council.
- 4.2.3.6 When a formal grievance is filed, the Chair of the Graduate Council will select one male and one female faculty member and one female and one male student member from the current members of the committee to form an ad hoc grievance “panel.” The Chair of the Graduate Council will appoint a chair for the grievance panel from among the selected committee members.
- 4.2.3.7 The Graduate Council Chair will make every effort to avoid perceived or actual conflicts of interests in selecting the panel members by avoiding members that are in the same department, laboratory, and/or have a close relationship with either the student or faculty member involved in the grievance complaint.

4.2.3.8 The Chair of the Faculty Professional Conduct Committee (or designee) will sit on the Panel as an observer without a vote, to prevent unnecessary duplication of investigation if the grievance results in the matter being referred to the Faculty Professional Conduct Committee. This person can also advise the grievance panel about recommended corrective action, if appropriate.

4.2.4 Graduate Student Grievance Panel Responsibilities:

4.2.4.1 The panel members will review the statements of both parties. They will interview the involved parties and any named witnesses, as appropriate. They will review other provided evidence. Panel members may seek advice and evidence from other university officials as necessary to conduct the investigation.

4.2.4.2 The Panel may, at their discretion, convene a hearing to meet with the involved student and the faculty. Each individual will be given the opportunity to respond, to provide a statement and/or counter-statement, in order to provide additional information as warranted. The meeting will not be open to the public although the involved parties may bring another individual for support. This person may not speak or participate in the hearing. The Panel will provide a written report summarizing the obtained evidence, detailed proceedings, conclusions, and recommended actions to the Dean of Graduate Studies within 30 class days of when the Panel assembled.

4.2.4.3 The graduate student and faculty/administrator's names, identifying information, statements, and comments as well as any deliberations, advice, or evidence given in the course of Graduate Student Grievance Panel deliberations are confidential. The members of the Graduate Student Grievance Panel are expected to abide by this duty to maintain confidentiality. Any unauthorized release or carelessness in the handling of this confidential information is considered a breach of this duty to maintain confidentiality and is strictly prohibited.

4.2.5 Deliberation:

4.2.5.1 The Panel shall deliberate privately at the close of the hearing. If a majority of the Panel finds that the allegations are supported by a "preponderance of the evidence," the Panel will make

confidential recommendations to the Dean of Graduate Studies to resolve the matter.

4.2.6 Report:

- 4.2.6.1 The Panel will submit a formal report to the Dean of Graduate Studies. If the Panel identifies misconduct, the Dean of Graduate Studies is responsible for immediate and timely corrective action in coordination with the department/division Chair or Dean of the faculty member's primary unit, taking into consideration the recommendations of the panel.
- 4.2.6.2 The Dean of Graduate Studies will distribute the conclusion and recommended action(s) by the Panel to the faculty member and the department/division Chair or Dean of the faculty member's primary unit. The Dean of Graduate Studies will also distribute the conclusion and non-confidential recommended action(s) by the Panel as well as the non-confidential corrective action(s) as determined by the Dean of Graduate Studies to the student.
- 4.2.6.3 All reports will be distributed within 10 class days of the Dean of Graduate Studies receiving the full report from the Panel.
- 4.2.6.4 Retaliation is strictly prohibited. Incidents of retaliation by faculty members or administrators will be referred to the Faculty Professional Conduct Committee for disciplinary action.
- 4.2.6.5 Any intentionally false accusations and/or misleading complaints against University faculty or administrators by graduate students will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action.

4.2.7 Timelines:

- 4.2.7.1 Graduate students are encouraged to submit their complaint within 60 class days after the incident occurred or 60 class days after informal resolution procedures have failed. "Class days" are defined as days when the University is open for classes, examinations, or administrative office activities on the academic calendar from the College of Graduate Studies.
 - 4.2.7.1.1 If the grievance is ongoing or involves a particularly sensitive matter, the grievant is encouraged to submit their complaint as soon as possible.

- 4.2.7.2 The complaint must be submitted [electronically](#) and will be acknowledged by email correspondence from the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies within 5 class days.
- 4.2.7.3 The Panel will provide a written report summarizing the obtained evidence, detailed proceedings, conclusions, and recommended corrective actions to the Dean of Graduate Studies within 30 class days of when the Panel assembled.
- 4.2.7.4 The Dean of Graduate Studies will distribute the conclusion and recommended action(s) by the Panel to the faculty member and the department/division Chair or Dean of the faculty member's primary unit. The Dean of Graduate Studies will also distribute the conclusion and non-confidential recommended action(s) by the Panel as well as the non-confidential corrective action(s) as determined by the Dean of Graduate Studies to the student. These reports will be distributed within 10 class days of receiving the full report from the Panel.
- 4.2.7.5 If the Panel identifies misconduct, the Dean of Graduate Studies, in coordination with the department/division Chair or Dean of the faculty member's primary unit, is responsible for immediate and timely corrective action, taking into consideration the recommendations of the panel.
- 4.2.7.6 Graduate students have the right to file a written complaint to the UNMC Faculty Professional Conduct Committee chair if they are not satisfied with the grievance panel resolution.
- 4.2.7.7 The timelines may be adjusted by the Dean of Graduate Studies if there are compelling reasons for delay.

For additional information and guidance regarding this policy, contact the Graduate Student Association Chair of Issues Committee ([GSA Officers](#)) and/or any of the persons listed below:

Terri Vadovski, Director of Graduate Administrative Services
(terri.vadovski@unmc.edu, 402 559 6532)

Dr. Philip D. Covington, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Success
(philip.covington@unmc.edu, 402 559 2792)

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