

CLAS Academic Grievance Procedures & Student Complaints

CLAS Academic Grievance Procedures

Academic grievances are generally defined as those involving (a) procedures, policies, and grades in courses, (b) major, minor, or program (graduate or undergraduate) degree requirements, (c) general undergraduate university graduation requirements, such as general education, total credit, or residency requirements, or (d) graduate degree requirements, such as total credit or residency requirements. Filing of a grievance is required by the end of the following regular semester after notification of grade or receipt of adverse decision. Appeals of decisions must take place 15 working days after receipt of notification.

A. Resolution of an academic grievance involving procedures, policies, and grades in individual courses. This process is defined in the [university catalog](#), and the resolution of academic grievances is based on two principles: first, that the resolution of a grievance should be sought at the lowest possible level, and second, that pathways for appeal exist for both faculty members and students. Resolution should be pursued as follows:

1. An appeal to the instructor. Normally, the instructor must respond to an appeal within 15 working days of receipt of the appeal. If the student is unable or unwilling to appeal to the instructor, the student may proceed to the next step, with an explanation of why the instructor was bypassed.
2. If the grievance is not resolved to the student's satisfaction, a further appeal could be made to the unit head who may request that the appeal be put in writing. In CLAS, the unit head is required to interview both the student and the instructor as part of the investigation of a grievance. The unit head will keep a written record of the interviews. If the unit head cannot interview the student and/or the instructor for some reason, then an assistant unit head (or a faculty designee for a unit without any assistant unit heads) will conduct the interview(s) and keep a written record of the interview(s). Both the student and the faculty member will be notified in writing of the unit head's decision, within 15 working days of receipt of the appeal.
3. If the disposition by the unit head is not acceptable to either party, an appeal **in writing** may be made to Associate Dean Dwayne Tunstall who adjudicates academic grievances on behalf of the dean in CLAS, via Mona Silva (silvar@gvsu.edu), and must follow these specific procedures:
 - The appeal must be descriptive and specific. This includes: the outcome the student is seeking (for example, a grade change from F to D); and the specific reason(s) why the grade should be changed in accordance with GVSU policies and the course syllabus.
 - The student should provide evidence (e.g., the syllabus) to support their grievance.
 - The appeal must contain specific documentation of the outcome of the meeting with the professor and the unit head, including the unit head's written response. The student should also clearly demonstrate errors of fact in the unit head's response, as the Associate Dean's review is an appeal, not an initial consideration of the case.

If Associate Dean Tunstall feels that there is some merit in the written grievance, he will either make a determination based on the information and materials provided, or he may establish a committee to review the grievance and make a recommendation within 15 working days to the dean. Such a committee may include a representative of the dean's office, a faculty representative from the college of the course under appeal, and a student representative. If a student representative is to be included in the committee, the student that is a party to the appeal must sign a FERPA release/waiver prior to the committee convening. Within 15 working days of receiving the committee's recommendation in the latter procedure, the dean shall rule on the grievance. Both the student and faculty member will be notified in writing of the dean's decision. The unit head will also be notified in writing of the dean's decision. The dean's review and judgment in the case will be final.

B. Resolution of academic grievance involving fulfillment of program, major, or minor degree requirements should be pursued as follows:

1. An appeal to the unit head or graduate program director will be resolved within 15 working days.
2. If the grievance is not resolved to the student's satisfaction at this level, an appeal to the dean of the college would be possible, in the same manner as outlined in (A).

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences offers students the opportunity to meet with Assistant Dean Betty Schaner prior to the formal appeal submission for (A) or (B). This provides the student with an opportunity to review the appeal process, ask questions, and develop the best possible appeal case. Meetings with Assistant Dean Schaner can be made by contacting Mona Silva at 616-331-2495 or silvar@gvsu.edu.

C. Resolution of an academic grievance involving fulfillment of general undergraduate university requirements, should be pursued as follows:

1.
 - a) For general education, an appeal should be made to the general education director.
 - b) For residency requirements, students should contact their academic advisor to request the appropriate approvals for the student's program.
 - c) For supplemental writing skills (SWS) requirements, an appeal should be made to the director of SWS.
2. If at this point the grievance is still not resolved to the student's satisfaction, a further written appeal could be made to the provost or the provost's designate. In this case, the provost or designate may establish a committee to review the grievance and make a recommendation within 15 working days. Such a committee shall include a representative of the provost's office, a faculty representative related to the student's major, and a faculty representative from outside the student's college. Upon receiving the committee's recommendation, the provost will render a final judgment in the case.

D. Exceptions to institutional graduate degree requirements sought by individual students will be determined by the dean and the provost or the provost's designate.

The student filing the grievance may have an observer from the Dean of Students Office or a person of their choice attend any meeting at which the student appears. The faculty member involved in the grievance may have an observer of their choice attend any meeting at which the faculty member appears.

Student Complaints

Students can file complaints about **unprofessional conduct** of faculty in CLAS and **instructional quality** of individual courses taught in CLAS.

- A. Unprofessional conduct.** Student complaints about unfair grading or regarding discrimination or harassment in the classroom based on their identity can be made to the unit head. If students would prefer to remain anonymous when reporting incidents of discrimination or harassment in the classroom, they can file a [climate incident report](#) or contact [the Title IX office](#). Students should contact [the Title IX office](#) to report sexual misconduct.
- B. Instructional quality.** For student complaints regarding the quality of instruction that are not directly related to unfair grading or issues of institutional equity concerns (e.g., sexual misconduct, harassment, discrimination) in the classroom, we ask that students use the end-of-semester course evaluations. These evaluations are designed to provide this sort of feedback to both instructors and unit heads. We can assure you that the unit head and any other faculty who are in charge of staffing courses will want to hear the feedback that you and your classmates have communicated (anonymously, of course) through those evaluations. Such feedback is valuable in identifying ways to improve future offerings of courses. If you would like to submit a formal complaint about the quality of instruction after the semester ends, we will certainly discuss your complaint with the unit head and/or investigate it, depending on the severity of the matter. The procedure would follow the same guidelines listed in (A) of the Academic Grievances Procedures section above. For such information to be shared at that point, it would need to be a signed document or from a verified GVSU email.

Students should consult the Division of Student Affairs' [Student Complaint and Concern Process webpage](#) for issues or **concerns involving other students** or complaints involving a faculty or staff member that is **not an academic grievance, Title IX, or institutional equity concern** (e.g., sexual misconduct, harassment, discrimination).

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