

# Academic Appeals Committee Policy

## [Working Draft Revision -2/9/16]

### **Committee Charge**

**[To be placed here and in the Faculty/Staff Handbook on the committees page]**

The Academic Appeals Committee serves as an appellate body for all academic matters except instances of academic misconduct. Particular committee responsibilities include appeals of assigned grades and program dismissals. Such appeals may be brought to the Committee only after regular department and college channels of appeal have been exhausted. The committee's decision is binding unless any party appeals to the Provost/Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs.

### **Committee Role**

The Academic Appeals Committee shall be called upon by the chair of the committee to hear appeals of academic matters. Such appeals may be initiated by students after all regular channels of appeal within the department and college have been exhausted. The Academic Appeals Committee serves throughout the calendar year, including fall, spring, and summer semesters.

The charge of this committee is to serve as an appellate body for students who dispute an assigned grade, a program dismissal, or any other academic matter, with the exception of issues of academic misconduct, which are to be heard by the Academic Integrity Council<sup>1</sup>. Grounds for a successful appeal may involve one or more of the following conditions, the existence of which the student is required to prove:

1. The professor of record violated university policy.
2. The grade reflects discriminatory or improper conduct towards the individual student.
3. The instructor refused to correct a clerical or administrative error made in the process of transmitting an earned grade to the registrar.

The committee's decision is binding unless any party appeals to the Provost/Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. The ultimate appellate route is to the Provost. The committee falls under the oversight of the Provost.

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<sup>1</sup> This committee will continue to hear academic misconduct appeals until the Academic Integrity Council has been set up and the TCU Honor Code put into effect.

## **Committee Structure**

The Academic Appeals Committee will comprise 33 standing members. This committee will have 5 staff members, 4 undergraduate students, 4 graduate students, and 20 faculty members, of which 10 must have graduate faculty status. The undergraduate students will be selected by the Undergraduate House of Representatives, the graduate students will be selected by the Graduate Student Senate, the staff members will be selected by the Staff Assembly, and the faculty members will be selected by the Faculty Senate. A chair and vice-chair of the Academic Appeals Committee will be appointed by the Chancellor from the twenty faculty members. The chair and vice-chair must both be members of the graduate faculty and should not be members of the same college.

## **Appeals Process**

The Academic Appeals Committee is responsible for both the Undergraduate and Graduate Appeals process. An appeal to the committee is initiated *in writing* by a student to the committee chair after all regular channels of appeal within the department and college have been exhausted. If the chair is not available to serve in a particular instance (e.g., the chair may be a party to the appeal, the chair may be out of town during the appeal period, or the chair may be employed in the college of the appeal), the vice-chair shall assume the duties of the chair for the duration of the appeal.

The student's appeal must be received within ten (10) academic days of the decision of the dean. The appeal should include a letter to the committee discussing the reason for the appeal and all pertinent documents that support the appeal. When the appeal is received, the chair (or acting chair) will ask the appropriate dean for all written documents pertaining to the appeal and will inform the student and faculty member(s) as to all relevant appeals procedures and policies. During the review of the material, the chair may request other documents pertaining to the appeal. If the appeal involves an alleged failure to provide the student with accommodations mandated by Academic Services, then Academic Services should be consulted for clarification of their policies and the accommodations granted the particular student.

Once the chair (or acting chair) has assembled all the necessary documents, he or she will organize a hearing panel composed of committee members. For an undergraduate appeal the following personnel will be selected: three faculty, one staff member, and one undergraduate student. For a graduate appeal the following personnel will be selected: three graduate faculty, one staff member, and one graduate student. The chair (or vice chair, if necessary) will serve as the chair of the hearing panel for both the graduate and undergraduate appeal hearings. To avoid conflicts of interest, none of the members of the hearing panel should be employed in or a student with a major or minor in the college of the appeal. The personnel chosen for hearing panels should be rotated as much as possible so as to distribute committee responsibility and time commitment as evenly as possible.

Hearings will generally be scheduled on days that classes are in session, though urgent cases may be heard more expeditiously at the discretion of the chair. When an appeal hearing occurs outside of the fall and spring semesters, the hearing panel members will be compensated as per university policy on compensating summer service commitments. In the event that an insufficient number of committee members are available to constitute a hearing panel in a timely manner, the Committee chair (or acting chair) shall have the authority to appoint temporary committee members, including, if necessary, an acting vice-chair, who should be chosen from among the Committee members if possible, to preside over an appeal.

During an appeal hearing<sup>2</sup>, only the following may be present: the members of the hearing panel, the student who filed for the appeal, a support person for the student if desired by the student, the faculty member(s) whose decision is being appealed, and the dean or a designee who will represent the college or school. The dean/designee will be invited by the hearing chair. The student's support person will not ordinarily be allowed to address the committee directly; however, the student may petition the hearing panel in advance, via the chair, to allow the support person to speak to the panel assuming good cause is presented. If the support person is an attorney, the student must inform the University five (5) academic days in advance in order for the University to also have an attorney present (in which case the University attorney may also attend the hearing).

During the hearing, the student will be given an opportunity to present the case for his or her appeal and the faculty member(s) will be given an opportunity to respond. The representative of the College/School will also be given an opportunity to comment, and the hearing panel will be given the opportunity to ask questions of the student, the faculty member(s), and the College/School representative. The student may request to present his or her appeal without the faculty member being present.

Once the panel has interviewed the student and faculty member(s) to its satisfaction, the student, support person, faculty member(s), and College/School representative will be excused and the panel will deliberate, ultimately voting on an outcome. The panel may decide to delay voting beyond the hearing meeting in order to seek outside information, for example from Academic Services if there are questions regarding academic accommodations or to consult with the Provost concerning possible remedies. In that case, the panel will either reconvene in person or vote electronically as soon as feasible. The chair of the panel will not vote unless the panel is otherwise deadlocked. The chair will report the panel's decision to all parties, including the Provost, in writing within ten (10) academic days of the hearing.

#### Outcomes:

The hearing panel may vote to decline the appeal or may conclude that the appeal has sufficient merit to warrant some remedy or compromise, in which case the panel must suggest such a resolution. The typical remedy would be to replace a grade or reverse a

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<sup>2</sup> An appeal hearing does not constitute a "meeting of the Committee" and hence need not be an open meeting.

program dismissal, in which case, and in absence of a further appeal to the Provost, the chair will advise the appropriate dean to report the change to the registrar's office. The panel may also consider more extraordinary resolutions, in which case the Provost should be consulted to ascertain whether the proposed resolution is within the Committee's discretion.

Deviations: Should circumstances arise during an appeal process that are not covered fully by this document, the committee and its chair are entrusted to do their best to act within the reason and the spirit of the policy, yielding the student the benefit of the doubt in procedural issues where possible.

## **Full Academic Appeal Procedure**

**[To be placed in the *TCU Student Handbook*, *TCU Handbook for Faculty & Staff*, *Graduate Catalog*, and *Undergraduate Catalog*]**

### ***Procedures for filing an Academic Appeal***

The following procedures are specified for filing a formal grade appeal. Appeals of program dismissals or other appeals of an academic nature, not including appeals related to academic misconduct, shall follow analogous procedures beginning at the appropriate level. For example, the appeal of a program dismissal by an associate dean would begin with a discussion with the associate dean, followed by an appeal to the dean. Academic misconduct appeals should be directed to the Academic Integrity Council<sup>3</sup>.

#### ***Preconditions for a Formal Grade Appeal:***

In the event a student questions the appropriateness of a grade assigned for a course or the results of another critical component of a degree requirement (e.g. oral exam, juried exhibition, thesis, etc.) the student must first discuss the matter with the faculty member(s). These discussions between the faculty member and student should be initiated by the student as soon as possible after the grade is assigned, but no later than six (6) academic days following the disclosure of the grade to the student. The faculty member is expected to respond within five (5) academic days of the initiation. If there is no response from the faculty member, the student may present the issue directly to the department chair. In the event that the faculty member(s) agrees to change the grade/decision, the normal process for changing a grade shall be followed. If the student wishes to appeal the faculty's decision after these discussions, he or she must follow the formal grade appeals process outlined below.

**Note:** An academic day is defined as a school day on which TCU classes are meeting. Initiation of the discussion is any attempt to contact the faculty of record, or chair of examination committee in the case of a candidacy exam or thesis/dissertation defense,

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<sup>3 3</sup> This committee will continue to hear academic misconduct appeals until the Academic Integrity Council has been set up and the TCU Honor Code put into effect.

about the grade, including email or other written correspondence (recommended), personal meeting, and telephone call or message.

*Formal Grade Appeal:*

1. Appeal to the Department Chair or appropriate Administrator (see Dean's office for appropriate administrator)

The student may appeal the faculty decision **in writing** to the department chair or appropriate administrator within fifteen (15) academic days of the first day of the next long semester if a satisfactory resolution is not reached in the initial discussion with the faculty. Exceptions to deadlines set forth herein for students in unusual circumstances (for example, studying abroad) may be granted in writing by the dean of the college/school in which the course (or critical component) was offered. An exception may also be granted by the Provost/Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs.

The department chair or appropriate administrator will become familiar with the facts of the case by communicating with the student and the faculty member(s). The parties have a right to meet with the chair without the other party present. The faculty member or examination committee chair will respond **in writing** to the department chair concerning the student's appeal.

The department chair or appropriate administrator may either accept or deny the student's appeal. The chair will notify the student and faculty member(s) of his/her decision in writing within ten (10) academic days of receiving the appeal. In the event that the department chair accepts the student's appeal, and no further appeals occur, he/she will initiate a grade change through the dean of the college.

**EXCEPTIONS**

If the department chair is involved in the appeal as the faculty member (or as one of the faculty members), the chair of the department advisory committee will assume the department chair's role in the appeal process. If the department does not have a department advisory committee, the chair of the school/college advisory committee will assume the department chair's role in the appeal process.

2. Appeal to the Academic Dean

The chair's position may be appealed **in writing** by the student or faculty member(s) to the appropriate dean within ten (10) academic days of the department chair's decision.

The dean will become familiar with the facts of the case by reading the prior appeal documents and by communicating with the student, faculty member(s), and the department chair. The parties have the right to meet with the dean without the other party present.

The academic dean will notify the student, faculty member(s), and the department chair of his/her decision **in writing** within ten (10) academic days of receiving the appeal. In the event the dean upholds the student's appeal and no further appeals occur, the change of grade shall be reported by the dean to the registrar's office.

#### EXCEPTIONS

If the dean of the college/school is involved in the appeal as the faculty member, the appropriate associate dean will assume the dean's role in the appeal process.

### 3. Appeal to the Academic Appeals Committee

The dean's decision may be appealed **in writing** by the student, the faculty member(s), or the department chair to the Academic Appeals Committee within ten (10) academic days of the dean's decision. The Academic Appeals Committee will follow the appeals procedures in the Academic Appeals Committee Policy, which may be obtained in full from the chair of the committee or the Provost's office.

The appeal by the student, the faculty member(s), or the department chair will be sent to the Academic Appeals Committee chair **in writing**. The material corresponding to the appeal should include a letter to the committee discussing the reason for the appeal and all pertinent documents that support the appeal. When the appeal is received, the committee chair will ask the appropriate dean for all written documents pertaining to the appeal. Once the committee chair receives the documents, he or she will convene a hearing panel and distribute the documents to the hearing panel members for review. During the review of the material, the chair may request other documents pertaining to the appeal. The chair will set a date for a hearing that will include the appropriate committee members, the student, and the faculty member(s). The chair will request that the dean or a designee be present to represent the college or school.

A hearing will take place at which time all parties will have an opportunity to discuss their case and committee members will ask questions to better understand the appeal.

The committee will confer and come to a decision on whether to support the appeal or not. All parties will be notified **in writing** of the committee's decision within ten (10) academic days of the hearing. In the event the committee upholds the student's appeal, and no further appeals occur, the chair will advise the appropriate dean to report the change of grade to the registrar's office.

### 4. Appeal to the Provost

The student, faculty member(s), or the department chair may appeal the Academic Appeals Committee's decision to the Provost of the University **in writing** within ten (10) academic days of the committee's decision.

All questions pertaining to the appeals policy and procedures should be addressed to the Chair of the Academic Academics Appeals Committee or the Provost's Office.