

**College of Education and Human Development**  
**Texas A&M University**  
**Graduate Student Grievance Policy**  
**Approved: February 5, 2008**

**1. Purpose, Overview, and Guiding Principles**

When conflicts or ethical difficulties arise during graduate students' professional training, they are encouraged to resolve the issues, informally, through dialogue among all affected parties.

Informal conversations and attempts to resolve the issues have the potential to lead to suggestions of, or necessity for, formal grievance procedures. The purpose of this policy is to provide a mechanism to address and resolve graduate students' grievances or conflicts with the CEHD. Specifically, this policy is designed to (1) inform graduate students of their rights, and (2) provide graduate students with the understanding of the steps necessary to initiate both informal and formal complaints.

**1.1** This policy addresses grievances associated with:

- *workload assignments;*
- *interpersonal conflicts;*
- *working conditions;* and
- *ethical concerns.*

**1.2** In accordance with Texas A&M University Student Rules, grievances involving discrimination and discrimination appeals, disability accommodation in academic programs, sexual harassment, grade disputes, unexcused absences, academic suspension and blocks, disciplinary action, academic misconduct, graduate student examination evaluation disputes, financial assessments by the university, and parking citations will be pursued by established university rules and procedures. These grievances are pursued through established avenues detailed by the University as outlined in *Texas A&M University Student Rules, Part III: Student Grievance Procedures (Rules 45-60)*, available at <http://student-rules.tamu.edu/part3.htm>.

**2. Grievance Procedures**

There are two avenues by which a student may initiate grievance proceedings: informal procedures and formal procedures. Before engaging in formal procedures, graduate students are strongly encouraged to resolve grievances through the informal steps outlined below. Before initiating any of these, graduate students are strongly encouraged to document events related to the issue in question. If a graduate student feels any discomfort with the steps outlined in Section 2, he/she may initiate informal procedures at any step outlined below.

**2.1 Informal Procedures.** Informal procedures encourage constructive resolution of grievances by graduate students. Graduate students are encouraged to follow the procedures outlined below in sequence; however, should there arise a situation that makes the sequential following of informal procedures untenable, then students are encouraged to pursue the next logical step to resolve the grievance in question. Informal procedures consist of the following steps:

**2.1.A.** The graduate student should first contact the individual with whom he/she has a grievance and attempt to resolve the grievance directly, in a constructive manner.

**2.1.B** Should there exist a grievance that has not yet been resolved related to rule 2.1.A., the graduate student will contact the Ombudsperson in his/her respective department. The role of an Ombudsperson is outlined 2.1.E. of this policy. *This step may be omitted if the department does not have an ombudsperson to addresses student grievances.*

**2.1.C.** If the parties involved can not achieve a satisfactory outcome, the graduate student will then speak to the Department Head. Graduate students are strongly encouraged to present their grievance in writing to the Head of their department unless the graduate student feels threatened or uncomfortable with a direct communication with the Department Head. In this case, the student is free to talk directly with the Ombudsperson for Graduate Studies in the CEHD. The Department Head will then meet with the parties in an attempt to resolve the grievance. If the Department Head is unable to resolve the grievance, he/she may contact the Ombudsperson for Graduate Studies in the CEHD and/or the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in the CEHD, or by an individual appointed by the Dean.

**2.1.D.** If/when a graduate student believes he/she has cause for grievance concerning the Department Head, or if the student does not feel comfortable taking the issue in question to the Department Head, the student should express the grievance directly to the Ombudsperson for Graduate Studies in the CEHD.

**2.1.E. Role of the Ombudsperson.** The role of the Ombudsperson in the informal grievance procedures is to:

- “Assist members of the university community in solving problems and conflicts”;
- “Investigate claims of unfair treatment or erroneous procedure”;
- “Serve as a neutral listener, information resource, advisor, intermediary, and mediator”;
- “Consider all sides of a question impartially and objectively”;
- “Explain established policies and procedures of the university and the CEHD”;
- “Develop options for addressing graduate students’ concerns, and help find a solution”; and,
- “Facilitate communication between the parties involved in an issue.”

Further information concerning the role of the Ombudsperson is available from the Office of Graduate Studies, Texas A&M University: <http://ogs.tamu.edu/OGS/tCurrentOmbudsperson.htm>.

In specific cases, the CEHD Ombudsperson may, with the student’s permission, contact the University Ombudsperson in the Office of Graduate Studies, hereinafter referred to as the “University Ombudsperson,” for assistance with the issue.

It should be noted that the Ombudsperson is not an “advocate” or “supporter” of the student or faculty member. Rather, it is the role of the Ombudsperson to ensure fairness, neutrality, and objectivity of all parties involved in a grievance.

**2.1.F.** If the matter is resolved prior to the recommendation to initiate formal grievance procedures, the mediating officer (Department Head, Ombudsperson for Graduate Studies in the CEHD, or the University Ombudsperson) will draft a letter of understanding explaining the resolution. This letter will be retained in the Department Head’s office.

**2.2 Formal Procedures.** Should a satisfactory resolution not be achieved through the use of informal procedures outlined in this policy, a graduate student has the option of initiating formal grievance procedures. Should formal procedures be sought, a graduate student should express his/her grievance in writing to the Department Head or the University Ombudsperson. However, these formal procedures are, from then on, managed by the University and guided by its rules.