

Policy: Graduate Student Complaints, Grievances, and Appeals

No: 29.1

Date Approved: FC 2/3/2015, GPC 8/25/2021, GPC 5/15/2023, FC 5/19/2023

Responsible Party: UWM Joseph J. Zilber College of Public Health

1. Purpose

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Zilber School of Public Health is committed to ensuring a fair and respectful process through which students can seek resolution of complaints and/or grievances involving Zilber School representatives (i.e., faculty member, instructor, faculty body, or staff member).

2. Policy

Non-Academic Complaints

The Zilber School seeks to promote a supportive environment that values each member of its collective body and respects the diversity that each member brings. As such, the UWM Zilber School does not tolerate harassment or discrimination based on race/ethnicity, sex/gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, or other protected status designated by UWM (see UWM SAAP 5-1: Discriminatory Conduct and Consensual Relationships Policy).

If a student believes they have been the subject of discrimination or harassment by a UWM representative (faculty, staff, instructor, administrator) or student, they may discuss the matter with the Associate Dean for Academic & Student Affairs ("Associate Dean for ASA"), who will direct the student to appropriate resources and/or methods for resolution.

If the student's complaint pertains to the above issues, they may also choose to directly contact:

UWM's Office of Equity/Diversity Services

Mitchell Hall 359

3203 N. Downer Ave.

(414) 229-5923

diverse@uwm.edu <https://uwm.edu/equity-diversity-services/>

Academic Grievances

If a student believes they have been treated unfairly by a Zilber School representative with regard to an academic matter (e.g., grade, evaluation, graduation decision, scholastic standing), they may file an appeal using the process outlined below. This policy aligns with the UWM Graduate School Academic Appeals Procedure.

For academic grievances related to faculty and instructors from other UWM units, please consult that unit's grievance policy. Zilber students can consult with Zilber leadership, including the Associate Dean for ASA, for guidance in this situation.

Informal Resolution to Academic Grievances

Many issues and concerns can be addressed informally. Students may reach a satisfactory resolution by speaking directly with the responsible party/body about the academic issue or concern. Ideally, the grievance process begins with a meaningful effort by the student to resolve the issue through informal discussion with the responsible faculty member, instructor, or representative of the faculty body (dissertation committee, preliminary exam committee, etc.).

If the student is not satisfied with the outcome of the informal process or is uncomfortable raising the issue with the faculty member/instructor/body, they may seek confidential guidance and consultation from their advisor (faculty or staff), program director, Faculty Chair, or Associate Dean for ASA.

Students may also choose to initiate a formal academic grievance (see Step 1 below).

Step 1: Formal Academic Grievance

A student can initiate a formal grievance by submitting a written statement to the responsible faculty member/instructor/body within 30 calendar days of the action that prompted the appeal. The student should send a copy of the grievance to the Associate Dean for ASA. The written grievance must include:

- A. A description of the specific nature of the issue, decision, or behavior
- B. The facts underlying the grievance
- C. Any previous efforts made to address the issue
- D. The solution sought and the rationale for the solution outlined

The faculty member/instructor/body has 15 working days to respond in writing to the student's written grievance and should describe the reason for their decision. A copy of this response shall also be sent to the Associate Dean for ASA.

Step 2: Appeal to Zilber GPC Grievance Subcommittee

If the student is not satisfied with the outcome of Step 1, the student may appeal the decision within 10 working days of receipt of the faculty member/instructor/body's written response to the grievance. Appeals should be made in writing to the Associate Dean for ASA, who will submit materials to the Zilber Graduate Program Committee (GPC) Chair to schedule a formal meeting.

Student appeals must include:

- A. A description of the specific nature of the issue, decision, or behavior
- B. The facts underlying the grievance
- C. Evidence of all previous efforts made to address the issue (including the written response from the responsible faculty member/instructor/body)
- D. The solution sought and the rationale for the solution outlined

The GPC will convene a Grievance Subcommittee to address the issue and send an email to the student indicating the date and location of the meeting, as well as the timeline for review. If a member of the GPC is the faculty member responsible for the decision or behavior at issue, the faculty chair will appoint a faculty member to replace them for the meeting. The Subcommittee must take and maintain complete minutes from the appeal meeting.

The Grievance Subcommittee has 20 working days from the receipt of the grievance from the Associate Dean for ASA to respond with its determination in writing to the student's appeal. The determination must be sent via both email and certified mail to the student, return receipt requested. The Associate Dean for ASA shall also be informed via email.

During the summer period, the Grievance Subcommittee may be comprised of an ad hoc group appointed by the Faculty Chair.

Step 3: Appeal to Dean of the UWM Graduate School

If the Step 2 decision is negative, the student may, within 10 working days from the date of notification of that decision, appeal to the Dean of the UWM Graduate School. The appeal must be made in writing and should contain the reason for the appeal, substantial evidence in support of the appeal, and the solution sought. This may be done using the Step Three Academic Appeal Form. The student should direct the appeal to the Dean of the UWM Graduate School in Mitchell Hall Room 251 (using the form linked below) and email a copy to the Zilber Associate Dean for ASA. For additional details about Step 3, students should refer to the UWM Graduate School website for timelines and policies.

Recordkeeping

The Associate Dean for ASA will maintain a record of all documentation related to Step 1, 2, and 3 student complaints and their resolution on a password-protected university server. The records will be retained for a period of seven years.

Regarding the Prevention of Retaliation

UWM's Discriminatory Conduct Policy prohibits retaliation. Retaliation is an adverse action made as a result of an individual's complaint about conduct prohibited by the University's Discriminatory Conduct Policy or participation in enforcement of this Policy. Protected activities include reporting discrimination or serving as a witness in an investigation in connection with the same. Students, staff, and faculty are thus protected from retaliation from participating in discrimination-related complaints.

3. Definitions

Associate Dean for ASA: Associate Dean for Academic & Student Affairs

Discrimination: UWM defines discrimination as conduct that (1) adversely affects any aspect of an individual's employment, education, or participation in activities or programs at UWM; and (2) is based on one or more characteristics of the individual that are protected under federal or state laws. Characteristics that are protected under federal or state ("protected statuses") law may include: age, ancestry, arrest or conviction record, color, disability, gender identity/expression, genetic information, identity as a veteran, disabled veteran, or Vietnam veteran, marital status, membership in the national guard, state defense force or any other reserve component of the military forces of the United States or this state, national origin, pregnancy, political affiliation, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation.

Harassment: UWM defines discriminatory harassment as conduct that (1) is of any type (oral, written, electronic, graphic, or physical); (2) is directed towards or against a person because of the person's protected status (see the list of protected statuses above); and (3) unreasonably interferes with the individual's work, education or participation in activities or programs at UWM or creates a working or learning environment that a reasonable person would find threatening or intimidating.

GPC: Graduate Program Committee

4. Procedures

The overarching UWM Graduate School Academic Appeals Procedure may be found at <https://uwm.edu/graduateschool/students/academic-policies-and-procedures/appeals-and-exceptions/graduate-school-academic-appeals-procedure/>

5. Contact Information

Associate Dean for Academic & Student Affairs.

6. Forms

Step Three Academic Appeal Form: [https://uwm.edu/graduateschool/wp-content/uploads/sites/646/2023/12/Step Three Academic Appeal form.pdf](https://uwm.edu/graduateschool/wp-content/uploads/sites/646/2023/12/Step_Three_Academic_Appeal_form.pdf)