

Graduate School Complaint Resolution Procedure

The University of Connecticut is a community of scholars and researchers committed to integrity, freedom of inquiry and intellectual pursuit, respect for individuals and the rights of others, and tolerance for both individual differences and differing points of view. Accordingly, a fundamental responsibility of the Graduate School is to foster durable, harmonious, and productive working relationships among graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, faculty members, and administrators. For the purposes of this document, a **graduate student** is defined as any individual who holds admission to the Graduate School to pursue either a graduate certificate or a graduate degree, as well as any other individual enrolled in a graduate-level course. A **postdoctoral fellow** is defined as a person who (1) holds a research or other doctoral degree and is not pursuing a graduate degree, and (2) is working in a temporary position with a focus on further training in research and scholarship. A **faculty member** is defined as a person holding an academic appointment in one or more academic units at the assistant professor level or higher. An **administrator** is defined as a person functioning in an administrative role and having contact and interaction with graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and faculty, whether holding a faculty position concurrently or not.

Occasionally, difficult situations may arise. This document establishes a process by which graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and faculty can pursue fair and timely resolution of complaints resulting from their interactions with faculty, administrators, academic programs or departments, or other graduate students or postdoctoral fellows. Many of these situations involve matters of personal sensitivity and need to be resolved amicably and with a minimum of legalistic maneuvering. The procedures outlined here are intended as means to resolution and not as means to cast blame or deliver recriminations. Thus, it is expected that parties involved in these processes shall suffer no reprisals or harassment and shall not be penalized in any way for doing so. Further, if several individuals share a common complaint, that complaint may be heard collectively and resolved accordingly.

For an issue to be considered under this policy, the party (or parties) bringing the complaint may not be anonymous. If one wishes to alert the Graduate School about an issue while remaining anonymous, the University of Connecticut Reportline (<https://www.compliance-helpline.com/uconncares.jsp>) may be used for this purpose, although progress toward resolution ultimately may require the complainant to disclose his or her identity at some point.

This document does not apply in matters of academic misconduct, disciplinary issues, harassment, conflict of interest, or any other area in which the University has in force other policies or procedures governing the handling of specific kinds of complaints and allegations. After reviewing a complaint submitted under this policy, the Associate Dean of the Graduate School with jurisdiction (Storrs or Health Center) may determine that the issue falls under the jurisdiction of the [*Responsibilities of Student Life: The Student Code*](#), the [*Academic Integrity in Graduate Education and Research*](#) policy, the [*Policy Statement on Harassment*](#), the [*Policy on Conflict of Interest in Research*](#), or other such policy. In such instances, the Associate Dean will notify the parties involved and refer the complaint to the appropriate authorities.

In the areas of research and publication, the Graduate School further subscribes to the tenets of responsible conduct in research as set forth in [*On Being a Scientist: Responsible Conduct in Research*](#) (1995) by the National Academy of Sciences, as periodically amended.

Grounds for complaints brought forward by graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and faculty under this policy may fall within one or more categories, including but not limited to:

- alleged inappropriate or unfair application of policies or regulations of a particular degree program, department, school or college, or of the University;
- any alleged personal conflict or interaction that adversely impacts either the rights of a member of the academic community or the academic/research environment;

- alleged inappropriate or unfair decisions related to work assignments, research reports, or publications;
- inappropriate or unfair decisions related to the award of graduate student financial support within the purview of the Graduate School;
- alleged disregard of official University requirements, policies, or regulations;
- alleged tampering with or misuse of research data or University resources or property; and
- alleged inappropriate interference or intimidation by another individual in the performance of one's academic or research duties.

Step One: Informal Resolution

A person who believes that he or she has a complaint must attempt first to resolve the issue by discussing the matter directly with the individual(s) involved.

Step Two: Mediation

If the attempt to resolve the complaint informally is not successful, the individual(s) may submit a concise yet complete written summary of the issue to the Coordinator of Graduate Studies or Department Head of the complainant's unit ("the local mediator") to seek a mediated resolution. In the event that the issue involves the designated mediator or if the mediator is not available, the Associate Dean of the Graduate School may designate another individual to serve in that role. In the event that the complaint involves the Associate Dean, then the Associate Dean from the other campus (Storrs or Health Center) will administer the process.

The written summary must (1) bear the signature of the complainant(s), (2) be specific in terms of the circumstances and individuals involved in the situation resulting in the complaint, (3) include detailed information about the complainant's attempt to resolve the issue informally, and (4) be submitted within thirty (30) calendar days of the last unsuccessful attempt to resolve the matter informally.

As soon as feasible, ordinarily within 10 calendar days of receipt of a complaint, the mediator will confer with the cognizant Associate Dean of the Graduate School (either Storrs or Health Center) to determine whether the mediation process would more appropriately be pursued within the local unit (program or department) or by the Graduate School.

If the complaint remains in the local unit ("local mediation"), the mediator will confer with all parties involved in the issue to seek a resolution. If this effort is successful, the mediator will write a memorandum stating the specifics of the issue, the steps taken in the mediation process, and the agreed-upon resolution. Copies of the memorandum will be signed by and distributed to the principal parties and to the Associate Dean of the Graduate School. This should occur within thirty (30) calendar days of the decision to pursue local mediation. If the mediator is not successful in resolving the issue, he or she will notify the principal parties and the Associate Dean of the Graduate School of that fact in writing within thirty (30) calendar days of the decision to pursue local mediation.

If the mediation of the complaint is to be handled by the Graduate School, the Associate Dean or his or her designee will carry out the mediation process described in the preceding paragraph, following the same timelines.

If the attempt to resolve the issue through mediation is unsuccessful, the complainant may seek a formal hearing determination.

Step Three: Formal Hearing

The Graduate Hearing Committee is composed of three voting members (two members of the Graduate Faculty and one non-faculty person--either a graduate student or a postdoctoral fellow, respectively). The Associate Dean of the Graduate School will select the members of the Committee. Any person who served as a mediator for the complaint shall not serve as a member of the Committee. The Associate Dean of the Graduate School (Storrs or Health Center) shall preside over the hearing as a non-voting member. A member of the Hearing Committee cannot have a direct involvement in the matter being contested. The complainant will be notified in writing of the composition of the Hearing Committee and may object to the appointment of any voting member on the grounds that the member's participation would jeopardize his/her right to a fair hearing. The Associate Dean presiding over the hearing will determine whether such objections have merit and may, when necessary, appoint substitute voting member(s).

The Hearing Committee shall not be bound by the procedures and rules of evidence of a court of law. Both the complainant(s) and the party (or parties) who are the object of the complaint may be accompanied by no more than one (1) support person for consultation purposes during the hearing. This support person shall not address the Hearing Committee or others at the hearing unless permitted by the presiding Associate Dean. The hearing shall consist of the following steps:

- 1) Identification of the principal parties involved in the case, the support persons (if any), and the members of the Hearing Committee.
- 2) The complainant may make a succinct opening statement and then present the substance of his/her complaint via statements, witnesses, documents and/or other evidence. This presentation is at the discretion of the presiding Associate Dean, who may exclude irrelevant, repetitive or inherently unreliable evidence.
- 3) The person(s) who is (are) the object(s) of the complaint may then make an opening statement and present the evidence supporting his/her efforts and responses to the complainant(s) via statements, witnesses, documents and/or other evidence. This presentation is at the discretion of the presiding Associate Dean, who may exclude irrelevant, repetitive or inherently unreliable evidence.
- 4) Members of the Hearing Committee may question the parties involved in the hearing.
- 5) At the discretion of the presiding Associate Dean, the parties may make succinct summations.

All hearings will be recorded and the University will maintain the audio recordings as required by Connecticut state law and are the property of the University. Participants are prohibited from making their own recordings. Upon written request, an accused person or complainant may review the audio recording and make appropriate arrangements for it to be transcribed at the University. Arrangements and all associated costs involved in the transcription will be the responsibility of the requesting individual.

Following the hearing, the Hearing Committee shall deliberate in private and determine by majority vote of its voting members whether the complaint has merit, and if so, any recommended remedy or sanction. Within ten (10) business days of the hearing, the Associate Dean who presided over the hearing will communicate the Committee's findings and any recommended remedy or sanction to: (i) the complainant(s); (ii) the participating individuals involved in the issue; (iii) the local official; and (iv) the school or college dean(s) of the parties involved.

Step Four: Appeals

The complainant(s) may file an appeal of the Hearing Committee's decision with the Dean of the Graduate School. The appeal itself shall be a review of the record of the hearing, not a new hearing. The appeal may be based on one or more of the following grounds:

- 1) a claim of error in the hearing procedure that substantially affected the decision.
- 2) a claim of new evidence or information material to the issue that was not available at the time of the hearing and that may be sufficient to alter the decision of the Hearing Committee.
- 3) a claim of unfair conduct by a Hearing Committee member or presiding officer.

A request for an appeal must be received by the Dean of the Graduate School within five (5) business days of notification of the decision by the Associate Dean, except under extraordinary circumstances.

The Dean shall have the authority to dismiss an appeal not based on proper grounds. If the appeal is upheld, the Dean shall refer the issue back to the hearing panel with further instructions. The Dean's decision on such appeals shall be final.

Amendments and Revisions to the Document

This document may be reviewed and amended on an ongoing basis as needed. Suggested modifications shall be submitted to the Associate Dean, who shall submit them to the Executive Committee of the Graduate Faculty Council for consideration and action, with advice from the Graduate Student Senate.

Adopted by the Graduate Faculty Council, 17 October 2007
Modified 23 May 2008