DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Petitions and Appeals

Graduate students may petition for exceptions to academic requirements, regulations, and judgments. A course requirement is an example of an academic requirement. Allowed time to degree is an example of an academic regulation. Course grades and dismissals from programs are examples of academic judgments. If a petition is denied, one level of appeal is allowed.

Petitions

Petitions should include the circumstances that may qualify the student for an exception, as well any supporting documentation or endorsements. In general, petitions will be handled at the lowest appropriate level.

- A petition regarding requirements, regulations, deadline extensions, or judgments of a graduate program will be handled at that level, that is, by the program. Such petitions need to follow procedures established by these programs.
- A petition regarding University requirements, regulations, deadline extensions, or judgment must be submitted to the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies; such a petition must be accompanied by a recommendation from the program.
- When the program's recommendation is negative, or when the petition requests a major exception—for example, an extension of allowed time to degree by more than 1/2 semester—the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies may also obtain the recommendation of the school overseeing the program (when relevant) and the Graduate Council with regard to such petitions.

Petitions for exceptions to academic requirements, regulations, and judgments should be viewed as unusual, rather than typical. Extensions of various time limits, such as time to candidacy, oral examinations, or time to defense, will not be granted routinely. (See *Time to Degree (All Degrees)* found on the Regulations and Procedures for All Graduate Students (https://ga.rice.edu/graduate-students/academic-policies-procedures/regulations-procedures-all-degrees/#text) page.) Students requesting such extensions have to document the unusual circumstances justifying their request, demonstrate their academic progress towards the goal, and provide a concrete plan for meeting the goal within the requested extension.

Petitions regarding academic decisions must be submitted in writing within 15 days from the time that the student knew or should reasonably have known of the decision being petitioned, or within 15 days after an informal effort to resolve the situation has not been successful.

Petitions seeking exceptions to academic requirements or regulations should be submitted in writing at least 30 days before the requirement or regulation takes effect. For example, a petition to extend allowed time to degree should be submitted at least 30 days before the deadline in effect. Late petitions may be dismissed, except for unusual situations when a delay is found justifiable by the unit receiving the petition. Petitions must be acknowledged in writing immediately upon their receipt by the receiving unit. Email communication is considered to be "in writing."

Appeals

If a petition is denied, a student (or other parties affected by the decision) is allowed only one level of appeal. In general, the appeal process will be resolved at the lowest level possible.

- When the petition is decided at the graduate program or department level, the appeal must be submitted to the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.
- When the petition is decided at a school level, the appeal must be handled by the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.
- When the petition is decided by the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, the appellant may submit an appeal to the Provost.

An appeal must be submitted within 15 days from receipt of the decision that is being appealed. Late appeals will be dismissed, except for unusual situations when a delay is justified. Appeals must be acknowledged in writing immediately upon their receipt by the receiving unit. Email communication is considered to be "in writing."

Guidelines Regarding Petitions and Appeals

- Grounds for a petition/appeal could be procedural errors by academic or administrative personnel or special circumstances found to be mitigating by the unit receiving the petition/appeal. Disagreement over evaluation of academic quality (i.e. grade dispute) will not be considered as an appropriate basis for petitions/appeals unless the evaluation is found to be patently unreasonable or in conflict with the Faculty Grading Guidelines by the unit receiving the petition/appeal.
- All petitions and appeals should indicate the requirement, regulation, or judgment that is the subject of the petition/appeal, the specific exception requested, and the grounds for the request.
- Additionally, an appeal must indicate why the decision involving the earlier petition was incorrectly decided.

Petitions involving a violation of University policy or improper conduct by University personnel will be handled as grievances (see Grievances below).

Petitions and appeals should be resolved within 30 days of their submission. When such resolution cannot be achieved within 30 days, students will be informed of the delay before the 30 days are over. A resolution of the petition or appeal must be achieved within 60 days. A lack of resolution of a petition within 60 days is an acceptable cause for an appeal.

An academic program directly managing graduate students must establish a standing Petitions, Appeals, and Grievances Committee. A petition concerning a graduate program regulation by a student will be handled by a committee consisting of at least three faculty members. The committee must be independent of the cause for the petition. Members of a student's thesis committee must not participate in the handling of a petition by the student. (The department chair or dean may appoint ad-hoc members to the committee to ensure independence of the committee.) The committee will conduct an investigation of the circumstances and reach a decision regarding the petition. Their written report to the graduate director, and the chair (or dean) will describe the circumstances, the decision, and the rationale for the decision. The graduate director or chair (or dean) will convey the final decision to the student and include the committee report. (Redaction from the report is allowed to protect the privacy of other students.) In case of decisions by the faculty members of a graduate program acting as a committee of the whole, petitions will also be considered by the Petitions, Appeals,

and Grievances Committee, which will reconsider the decision in view of the information provided in the petition. This committee may choose to bring the matter back for consideration by the faculty members of the academic program, acting as a committee of the whole. Petitions regarding University requirements, regulations, or judgments submitted to the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies may be handled by the dean or the dean's designee.

An appeal handled by the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies may be referred to a subcommittee of the Graduate Council, composed of three faculty members (representing diverse disciplines within the university) and a graduate student. Such committees must be independent of the cause for the petition. In general, officers or committees handling the appeal should not try to substitute their judgment for that of the unit handling the petition. Rather, their task is to consider whether the petition was handled appropriately, whether all relevant circumstances have been considered, and whether University policy has been appropriately interpreted and applied. Nevertheless, a petition decision may be overturned if the officer or committee handling the appeal finds the petition decision to be patently unreasonable.

All time frames in this procedure refer to Academic Calendar (https://registrar.rice.edu/calendars/) days, and exclude mid-term, inter-term, and summer recesses. This exclusion does not apply to a student who is enrolled during the summer. All petitions and appeals, as well as responses to petitions and appeals, must be in writing. Email communication is considered to be "in writing." Academic units should archive copies of all email communications pertaining to petitions and appeals.

Grievances

Grievances are different from petitions and appeals. Petitions and appeals involve exceptions to academic requirements, regulations, and judgments. A grievance is a complaint regarding inappropriate conduct by other students, faculty members, or staff. Inappropriate conduct encompasses both inappropriate personal conduct, such as sexual harassment, as well as inappropriate official conduct, such as violation of University policies. Specific policies exist to address grievances based on discrimination or sexual harassment and these policies must be followed in situations involving these issues. Grievances against another student may be raised with the director of student judicial programs and addressed under the Code of Student Conduct. In other cases, a student may present a grievance in writing at the lowest appropriate level, typically the graduate program or school. If a satisfactory resolution is not obtained at that level, the student may appeal the outcome of the grievance by presenting the problem at the next administrative level: the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, followed by the provost, or president. Grievances against non-faculty staff members may also be brought to the employee relations director in Rice's Human Resources office (https://people.rice.edu/).

The procedures for handling grievances are analogous to those for handling petitions and appeals. Students submitting grievances must so indicate in their submissions.

Problem Resolution

It is the responsibility of the graduate program to provide an appropriate educational environment for all graduate students. During the course of graduate studies, problems that do not fall under the category of grievances, described above, may arise in the relationship between a graduate student and the student's program or advisor. Students should attempt to resolve such problems by informing the appropriate faculty members and working together to resolve the problem. When attempts to resolve the problem informally are unsuccessful, the following problem-resolution procedure will be used:

1. The student will submit the problem in writing to the director of graduate studies, who will then attempt to resolve it.
2. If the student remains unsatisfied, the problem will be presented to a committee of the program for resolution. This committee will be a standing committee and not the student's own thesis committee. Both the student and the program chair will submit a written record of their views to this committee.
3. If the student remains unsatisfied, the problem will be referred to the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. A written report of proceedings at stage 2 will be presented to the dean of graduate and postdoctoral studies, along with all other written materials generated during the investigation. The dean may, at personal discretion, handle these in a similar manner by enlisting the assistance of a subcommittee of the Graduate Council, which will submit its report to the chair of the Council and to the dean of graduate and postdoctoral studies. The decision of the dean of graduate and postdoctoral studies is final.

The time frame for handling problem resolution is similar to that for handling petitions, appeals, and grievances. Students may seek guidance on any of these procedures through discussions with the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (https://graduate.rice.edu/).

After Rice's grievance process has been exhausted and documented, students may also pursue an external complaints process (https://ga.rice.edu/important-notices/complaints-process/).