

Revised January 2003

**School of Graduate Studies
University of Toronto**

Graduate Department Academic Appeals Committee *Guidelines for Chairs*

Preamble

The Graduate Department Academic Appeals Committee is a committee established under the authority of the Graduate Chair or Graduate Director of a Graduate Department, Centre or Institute. This Committee constitutes part of the overall academic appeals procedures available to graduate students within the University of Toronto. (See SGS Calendar for an overview and timeline of the overall graduate appeals process.) Therefore, it is required that all graduate chairs establish such a committee at the commencement of every academic year. Nonetheless, the Committee is advisory to the Chair who is not bound by the Committee's recommendation. Within the overall academic appeals procedure, the Graduate Department Academic Appeals Committee has a high level of discipline-specific academic expertise to judge the academic matters in an appeal. This Committee therefore plays a crucial role in the overall appeals procedure. This Committee may consider only academic matters. Decisions related to admission to an academic program, including admission to the doctoral program for current master's students, are not subject to appeal. Issues relating to non-academic matters (for example, fees) are not to be considered by the Committee.

These guidelines will be made available to the Committee membership, and to all appellants. It is within the authority of the Chair to alter any of the procedures outlined herein, if circumstances warrant. However, members of the Committee and the appellant should be notified in writing as soon as possible of any changes in procedures and reasons for the changes. In cases where an appeal moves to the next stage after the Graduate Department Academic Appeals Committee, if procedures were altered, the Chair is responsible for ensuring that this information is available at the next appeal stage. These guidelines are subject to the approval of the School of Graduate Studies Council.

Informal Mediation:

At any stage prior to filing an appeal with the Graduate Academic Appeals Board, a student may consult the relevant SGS Associate Dean for advice and/or informal mediation. The Associate Dean will serve as informal mediator, attempting to resolve the dispute or clarify issues. Timelines are not affected by mediation.

Definitions

Throughout this document, the following definitions apply:

- the Graduate Department Academic Appeals Committee is referred to as “the Committee” or the “GDAAC”
- the Chair of the GDAAC is referred to as “the Chair of the Committee”
- the Graduate Chair or Graduate Director of a Graduate Department, Centre or Institute is referred to as “the Chair”
- the Graduate Coordinator of a Graduate Department, Centre or Institute is referred to as “the Graduate Coordinator”
- “student” shall include a person who is no longer enrolled as a student in the School of Graduate Studies, but who was so enrolled at the time of the decision that is being appealed to the GDAAC in the relevant department
- the Associate Chair or Associate Director of a Graduate Department, Centre or Institute is referred to as “the Associate Chair”
- the Graduate Department, Centre or Institute is referred as “the Department”
- School of Graduate Studies is referred to as “SGS”
- Graduate Academic Appeals Board is referred to as “GAAB”

Appeals Process at the Department Level

1. Graduate students may dispute substantive or procedural academic matters, including grades, evaluation of comprehensive examinations and other program requirements, decisions about the student’s continuation in any program, or concerning any other decision with respect to the application of academic regulations and requirements to a student. Students must first attempt to resolve the matter with the instructor or other person whose ruling is in question.
2. Should the matter not be resolved and should the student wish to pursue it, the student must discuss the matter with the Graduate Coordinator or Associate Chair of the Department.

Method for Consideration of an Appeal

3. An appeal may be conducted as an oral hearing or by written submission only, at the discretion of the Chair of the Committee.

Jurisdiction of the Committee

4. EXCEPTION: Appeals related to failure of a final Ph.D. examination or related to termination of registration in a program should be made directly to the SGS Graduate Academic Appeals Board – Step 3(b) (see SGS Calendar entry on Academic Appeals). In some cases, the Chair of GAAB may refer the appeal to the Graduate Department Academic Appeals Committee for prior consideration. The GDAAC will not have the right to overturn a failed Ph.D. examination result or a termination of

registration, but may recommend that such a decision be considered further by GAAB.

5. All academic appeals, other than those identified as an exception in Clause #4 above, must be initiated within the student's home graduate unit, unless the appeal relates to courses outside the home unit. Appeals related to courses taken outside the student's home department shall be conducted in the department in which the course was offered. The student's home department chair will be notified.
6. The Committee does not render decisions but rather makes recommendations to the Chair of the Department. A GDAAC report may include, but is not limited to, a recommendation that the decision appealed from be vacated, reversed, amended, or upheld; and in the case of an appeal of a grade, GDAAC may recommend that the student be re-evaluated in such manner and on such terms and conditions as the Committee considers appropriate. The Committee may recommend to the Chair of the Department that fees of a student be rebated or cancelled in whole or in part, but shall not otherwise recommend or award any monetary or other compensation. In turn, the Chair may recommend to SGS that adjustments be made to a student's fees. However, only SGS may make such a decision, with the recommendation of the SGS Associate Dean. Costs of the appeal are never awarded to any party.

Establishment of the Graduate Department Academic Appeals Committee

7. ***Establishing the Committee:*** A graduate academic appeals committee should be established in each graduate unit by the graduate chair at the beginning of each academic year. An academic appeals committee may be constituted for more than one year.
8. ***Alternate Members:*** In addition to the committee membership (as described in #11 below), the Chair is required to identify at least one alternate member for each individual on the committee. These alternate members may be called upon by the Chair in an individual appeal to replace a regular GDAAC member where a conflict of interest has been identified, or where a regular member is unable to serve.
9. ***Joint GDAAC:*** In the case of smaller departments, a Joint Graduate Department Academic Appeals Committee may be formed with membership to be selected by the graduate chairs from amongst the faculty and student membership of the departments involved. This provision applies to the membership and alternate membership criteria and procedures below. Additional criteria related to the Joint GDAAC are noted within clause #11 in square brackets below.
10. ***Conflict of Interest in Small Departments:*** In the case of small graduate departments, or where there is conflict of interest, some or all appeals committee members may be seconded by the Chair of the Department from one or more cognate departments. See also clauses #20 and 25 below.

Membership

11. **Members and Quorum:** The Committee shall have a total membership of five: four graduate faculty members and one graduate student; in addition there will be alternate members, as set out below. One of the faculty members will serve as Chair of the Committee. The Chair of the Department may assign a Secretary to the GDAAC, as required. Quorum for the Committee is three members, including the Chair. [For the purposes of an individual appeal, the Joint GDAAC would report to the Chair of the Department in which the appeal is being launched.]
- (a) **Members:** There shall be four graduate faculty members and one graduate student member from the department. Neither the Chair nor the Graduate Coordinator of the Department normally should be a member of the GDAAC.
 - (b) **Chair of the Committee:** The Chair of the Department will appoint a Chair of the Committee from amongst the faculty membership of GDAAC. [In the case of a Joint Committee, the chairs of the participating departments will jointly appoint a Joint Committee Chair.]
 - (c) **Student Member:** The graduate students in the Department normally shall choose the student member.
 - (d) **Alternate Members:** Alternate Committee members and an alternate Chair of the Committee shall be appointed by the Chair of the Department each academic year. The graduate students in the Department also normally should choose alternate student members. Normally, alternate members from cognate departments will be chosen from the Graduate Department Academic Appeals Committee of the cognate department. Once an alternate member is involved in an appeal, that alternate member shall continue to hear that same appeal until it is resolved.
 - (e) **Secretary:** The Chair of the Department may assign a Secretary to the GDAAC, as required.
12. In some cases there may be insufficient graduate faculty or student members or alternate members, who are available to hear and determine an appeal. In such cases, the Chair of the Department may appoint *ad hoc* a person from the same constituency as the member who is unavailable, to be a member of the Committee for the purposes of determining that appeal.

Timeline for Student to File Appeal

13. The student must file an appeal to the Committee within eight weeks after date of the decision being appealed. (See SGS Calendar for overview and timeline of overall graduate appeals process.)

Filing of Appeal

14. The student files an appeal by submitting a Notice of Appeal to the Chair of the Graduate Department Academic Appeals Committee in the relevant department or to the Chair of the Department (see form in Appendix A). The Notice must be filed no later than eight weeks of the date of the decision being appealed.
15. The Notice of Appeal must include the following:
 - (a) a clear statement of the decision the student is appealing;
 - (b) the name of the person or persons who made the decision, if known to the student;
 - (c) the date the decision was communicated officially to the student;
 - (d) a clear statement of the resolution the student is seeking on appeal;
 - (e) a statement of the reason or reasons that the student feels that the decision was incorrect and that the student's proposed resolution is appropriate, including any arguments the student wishes to advance in support of the appeal;
 - (f) copies of any documentary evidence the student has in her/his possession, and wishes the Committee to consider. Other documents may be used in the appeal only with the leave of the Committee.

Committee Procedures

16. **Convening:** The Chair of the Committee shall proceed to convene the Committee as quickly as possible, keeping all parties informed.
17. **Notice of Appeal:** After receiving a Notice of Appeal, the Chair of the Committee will provide the person or persons who made the decision being appealed with a copy of the Notice of Appeal and invite a written response.
18. **Guidelines:** All parties to an appeal should receive a copy of these Guidelines.
19. **Confidentiality:** Committee proceedings normally should be carried out in confidence.
20. **Conflict of Interest Involving GDAAC Members:** Any conflict of interest or perceived conflict of interest should be declared and/or identified and committee members replaced by the Chair of the Department, as necessary. The appellant must also be provided with an opportunity to identify conflicts of interest and request that an alternate member be selected. The appellant retains the right to proceed without a student member of the committee. In such a case, the student member will be replaced with an additional faculty member. The appellant shall be informed in

advance of the membership of the Committee that will hear the appeal. See also clauses #10 above and #25 below.

21. ***Powers of the Chair of the Committee:***

- (a) The Chair of the Committee may determine all procedural matters that may arise concerning the appeal, including whether there will be an oral hearing and/or a review of written materials and the admissibility of evidence. All parties will be duly informed.
- (b) The Chair of the Committee may determine that certain persons may receive notice of the proceedings in an appeal, and give directions as to copies of documents that shall be supplied to those persons, and as to the manner and degree of participation of such persons in the appeal.

22. ***Legal Representation:*** Normally the University will not engage legal representation at the level of a department appeal. However, any party to an appeal may, at her/his own expense, be represented by counsel or other agent at any stage of the appeal process. The Chair must secure the permission of the SGS Dean in order to obtain legal representation for the University.

Committee Recommendations/Decision of the Chair:

23. ***GDAAC Recommendation:*** Recommendations of the GDAAC shall be agreed upon by a simple majority of members. The Chair of the Committee shall cast a vote. A detailed, written report with recommendations of the Committee must be presented immediately by the Chair of the Committee to the Chair of the Department and to all parties involved in the appeal. The report will outline the evidence considered and the recommendations reached, with reasons. A copy of this document should be given to the SGS Associate Dean by the Chair of the Department, and shall remain on file in the department.

24. ***Chair's Decision:*** The Chair of the Department may accept, amend, or reject any or all of the recommendations of the GDAAC. Normally, within eight weeks of receiving the Notice of Appeal, the Chair shall notify the appellant in writing of her/his decision with a copy to the Chair of the Committee, and a copy to the SGS Associate Dean. If the Chair rejects or amends one or more of the recommendations of the GDAAC, reasons shall be provided. This is considered the final stage of the department appeal.

25. ***Conflict of Interest involving the Chair:*** If the appeal is against an academic decision made by the Chair of the Department in her/his teaching/research supervision role then, in advance of the department-level appeal process, the Chair will secure a replacement to whom GDAAC will report. This replacement may be either an impartial senior faculty member in the Department or a senior faculty member from a cognate department. All parties to the appeal must be informed in writing of the

replacement prior to the commencement of the GDAAC proceedings. See also clauses #10 and #20 above.

Further Notice of Appeal

26. ***Graduate Academic Appeals Board:*** If a student wishes to pursue the matter further, she/he may file a Notice of Appeal from the Chair's decision of the Department appeal to the SGS Graduate Academic Appeals Board. The student must file the Notice within eight weeks of the date of the decision of the Chair of the Department.

**School of Graduate Studies
University of Toronto**

**Notice of Appeal
to the
Graduate Department Academic Appeals Committee**

To: Chair, Graduate Department Academic Appeals Committee
Graduate Unit:
Address:

In order to initiate an appeal to the Graduate Department Academic Appeals Committee, the student must submit a duly completed copy (*see Note below*) of this form to the Chair of the Graduate Department Academic Appeals Committee in the department in which the student is registered. If the appeal is for a course taken outside the student's home department, the Notice of Appeal form must be submitted to the Chair of the Graduate Department Academic Appeals Committee in the Department in which the course was offered.

EXCEPTION: Graduate appeals related to failure of a final Ph.D. examination or related to termination of registration in a program should be made directly to the SGS Graduate Academic Appeals Board – Step 3 of the Academic Appeals process (see SGS Calendar, General Regulations).

This form must be signed by the appellant and briefly summarize the nature and grounds of the appeal, any decisions appealed against, and relevant facts and allegations. Any person who is a party to an appeal may be represented by legal counsel.

PLEASE PRINT

Name:
Student Number:
Address:
Telephone:
E-mail:
Department/Centre/Institute:

I, _____, hereby appeal to the Graduate Department Academic Appeals Committee. The nature and grounds of my appeal, any decisions appealed against, and relevant facts and allegations are provided as follows. Detailed supporting documentation may be attached.

NOTE: This form must be duly filed within eight weeks of the decision the student wishes to appeal.

**Notice of Appeal to the
Graduate Department Academic Appeals Committee**
Page 2

Student Name: _____

1. Statement of the decision you are appealing:

2. Name or names of the person or persons who made the decision, if known to you:

3. Date of the decision:

4. Statement of the resolution you are seeking on appeal:

5. Statement of the reason or reasons that you think the decision was incorrect; please include a statement about why your proposed resolution would be appropriate, including any arguments you wish to advance in support of the appeal:

6. List and attach copies of any documentary evidence you have in your possession, and wish the Committee to consider. Will you be represented by legal counsel?

7. List of witnesses:

SIGNATURE OF APPELLANT

DATE