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UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

School of Social Work

Academic Grievance Policy and Procedures

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In accordance with all applicable University of Wisconsin-Madison policies, the Sandra Rosenbaum School of Social Work Academic Grievance Policy and Procedures provides a process for students to address concerns that arise when a student believes they have been treated unfairly academically. Alleged unfair treatment can be related to course grades, the field seminar and/or placement, the classroom, and other academic concerns.

Exceptions

The following are situations in which a student would not use the School's Academic Grievance Policy and Process procedure and instead would take a different route.

- If a student is experiencing sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, dating and domestic violence, or sexual exploitation and is seeking support and/or wanting to talk about making a report to the University, please contact the Sexual Misconduct Resource and Response Program (formerly called the Title IX Program), which is overseen by the Title IX Coordinator (<https://compliance.wisc.edu/titleix/>).
- Grievances related to a teaching assistant(s) (TA) should be brought to the course instructor.
- Grievances related to an agency supervisor(s) should be brought to the student's field instructor.
- Non-academic grievances will not go through this academic grievance process. Examples of non-academic grievances that have their own processes are financial aid complaints or reports of bias and hate incidents.

Grievance Committee Composition

The Grievance Committee is appointed by the School of Social Work's director on a case-by-case basis. Care is taken to avoid conflict of interest in the appointment of the committee so that the student has a committee consisting of faculty who do not instruct them and student peers who are not in their courses.

Grievance Hearing Composition

The Grievance Hearing Committee requires a quorum of three committee members. The chair of the committee will be tenure track or clinical faculty member appointed by the Director. The other two members are appointed by the school's director as follows:

- One student program peer for either a field related or non-field related issue: A full-time MSW student program peer will generally serve if the grieving student is a PTP MSW student, and a PTP student program peer will generally serve if the grieving student is a full-time MSW or undergraduate student. PhD program peers are assigned on a case-by-case basis to avoid conflict of interest.
- Field Related Issue: If the student requesting the grievance hearing is in the Part-Time MSW Program, then a permanent field faculty member in the Full-Time Program will generally serve. If

the student is in the Full-Time MSW Program or the BSW program, then a permanent field faculty member in the PTP program will generally serve.

- Non-Field Related Issue: If the student requesting the grievance hearing is in the Part-Time MSW Program, then a permanent faculty member in the Full-Time Program will generally serve. If the student is in the Full-Time MSW Program or the BSW program, then a permanent faculty member in the PTP program will generally serve. PhD Program Faculty are assigned on a case-by-case basis to avoid conflict of interest.

Grievance Process

When a student believes they have received unfair treatment and decides to take action, they should follow the steps below. Please note that Step 1 is to occur within 10 business days from when the concerning treatment occurred.

Step 1: Meet with Instructor¹

Prior to meeting with an administrator, faculty, or staff member, the student is required to schedule a meeting with the instructor from whom they believe they have received unfair treatment. If after the meeting the student does not feel a resolution has been reached, the student may either decline to take further action or proceed to Step 2 no later than 10 business days from the Step 1 meeting. If a student wants support preparing for the meeting with the instructor, they can consult with an academic advisor, another faculty member, or the Dean of Students Office.

Step 2: Meet with Instructor and Appropriate Administrator:

After completing Step 1, if the issue is not resolved to the student's satisfaction, the student schedules a meeting with the instructor and the appropriate School administrator based on the guidance below. When the student contacts the appropriate administrator (see Appropriate Administrator list below) to schedule a meeting, the administrator is responsible for ensuring that the student has met with the instructor (Step 1). If the student has not done so, the administrator tells the student that they must complete Step 1 before they can meet with them. Please note that the administrator will respond to the student within 5 business days of receiving the request for Step 2.

Appropriate Administrator List

- Undergraduate or FTP MSW or PhD students meet with the instructor and the School's Associate Director for non-field related concerns.
- PTP MSW students meet with the instructor and Director of the Part-Time MSW Program for non-field related concerns.
- Full-Time MSW and BSW students meet with the instructor and the Director of Field Education for field-related concerns.
- Part-Time MSW students meet with the instructor and the Associate Director of Field Education for field-related concerns.

The administrator will ask the student and the instructor to provide documentation as to the nature of the grievance and steps that were taken to ameliorate the issues for review prior to the Step 2 meeting.

¹ *Instructor* is defined as a tenure-track faculty member, clinical faculty member, short-term lecturer or long-term lecturer hired as the instructor of record for a course. *Instructor* does not include teaching assistants (TAs) or agency supervisors.

The administrator will schedule a meeting and provide the student and instructor with the time and location.

During the Step 2 meeting the administrator will ask the student and then the instructor to discuss any relevant information that was not included in the documentation provided prior to the meeting. If the student wishes to bring a support person to the meeting the student will let the administrator know of this request and the student will be responsible for providing the support person with the time and location of the meeting. It is important to note that the support person is present at the request of the student and does not have an official role in the meeting and is not allowed to provide any information or ask questions during the meeting. At the start of the meeting the administrator will provide a reminder of roles and responsibilities of all in attendance. At the conclusion of the meeting the administrator will ask for any final comments. The administrator will provide a decision via email to the student and instructor 5 business days from the Step 2 meeting date.

If the student does not feel resolution has been reached in Step 2, the student may either decline to take further action or proceed to Step 3. If the student chooses to begin Step 3, they must do so no later than 10 business days from the date of the Step 2 meeting.

Step 3: Formal Grievance Process

Within 10 business days of meeting with the instructor and appropriate administrator (Step 2), the student is required to email the School of Social Work's director and request a Grievance Hearing. The student is to attach a written statement detailing their grievance. The Director is to notify the student that they have received their written statement.

Hearing Preparation

1. Within 10 business days of receiving the student's statement, the Director will notify the Grievance Committee Chair (or appoint a Chair) via email that a student has requested a grievance hearing. The Director will attach the student's written statement to the email. The Director will also recruit the appropriate instructor and student to serve at the Hearing and forward their names to the Chair as soon as the appointments are confirmed. It may take a little time to find an appropriate peer who has no conflict of interest and is available to serve.
2. The Grievance Committee Chair will email the staff member assigned by the Director to provide support during the hearing process and request that they 1) create a Box folder for all hearing materials; and 2) send Box invites to the two Grievance Hearing Committee members chosen by the Director. Upon receipt of all documentation from the grieving student and the instructor, the Committee chair will distribute the materials to the Hearing committee members, who will read the documentation thoroughly in preparation for the hearing.
3. Within 10 business days of receiving the Director's notification, the Chair will e-mail separately the following to the student requesting the grievance hearing and the instructor from whom the student believes they have received unfair treatment:
 - a. Student
 - Notification that the Grievance Committee will hear the grievance.
 - Names of the student and instructor who will be serving at the Hearing.
 - Link to the School's formal grievance process (<https://socwork.wisc.edu/students/rights/>).
 - Request that any additional documentation relevant to the grievance be e-mailed within 5 business days to the Chair only.
 - Inform the student that they will be required to attend the Hearing, which will be held virtually and be audio-recorded, and that the staff member will be emailing them a doodle

poll link.

- Explain that at the hearing, the student will be asked to read aloud the written statement detailing their grievance that they originally emailed to the Director. The Chair should also tell the student that they will have the opportunity to make a closing statement at the hearing should they choose to do so. The statement need not be written or prepared prior to the hearing.

b. Instructor

- Notification that the Grievance Committee will hear the grievance.
- Names of the student and instructor who will be serving at the Hearing.
- Link to the School's formal grievance process (<https://socwork.wisc.edu/students/rights/>).
- The student's written statement as an attachment.
- Request that within 10 business days, the instructor email only to the Chair a written response to the student's written statement. The instructor's response should include details of the grieved action and the steps the instructor has taken with the student to settle the matter.
- Request that any additional documentation relevant to the grievance be e-mailed within 10 business days to the Chair only.
- Inform the instructor that they will be required to attend the Hearing, which will be held virtually and be audio-recorded, and that the staff member will be emailing them a doodle poll link.
- Explain that at the hearing, the instructor will be asked to read aloud their written response to the student's statement. The Chair should also tell the instructor that they will also be asked to make a closing statement at the hearing should they choose to do so. The statement need not be written or prepared prior to the hearing.

c. Administrator from Step 2

- Notification that the Grievance Committee will hear the grievance by the student the administrator met with in Step 2.
- Names of the student and instructor who be serving at the Hearing
- Link to the School's formal grievance process (<https://socwork.wisc.edu/students/rights/>).
- The student's written statement as an attachment.
- Request that within 10 days, the administrator email only to the Chair a written statement detailing why they upheld the instructor's decision.
- Inform the administrator that they will be required to attend the Hearing, which will be held virtually and be audio-recorded, and that the staff member will be emailing them a doodle poll link.
- Explain that at the hearing, the administrator will be asked to read aloud their written response to the student's statement.

4. The Chair will work with the assigned staff member to schedule the Grievance Hearing.

- The Chair will give the staff member the dates and times that work for them to attend the hearing. The staff member will then use these to create a doodle poll whose link is sent to the grieving student, instructor from whom the student believes they have received unfair treatment, and the two Hearing Committee members.
- Once the doodle poll has been completed by all parties, the staff member will notify the Chair as to the dates and times when everyone is available. The Chair will then inform the staff member of the preferred date and time.

- The staff member will then schedule the Zoom meeting and email the student, instructor, administrator, Chair and two committee members separately the chosen date and time of the hearing along with the Zoom link.
- The Chair, with assistance from the appointed staff member, is required to schedule and convene the grievance hearing within 15 business days of receiving all requested materials. This date may be extended by consent of the grieving student, instructor, or School's Director or for other good cause as determined by the Chair.

Document Confidentiality

All student and instructor documentation will be stored in a safeguarded BOX folder. Confidentiality regarding all documentation and proceedings will be maintained by the Grievance Committee, student, and instructor. Committee members, the student and the instructor will not discuss the documents and/or details of the grievance with each other until the day of the hearing. All student, instructor, and committee members' questions should be directed to the Chair. The hearing will be audio recorded and stored in a central location within the School of Social Work in accordance with FERPA guidelines.

Grievance Hearing Process

Consistent with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), 20 U.S.C. § 1232g and the Wisconsin Open Meeting Law, Wis. Stats. Ann. § 19.81 et seq., the hearing will be conducted in closed session.

Persons that may be present:

- a. Grievance Committee members³
- b. Student and, if desired by the student, a support person(s) (maximum 2). Support person(s) cannot speak at any time during the hearing and are held to the same confidentiality rules as the student and members of the committee.
- c. If the student chooses to have an attorney present with them, they must notify the Committee Chair at the time the hearing is scheduled.
- d. Instructor
- e. Administrator from Step 2.
- f. Student and/or instructor witnesses, as deemed appropriate by the Chair, who will be placed separately in Zoom breakout rooms until called individually for their testimony.

Zoom Pre-Hearing

1. All parties will be present in the Zoom main room at the beginning of the process.
2. The Chair explains to the student, instructor, and witnesses that they will be placed in separate breakout rooms while the committee members and Chair meet briefly.
3. The Chair places the parties in the breakout rooms.
4. Once all parties are in breakout rooms, the Chair asks if the committee members require any clarification regarding the materials or the hearing process.
5. Once all concerns and questions have been addressed, the Chair brings the student and instructor back to the main Zoom room to begin the hearing process.

Hearing Process Begins

1. The Chair turns on the Zoom recording.
2. The Chair reads the following italicized statement:

“This is a meeting of the Grievance Committee of the UW-Madison School of Social Work. This committee has been authorized by the School to make a determination regarding a student grievance pursuant to the Academic Grievance Policies and Procedures of the School of Social Work.

I am (Chair’s name) serving as the chairperson of this committee. Will each person state their name and role here today?

Consistent with the Wisconsin Open Meetings law and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), we are conducting this hearing in closed session. Events, statements, and outcomes of this hearing are not to be discussed outside of this room. The committee, however, will notify all parties of its decision and recommendations.

This hearing is intended to be informal and will proceed as follows: The Student who filed charges of grievance will present documents and witnesses, if any, in support of their position. Witnesses may not ask questions. The Committee and Instructor will have the opportunity to ask questions of the student and witnesses. After the witnesses have provided their information and answered questions, the Chair will excuse them from the hearing room.

The instructor will present documents and witnesses, if any, in response to the student’s grievance. Witnesses may not ask questions. The Committee and Student will have the opportunity to ask questions of the instructor and witnesses. After the witnesses have provided their information and answered questions, the Chair will excuse them from the hearing room.

The student and instructor may each make a closing statement after which they will be excused, and the Grievance Committee will deliberate in closed session.

Committee members, student, instructor, and witnesses are expected to conduct themselves in a cordial manner. As Chair, I reserve the right to take appropriate steps to maintain order. I may also temporarily suspend the hearing to grant rest breaks or to allow the participants the opportunity to consult with their respective advisors. Any advisor for the student [including an attorney] is limited to advising the student and may not directly address this Committee, instructor, or witnesses. The student is expected to respond on their own behalf to questions asked in the Hearing.

3. The Chair requests that the student read their written statement detailing their grievance that they submitted to the Director at the beginning of Step 3. If the student has witnesses, they are asked to share their information at this time. The Chair asks the instructor if they have clarifying questions for the student and/or witnesses. The Chair then asks the same of the committee members.
4. The Chair requests that the instructor read the statement they submitted to the Chair. If the instructor has witnesses, they are asked to share their information at this time. The Chair asks the student if they have clarifying questions for the instructor and/or witnesses. The Chair then asks the same of the committee members.
5. The Chair asks the student to make their closing statement; the statement need not be written.
6. The Chair asks the instructor to make their closing statement; the statement need not be written.
7. After closing statements are made, the Chair explains to the student and instructor that the decision will be emailed to them within 5 business days. In addition, the student will receive via DocuSign, a formal letter stating the decision. The student will be required to read the statement and sign it. The signature does not denote the student’s agreement with the decision; the signature is only to indicate that the student received and viewed the letter.

8. The Chair excuses the student and instructor from the hearing and the meeting moves into closed session.

Closed Session

1. Prior to the start of the decision process, the recording is turned off.
2. The Chair asks that each committee member speak about their thoughts regarding the hearing and then provides their own.
3. When the committee finishes the discussion, the Chair calls for a vote. The vote does not need to be unanimous: only a majority is necessary.
4. Once the decision has been reached, the committee members will be dismissed; no other work is required of the members.

Decision Letter

1. The Chair drafts the formal decision letter and includes the decision and details any steps that either the student and/or instructor need to take.
2. The Chair emails the letter to the School's Director for approval and their signature.
3. The School's Director returns the letter with any requested changes.
4. The Chair sends the finalized, signed letter to the program's advisor to be placed in the student's record.
5. The Chair sends the finalized, signed letter to the staff member, who sends the letter to the student via DocuSign and uploads a copy into the Box file.
6. When the student views and/or signs the letter: (1) the staff member uploads a PDF of the DocuSign log file to Box.

Step 4: Appeal to the School of Social Work Director

1. If the student is not satisfied with the Committee's decision, they may appeal to the Director of the School, who has the final decision-making authority. To do so, the student is required to write a letter requesting an appeal and detailing the rationale for it. This letter should be emailed to the Director of the School of Social Work within 10 business days of receiving the Committee's decision letter.
2. The Director will be provided access to the grievance materials by the staff member.
3. The Director will inform the student that, as stated in the letter, there is no formal appeals process outside of the School. They will also explain that the Director can review the materials and hearing recording to determine if they agree with the decision or choose to overturn it.
4. The Director will provide written notice to the student and Grievance Committee Chair of the decision within 10 business days of receiving the student's appeal. The Director's decision regarding the appeal is final.