
Graduate Student Dispute Resolution Policy

1. Overview

Graduate Student Dispute Resolution is a means for resolving disputes and achieving a workable outcome for all parties, within the related policies of the University.

The process is available to St. Mary's graduate students who have a dispute or disagreement with faculty, staff, or their program which relates to the equity and fairness of decisions or procedures. Such issues may arise regarding fair and equal treatment in the conduct of a class, in the grading or evaluation of academic work or unfair treatment in research. If the concerns are strictly academic in nature, the student must follow the Graduate Academic Appeals Policy first. Other issues may concern the equity and fairness of the program, department, or St. Mary's policies.

2. Addressing challenges through informal resolution process

The best way to handle a problem during your graduate studies is to identify it while it is manageable and collaborate with your instructor or project supervisor on finding a solution. In general, it is expected that student concerns will be dealt with as close to the source of concern as possible. Please refer to the Graduate Academic Appeals Policy for academic concerns. If a problem is not resolved at the immediate source/ first point of contact—for example, the course instructor—you can bring it to a more senior person, including your supervisor, the Graduate Program Advisor, Program Chair, or the Dean. A representative from your program will notify you in writing of your informal resolution procedure's outcome.

3. Support for addressing unresolved challenges

For complex and unresolved challenges, you may feel the need for additional support. Depending on the problem, you may seek support from the Dean, AVP of Enrolment and Student Experience, Registrar, or the ombudsperson.

The senior representative will meet with you in confidence to discuss your concerns, explain how St. Mary's policies may apply, provide resources that may be beneficial, and help identify steps to work towards a resolution.

Approval Authority	Responsible Office	Effective Date	Date Last Revisited	Review Frequency
Academic Council	Academic	Sept 23, 2024	N/A	Every 5 years

An ombudsperson is an impartial and confidential resource for students to obtain assistance when they feel they have been treated unfairly during the dispute resolution process in the university setting. You are required to follow the requirements of the University's Ombudsperson Policy

4. Formal Dispute Resolution

If the parties are unable to reach a resolution, or the nature of the dispute is not appropriate for informal resolution, a formal Dispute Resolution can begin. In general, decisions at each stage of the process will be made within 10 business days. When case volume, or the academic calendar make it difficult to adhere to this schedule, decisions will be made as timely as possible.

5. Graduate Student Dispute Resolution Process

- 5.1 Students must submit their complaint in writing (no more than two pages length) to the Vice President Academic (VPA) within ten (10) business days of receipt of the program's written decision, notification of the outcome of the informal process, or other action leading to the dispute. The complaint should include a copy of previous communications related to the complaint, where applicable.
- 5.2 Upon receipt of the student's complaint, the VPA will invite the respondent and other relevant parties involved in the dispute to submit a written statement. The parties will have ten (10) business days to submit materials.
- 5.3 Within two (2) business days of receipt of written statements by all parties, the VPA will forward the materials to the Ad Hoc committee drawn from staff, faculty, and Deans of St. Mary's University. No one will serve on the committee who has a conflict of interest.
- 5.4 Within ten (10) business days of receipt of the written statements, the Ad Hoc committee will provide a written decision to the parties and VPA.
- 5.5 Either party may appeal to the Ad Hoc committee decision by contacting the VPA. Appeals must be submitted within ten (10) business days of receipt of the Ad Hoc committee decision. Section 6 explains the appeals process.

6. Appeals Process

- 6.1 To initiate the appeal process, either party may contact the VPA. The VPA will ask each party to submit a summary statement (no more than two pages in length). The appellant must include the basis for the appeal as part of the summary statement. The parties will have ten (10) business days to submit summary statements.
- 6.2 Upon review of the Ad Hoc committee decision and summary statements submitted by the parties, the VPA will determine a resolution outcome based on the preponderance of the information presented.

7. The VPA will provide written notification of the decision to all parties and the Dean within ten (10) business days of receipt of case materials. This ends the St. Mary's appeal resolution process and the VPA's decision is not subject to appeal.

8. Related Policies

- New: Ombudsperson Policy
- New: Graduate Student Academic Integrity policy
- New: M.Ed. in Catholic Education Leadership Handbook
- New: Graduate Student Academic Appeal Policy