



UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

POLICY DOCUMENT

POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR GRIEVANCES AND APPEALS OF POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

Version 3

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Policy Title	Policy and Procedures for the Grievances of Postgraduate Candidates
Policy Officer	Carol Crosley
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1. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

The University is committed to providing its postgraduate students with an education of the highest quality, and offering a rounded and constructive experience of postgraduate study. It acknowledges that the concerns and problems of postgraduate students are often different from those of undergraduates. The University thus commits itself to instituting just and effective procedures for addressing both the grievances and appeals of its postgraduate students.

2 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- (1) The University commits itself to providing an environment in which the rights and dignity of its postgraduate students are upheld. Postgraduate students should not feel that their grievances or appeals will be ignored or trivialized.
- (2) Staff of the University are required to take appropriate action in accordance with this policy when the grievances or appeals of postgraduate students are drawn to their attention.
- (3) A grievance relates to complaints about conduct, supervision, or processes encountered during a postgraduate student's studies.
- (4) An appeal is a formal request by a postgraduate student for the review of an academic decision made by a Department, School, Faculty Graduate Studies Committee, or another duly authorised academic structure of the University. Grievances and appeals will be taken seriously, investigated promptly and rigorously, and treated in confidence.
- (5) Every effort should be made to resolve grievances through frank, informal discussion between the student and the staff member(s) concerned, before invoking formal procedures, including but not limited to appeals, where the issues do not include any cases of alleged bullying, harassment, intimidation, discrimination, or abuse of power, where the student reasonably feels unsafe to approach the member of staff directly.
- (6) Wherever possible, both grievances and appeals should initially be addressed at School-level, and referred to Faculty-level only if they cannot be resolved.
- (7) If it is found that a student has lodged an unwarranted grievance with malicious intent, the University reserves the right to invoke the appropriate disciplinary procedures.

3 DEFINITIONS

Postgraduate Student	A student registered for a higher qualification, including a postgraduate diploma, Honours degree, Masters or PhD
Occasional student	A person who is registered at the University for any course/s for non-qualification purposes. An occasional student is deemed to be a student as defined in rule G1.36 for all other purposes.
Student	A person registered at the University full-time or part-time for a degree, diploma, or certificate of the University, or enrolled for any course or programme of instruction of the University.
Complaint	A complaint means an action or statement that expresses dissatisfaction about any behaviour that is perceived to be unfair, discriminatory, provocative, prejudicial, or unjustified, and which requires prompt action or a response.
Grievance	A grievance relates to complaints about conduct, supervision, or processes encountered during a postgraduate student's studies
Appeal	An appeal is a formal request by a postgraduate student for the review of an academic decision made by a Department, School, Faculty Graduate Studies Committee, or another duly authorised academic structure of the University

4 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this policy and these procedures are:

- to ensure the fair and equitable treatment of postgraduate students;
- to ensure that the grievances and appeals of postgraduate students are dealt with fairly and expeditiously;
- to ensure the fair and equitable treatment of members of staff against whom such grievances may be laid;
- to articulate clearly those procedures which postgraduate students should follow in seeking to have a grievance or appeal addressed.

5 TYPES OF GRIEVANCES AND APPEALS

The procedures described in this document aim to assist postgraduate students in resolving grievances and appeals, with specific reference to:

5.1 Grievances:

- a. working relations with members of staff, including but not limited to their supervisor;
- b. procedural concerns during the course of the academic degree
- c. administrative processes and the provision of student services

The following types of grievance do not fall within the ambit of this policy:

- a. general grievances advanced by any member of the student body, whether undergraduate or postgraduate;
- b. grievances between postgraduate students (;
- c. allegations of racial and sexual discrimination;
- d. allegations of misconduct by members of staff;
- e. grievances related to application or selection processes.

Each of these types of grievances is bound by their own policies and relevant escalation processes.

5.2 Appeals:

The outcome of a formal academic decision made by a department, school, faculty graduate studies committee or other authorized academic structure of the university, which include:

- a) the final grade awarded for a postgraduate degree
- b) a decision to re-examine a research report, dissertation or thesis
- c) decisions to cancel registration, or prevent re-registration, on academic grounds

6. APPLICATION OF THE POLICY

All postgraduate students and all staff of the University are bound to abide by this policy and the related procedures.

7. PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH GRIEVANCES

7.1.1 If a postgraduate student has a grievance this should initially be discussed with the staff member concerned. Grievances against supervisors relate particularly (but not exclusively) to alleged failures to honour the terms set out in the 'Statement of Principles for Postgraduate Supervision'.

7.1.2 If the grievance still cannot be resolved, it should be submitted in writing to the Head of School. The student is entitled to be assisted by a representative of the

University's Postgraduate Association, if they so wish. They may also engage the office of the Dean of Students at any point in the grievance process.

- 7.1.3** If the grievance remains unresolved, it should be referred to the appropriate Assistant Dean in the Faculty (usually the Assistant Dean for Graduate Studies), who has the discretion to seek advice from the Faculty's Graduate Studies Committee and/or the Dean. The student is entitled to be assisted by a representative of the University's Postgraduate Association, if they so wish.
- 7.1.4** If the staff member against whom a grievance has been lodged is a Head of School, the grievance should be referred to the Dean. The student is entitled to be assisted by a representative of the University's Postgraduate Association, if they so wish. If the staff member against whom a grievance has been lodged is a Dean, the grievance should be referred to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & Innovation), whose decision will be final. The student is entitled to be assisted by a representative of the University's Postgraduate Association, if they so wish.
- 7.1.5** Postgraduate students who have a grievance concerning the quality of service of support staff (for instance in the University libraries, the relevant Faculty Office, the Fees Office, the Financial Aid and Scholarships Office, the Office of Residence Life or the International Students Office) should initially discuss this grievance with the staff member(s) concerned.
- 7.1.6** If the grievance cannot be resolved, it should be referred to the head of the relevant office, branch or division. The student is entitled to be assisted by a representative of the University's Postgraduate Association, if they so wish.
- 7.1.7** If the grievance still cannot be resolved, it should be referred to the Faculty Registrar of the relevant Faculty, with a written account sent to the Dean. The Faculty Registrar will consult with appropriate colleagues and/or line managers, as well as the Dean, before reaching a decision. The student is entitled to be assisted by a representative of the University's Postgraduate Association, if they so wish.
- 7.1.8** If the grievance remains unresolved, it should be referred to the University Registrar, whose decision will be final. The student is entitled to be assisted by a representative of the University's Postgraduate Association, if they so wish.

8. PROCEDURES FOR LODGING APPEALS ON ACADEMIC DECISIONS

8.1 General procedure for lodging appeals

- 8.1.1** In each Faculty of the University, the Faculty Board has delegated appropriate powers to a Graduate Studies Committee, which is responsible for overseeing a candidate's progress (including such aspects as the appointment of supervisors, the approval of research proposals, the approval of re-registration, the adoption of supervisors' reports, granting permission for extensions of research submission

dates, or placing registration in abeyance).

- 8.1.2** If a postgraduate student wishes to appeal against any decision taken or ratified by the Graduate Studies Committee, they should, within one month of being notified of this decision, address a written appeal to the Assistant Dean for Graduate Studies in the Faculty or the Chair of the Graduate Studies Committee. The student is entitled to be assisted by a representative of the University's Postgraduate Association, if they so wish. They may also engage the office of the Dean of Students at any point in the appeal process.
- 8.1.3** The Assistant Dean or the Chair of the Graduate Studies Committee will consider the appeal, also consulting with appropriate colleagues (such as the supervisor, Head of School or Faculty Registrar). The Assistant Dean or the Chair of the Graduate Studies Committee has discretion to refer the matter to the Dean or the Faculty's Graduate Studies Committee for discussion before reaching a decision.
- 8.1.4** If the student is dissatisfied with the outcome, they may appeal to the Dean of the Faculty, within a month of being notified of this decision, through a written appeal which includes the material submitted under 8.12 and any additional supporting evidence, documentation or responses to concerns raised in the appeal outcome. The student is entitled to be assisted by a representative of the University's Postgraduate Association, if they so wish.
- 8.1.5** If the student is dissatisfied with the outcome, they may appeal to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & Innovation), whose decision will be final. All appeals made to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & Innovation) must be compiled and submitted by the relevant Faculty Registrar. Students must therefore notify the Faculty Registrar within one month of being notified of the decision under 8.1.3 that they intend to appeal the decision further, and cooperate with the Faculty Registrar in compiling all necessary documentation. No appeals made directly to the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research & Innovation) will be considered if they have not followed this procedure.

8.2 Appeals Pertaining to Coursework

- 8.2.1** Postgraduate students who are dissatisfied with matters relating to the teaching or methods of assessment of a postgraduate course should initially discuss their concerns with the Course Coordinator.
- 8.2.2** If the matter cannot be resolved by discussion with the Course Coordinator, it should be referred to the Head of Department (if applicable). If a resolution is not achieved, the appeal should then be submitted in writing to the Head of School or Entity. The student is entitled to be assisted by a representative of the University's Postgraduate Association, if they so wish.
- 8.2.3** If the matter still cannot be resolved, the postgraduate student should lodge an appeal with the Assistant Dean for Graduate Studies, who will consult with the appropriate colleagues (such as members of the academic staff, the Course Coordinator or the Head of School) before reaching a decision. The Assistant Dean

also has discretion to refer the matter to the Faculty's Graduate Studies Committee or the Dean for discussion and decision. The student is entitled to be assisted by a representative of the University's Postgraduate Association, if they so wish.

8.2.4 If the student is dissatisfied with the outcome, they may appeal to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & Innovation), whose decision will be final. All appeals made to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & Innovation) must be compiled and submitted by the relevant Faculty Registrar. Students must therefore notify the Faculty Registrar within one month of being notified of the decision under 8.1.3 that they intend to appeal the decision further, and cooperate with the Faculty Registrar in compiling all necessary documentation. No appeals made directly to the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research & Innovation) will be considered if they have not followed this procedure.

8.2.5 Queries about marks for coursework should be addressed in terms of the Senate Standing Orders on the Assessment of Student Learning.

8.3 Appeals Pertaining to Cancellation of Registration on Academic Grounds as a Result of Unsatisfactory Performance/Progress

The appropriate procedure is set out in **General Rule 5.7.3**.

[The Senate may cancel the registration of a postgraduate student registered for a programme by research if a higher degrees committee (or equivalent), on the recommendation of the relevant supervisor(s) and head of school, has considered the research proposal and/or other milestones of the research of that student and has judged the research proposal or the progress towards the milestones to be academically unsatisfactory or, in material aspects, incomplete. The higher degrees committee may appoint a panel comprising one member of the higher degrees committee, the relevant supervisor and the relevant Head of School for the purpose of advising the higher degrees committee. Reasons must be given when such registration is cancelled and an appeal against such cancellation may be made to the Dean of the Faculty, who will then propose membership of an ad hoc committee to review the case. The three-person ad hoc committee will be chaired by the Dean. The Chairperson of the higher degrees committee; the Head of School and/or the Supervisor (or equivalent) may be in attendance. If the ad hoc committee does not permit renewal of registration the postgraduate student has the right to submit a further appeal to Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC): Research & Innovation, who may consult with the Dean. The decision of the DVC: Research & Innovation, acting on behalf of the Council, shall be final. Fee implications associated with the cancellation of registrations are outlined in the Schedule of Fees books.]

The appeal is made to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & Innovation), whose decision will be final. All appeals made to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & Innovation) must be compiled and submitted by the relevant Faculty Registrar. Students must therefore notify the Faculty Registrar within one month of being notified of the decision under 8.1.3 that they intend to appeal the decision further, and cooperate with the Faculty Registrar in compiling all necessary documentation. No appeals made directly to the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research & Innovation) will be considered if they have not followed this procedure.

8.4 Appeals Procedure: Examination of Research Reports, Dissertations and Theses

- 8.4.1** Postgraduate students should initially discuss the outcome of the examination of research reports, dissertations, and theses with their supervisor(s). If a student has submitted research work without the acquiescence of the supervisor, this discussion should be held with the Head of School or Director of the Research Entity through which the degree is offered.
- 8.4.2** If the student's concerns are not resolved, they should lodge an appeal with the Assistant Dean for Graduate Studies within one month of the date of the discussion. The Assistant Dean will consider the appeal, also consulting with appropriate persons (such as the internal and external examiners, the Head of School or the Faculty Registrar). The Assistant Dean has discretion to refer the matter to the Dean or the Faculty's Graduate Studies Committee for discussion. The student is entitled to be assisted by a representative of the University's Postgraduate Association, if they so wish.

If the student is dissatisfied with the outcome, they may appeal to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & Innovation), whose decision will be final. All appeals made to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & Innovation) must be compiled and submitted by the relevant Faculty Registrar. Students must therefore notify the Faculty Registrar within one month of being notified of the decision under 8.1.3 that they intend to appeal the decision further, and cooperate with the Faculty Registrar in compiling all necessary documentation. No appeals made directly to the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research & Innovation) will be considered if they have not followed this procedure.

9. RESPONSES TO GRIEVANCES AND APPEALS

Postgraduate students will generally receive a written response within one calendar month of submitting a written grievance or appeal.

10. WITHDRAWAL OF GRIEVANCES AND APPEALS

A postgraduate student may withdraw a written grievance without prejudice at any time during the grievance resolution process; in this case, the matter will be deemed to have been concluded and resolved. The withdrawal of a written grievance must always take a written form; a copy of the withdrawal must be submitted to the staff member against whom the original grievance or appeal was laid.

11. DOCUMENTATION

All documentation relating to the postgraduate student's grievances or appeals must be filed in the official student record.

12. RELATIONSHIP OF THIS POLICY TO OTHER UNIVERSITY POLICIES

This policy does not supersede related academic, administrative and appeal policies.

VERSION HISTORY

Version	Date	Summary	Changed by
1	2009	2009/2163a	
1	2025	Minor corrections to Deputy Vice-Chancellor's title	Carol Crosley
2	06 March 2026	Minor updates to policy	Nicoleen Potgieter
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