

SSD Grievance Policy December 2022

1. Division of the Social Sciences Statement of Standards

The Division of the Social Sciences constitutes a community of scholars committed to free academic inquiry and exchange, which in turn depend on forthright professional relations among students, faculty and staff. Graduate training is a complex enterprise with many competing approaches and visions, which can generate legitimate concern and conflict. The Division has established policy to assist students who have a complaint in seeking resolution through informal and formal grievance procedures.

This policy establishes a process by which currently enrolled graduate students in the Division of the Social Sciences and those on an approved leave of absence can file a formal grievance alleging abuse of authority by faculty, other academic appointees, postdoctoral researchers, or staff.

The policy also offers options for resolution through informal means and information about offices and individuals who can support students in resolving conflicts or addressing concerns. Informal resolution is available to all students and should be the first recourse for addressing all conflicts, concerns, or complaints. A concern does not have to involve allegations of abuse of authority in order for it to be resolved through informal methods. Likewise, complaints that do involve allegations of abuse of authority can often be addressed informally without needing to go through a formal grievance process. Absent exceptional circumstances, the Division of the Social Sciences requires that students attempt informal resolution before proceeding to file a formal grievance and will support students in these attempts.

In the case where a Social Sciences student has a potential grievance alleging abuse of authority by someone outside of the Division of the Social Sciences, students should follow the SSD grievance policy.

In extraordinary circumstances, students may request that a grievance case be handled by the Office of the Provost. If a student wishes to submit a grievance case to be handled by the Provost's Office, they must provide supporting rationale for why their case cannot be fairly heard within the Division of the Social Sciences. Please consult the [University Grievance Policy for Graduate Students](#) for more information.

2. Related University Policies

Allegation of sexual harassment, misconduct and unlawful discrimination are addressed exclusively under the [University's Policy on Harassment, Discrimination, and Sexual Misconduct](#) and [Policy on Title IX Sexual Harassment](#). More information about these policies and options for reporting and support are available through the [Office of Equal Opportunity Programs](#).

Complaints about student conduct involving possible violation of University policies and regulations and other breaches of standards of behavior should always be brought to the attention of the Dean of Students. For more information, please see [University Disciplinary Systems](#) and [Disciplinary System for Disruptive Conduct](#).

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Allegations of academic fraud (e.g. plagiarism; fabrication or falsification of evidence, data, or results; the suppression of relevant evidence or data; the conscious misrepresentation of sources; the theft of ideas; or the intentional misappropriation of the research work or data of others) should also be brought forward in accordance with procedures established in the [University's Policy on Academic Fraud](#).

Issues related to the conduct of members of the University of Chicago Police Department should always be directed to the [University's Safety & Security Complaint Process](#).

2.1 Complaints or Disputes about Grades and Academic Evaluations

Faculty have the authority and the responsibility to assess the academic performance of their students. Only the instructor who gave the course, examination, or evaluation has the authority to change the assessment of the students' performance. Similarly, the evaluation of students' academic progress and standing in the program is the prerogative of the department faculty.

Learning how to communicate with instructors and other faculty about confusion or concern around fairness in grading and evaluation is an important skill, and students may respectfully request explanations of grading decisions and feedback about how performance can be improved. If a student feels that a grade has been assigned unfairly or improperly, they should discuss their concerns with the instructor directly, consult with advisers within their program or department, or bring concerns to and seek advice from the Dean of Students. If a department has a prescribed formal grade appeal process, students can follow those procedures to contest a grade.

A grade dispute or complaints about other academic evaluations may be evidence in support of a formal grievance but these complaints cannot constitute a formal grievance on their own.

3. Abuse of Authority

Abuse of authority is the arbitrary or capricious exercise of authority for purposes inconsistent with the University's educational and research mission. Expression occurring in an academic, educational or research context is considered a special case and is broadly protected by academic freedom. Such expression will not constitute abuse of authority unless (in addition to satisfying the above definition) it is targeted at a specific person or persons and serves no bona fide academic purpose.

Identifying abuse of authority can be challenging. The examples below are intended to provide a general guide to understand and identify this behavior. The examples are by no means exhaustive or able to encompass the nuance and complexity of challenging interpersonal situations. Student can seek out the help of individuals noted in the Informal Resolution section to discuss their individual situation and options for resolution.

Not Abuse of Authority

A student receives a lower-than-expected score on an exam.

Potential Abuse of Authority

A student has been assisting one of their instructors by running personal errands. During this time, they have received high grades and positive feedback on coursework. After informing

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	<i>the instructor that they can no longer assist with these errands, the student receives an atypically low score on an exam.</i>
<i>A faculty member and a student work on a peer-review research paper together, and the student is listed a second author.</i>	<i>A faculty member asks a student to work on a peer-review research paper with them, and the student agrees. After the paper is submitted, they have a conversation in which the student informs the faculty member that she has decided to pursue a career in industry instead of academia. When the paper is accepted, the faculty member removes the student from the list of authors.</i>
<i>A student emails a faculty adviser requesting feedback on a dissertation draft and doesn't receive an immediate response.</i>	<i>Over the course of several months, a faculty adviser does not respond to continued attempts by a student to get feedback on dissertation work. The chronic lack of communication and feedback causes the student to fall behind on progress towards degree.</i>

4. Time Limits

There is no time limit on filing a grievance, though a grievance may only be filed by a current student or a student on an approved leave of absence. Students are encouraged to file a grievance as soon as is practicable as it maximizes the University's ability to respond promptly and effectively. Delayed reporting often results in the loss of relevant information or documentation, and/or in faded and unreliable memories; it also impairs the University's ability to interview individuals with knowledge of the case, assess information, and, if appropriate, review and resolve complaints.

5. Statement of Non-Retaliation

All members of the community should be able to bring forward conflicts, concerns, and possible grievances in a respectful environment and are expected to do so in good faith. The University prohibits retaliation against any person who exercises any rights or responsibilities under this policy. Any act of retaliation may be a separate violation of this policy.

6. Informal Resolution

Recognizing that all situations are unique, the Division of the Social Sciences seeks to present students with a number of options and approaches towards addressing conflict and reporting concerns. While formal grievance resolution is only applicable to cases involving an allegation of abuse of authority, the options presented in this section are available to all students regardless of the specific nature of their complaint or concern.

6.1 Seek Advice

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The individuals and offices listed below are available to assist students and discuss options for approaching informal resolution. Students should be supported when confronting challenges, and we seek to create an environment that encourages asking for help and providing support. Seeking advice for resolving concerns or complaints is the first step towards constructively addressing an issue of concern.

Division of the Social Sciences Resources:

- The [Dean of Students](#) can meet with students to discuss their individual situation, provide an overview of grievance procedures, and offer guidance on options for informal resolution.
- As appropriate, students can seek guidance on resolution from individuals within their departments, including a Director of Graduate Studies, Department Chair, Program Director, faculty adviser, or Graduate Program Administrator.
- Some departments may also have local peer resources such as peer mentors, student-faculty committees, or other student representatives who can bring concerns to departmental or Social Sciences leadership.

Campus-Wide Resources:

- [Student Ombuds Office](#) serves as a peer resource to assist in the resolution of conflicts, concerns, and other problems that they may encounter through the course of University life. They provide individual consultation and [write reports](#) to the campus community identifying recurring student concerns.
- The [Associate Director for Graduate Student Affairs](#) in UChicagoGRAD is an administrator who serves as a campus-wide resource for students on issues around grievance policy and procedures. The Associate Director can meet with students to discuss their individual situation and provide information about options for resolution. The Associate Director also works to provide trainings and workshops to improve mentorship and advising relationships and support constructive conversations around student concerns. Email gradgrievance@uchicago.edu for assistance.

6.2 Finding Support in Challenging Situations

Any conflict or difficulty in a student's academic life can have an adverse effect on mental health and wellbeing. In addition to seeking advice and assistance from the offices and individuals above, the Division of the Social Sciences strongly encourages students to seek support from the following university resources:

- [Counselors at Student Wellness](#) are available to provide critical support services to students navigating all manner of challenges.
- [Sounding Board](#) is a resource for helping graduate students negotiate work/life balance issues, navigate relationships, and create strategies for having difficult conversations with peers, faculty, and others.
- Students may also find support in the advisers and programs available through [the Office of Spiritual Life](#).

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- Student Wellness's [Health Promotion](#) office provides a range of services and programming to support students in managing stress and leading balanced and healthy lives.

6.3 Methods for Approaching Resolution

As students seek out advice and support for approaching conflict and concerns, they should consider the following methods for addressing their situation. This is not a complete list of strategies, rather it can be a starting point in thinking through ways to approach resolution depending on the individual situation and needs of the student.

Shuttle Diplomacy

Faculty and administrators can assist in resolution by speaking with the individual or individuals with whom there is conflict. They can convey concerns on the student's behalf and report back about the conversation to the student.

Facilitated Conversation

Students experiencing conflict or any challenging interpersonal situation may benefit from requesting a facilitated conversation. An administrator or faculty member can arrange a meeting to be attended by both the student and the individual or individuals with whom there is conflict in order to discuss the source of the conflict and collectively address possible solutions.

Reporting Options

A student may find themselves in a situation where they want to report a complaint or concern but do not wish to have their individual case acted upon. Reports of this kind can be made either directly to the Division of the Social Sciences or to the Office of the Provost. These reports can be used to identify potential instances of abuse or recurrent concerns.

Students wishing to make an informational report to the Division of the Social Sciences should reach out to the Dean of Students to discuss the concern or complaint. Students should be aware that information about these reports may be shared with the student's department and other university officials without prior consent in the following situations:

- There is a concern about abuse or other possible misconduct that rises to the level of requiring immediate action.
- There is a concern about the student's or another person's health and safety.

Anonymous reports may be made directly to the Office of the Provost through the [Abuse of Authority Report Form](#). Anonymous reports will be reviewed by the Office of the Provost and shared with academic units and other university officials as appropriate.

7. Formal Grievance Process

While informal resolution is available for students to address many conflicts and complaints, the formal resolution process is applicable to instances where there is an allegation of abuse of authority and where attempts at informal resolution have been ineffective.

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Timelines are specified for all stages in the formal grievance process. If necessary, specific deadlines may be extended with notice to the student and respondent[s].

7.1 Role of Support Person

Both the student and respondent(s) may bring a support person of their choice to any meeting conducted as part of the formal grievance process. However, they must notify the individual or individuals with whom they are meeting of the identity of their support person in advance. If the support person is a lawyer, a representative of the University's Office of Legal Counsel may also attend the meeting. The support person does not function as an advocate or participate directly in any way during the meeting. Both the student and respondent(s) are expected to speak for themselves and submit their own written statements.

7.2 Submitting a Formal Grievance

Students wishing to file a formal grievance are required to submit a complaint using [this online form](#).

7.3 Initial Review

The form and any provided written documentation will be reviewed by the Dean of Students or designee to determine if:

- The case is appropriate for formal resolution pursuant to the grievance policy (i.e., it alleges an abuse of authority as defined above and is not covered by another policy); and
- The case cannot be resolved by informal means.

The Dean of Students or designee will receive and review the complaint to determine if it meets the above stated criteria for formal resolution. As part of this initial review, the Dean of Students may request a meeting with the student to discuss the complaint. At this meeting there will be discussion of any supportive resources that the student may find helpful.

Based on the review, the Dean of Students or designee has the discretion and authority to dismiss the complaint or to refer the complaint to the Academic Dean with a recommendation to convene a grievance committee. The Academic Dean makes the final determination as to whether the complaint is appropriate for formal resolution.

The student will receive written notification of whether the case meets the criteria for formal resolution within 30 calendar days of submitting the formal grievance complaint.

If the Academic Dean decides the complaint is appropriate for resolution, the respondent(s) will be provided with written notice and a copy of the complaint within seven calendar days of the notice to the student.

7.4 Division of the Social Sciences Grievance Committee

The Dean will convene a Grievance Committee to consider the case. The Committee is charged with reviewing all information about the case and making a recommendation to the Dean.

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The Committee will generally be composed of three faculty members, one student, and the Dean of Students.

All members of the Committee are expected to maintain independent judgment and open-mindedness about the alleged grievance, free from material bias and conflicts of interest, or they should recuse themselves.

The student and respondent(s) will be notified of the composition of the Committee as soon as practicable before the Committee begins their review. Either party may request a substitution if the participation of any individual on the Committee poses a conflict of interest. Such requests must be made to the Dean within two business days of receiving notice of the members of the Committee. Requests must identify with specificity the alleged nature of the conflict of interest. Using reasoned judgment, the Dean will decide whether the alleged conflict is genuine and material and, if so, whether it compels the Committee member's replacement.

7.5 Division of the Social Sciences Grievance Committee Process

The Committee will designate a member or members to:

- Interview, as necessary, individuals who may have relevant knowledge;
- Collect materials, as necessary, including relevant documents.

The complainant and respondent(s) will be given the opportunity to provide relevant documentation, provide names of relevant individuals, and meet with the committee or a designated representative of the committee.

The Committee will apply a preponderance of evidence standard in making its recommendation to the Dean. Namely, the Committee will decide whether, in consideration of all the information before it, it is more likely than not that an abuse of authority occurred.

7.6 Potential Outcomes

Grievance processes and outcomes are intended to create a more respectful and inclusive university environment in which every student has the opportunity to maximize their potential, to provide remedies for students in need of support, and to facilitate productive conversations about challenging issues. In considering appropriate resolutions to grievance cases, the Division of the Social Sciences will be guided by the principle that outcomes should focus on addressing harm to the student and preventing its recurrence.

The range of possible outcomes will vary according to the role of the individual found responsible for violating the policy and the severity of the violation. If any individual is found to have abused their authority as defined in this policy, at minimum the Dean and/or other supervisor will meet with the respondent to discuss the finding and expectations regarding future conduct, and a notation regarding the finding and expectations may be made in the personnel record. Other possible outcomes include, but are not limited to, required trainings, amendments to teaching and advising assignments, removal from leadership positions or committee assignments, ineligibility for annual pay increases, and referral

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to applicable processes if further action is recommended. Outcomes will be based on the specific nature of the conduct, the particulars of the situation, and a pattern of violations if such exists.

7.7 Notification of Outcome

The student and the respondent(s) shall be notified formally, in writing, of the Dean's decision no more than 90 calendar days after the case was initially submitted.

Notifications will also provide both parties with information about how to request a review of the outcome by the Office of the Provost under the [Graduate Student Grievance Review Process](#).