

“The University of Chicago is a community of scholars dedicated to research, academic excellence, and the pursuit and cultivation of learning in an environment where the free and open expression of ideas and critical questions are paramount. Every member of the University- student, faculty, and staff- make a commitment to strive for personal and academic integrity; to treat others with dignity and respect; to honor the rights and property of others; to take responsibility for individual and group behavior; and to act as a responsible citizen in a free academic community.” (from the [Student Manual](#))

The University of Chicago Divinity School is committed to the highest ideals of our academic community. Respect, civility, and professionalism are essential to the Divinity School’s mission of advancing the academic study of religion and preparing students for careers in research, teaching, and public religious leadership. All Divinity School academic appointees and staff are responsible for creating and maintaining a learning environment in which every student can maximize their potential. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that Divinity School students have a means and opportunity to resolve complaints alleging abuse of authority.

#### **POLICY BASIS AND APPLICATION**

This policy establishes a process by which currently enrolled graduate degree-seeking or graduate non-degree visiting students in the Divinity School 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 student concern does not have to involve allegations of abuse of authority 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 Divinity School 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 Divinity student has a potential grievance alleging abuse of authority by someone outside of the Divinity School, students should follow the grievance policy of the Divinity School. 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 the Provost’s Office, they must provide supporting rationale for why their case cannot be fairly heard within the Divinity School. Please consult the [University Grievance Policy for Graduate Students](#) for more information.

*Complaints or Disputes about Grades and Academic Evaluations*

This policy does not apply to course grades. Faculty have the authority and the responsibility to assess the academic performance of students enrolled in their classes. Only the instructor who gave the course, examination, or evaluation has the authority to change the assessment of the student's performance. Similarly, the evaluation of academic progress and standing in the program is the prerogative of the Divinity School faculty as outlined in the [Divinity School Announcements](#) and [Doctoral Student Handbook](#).

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 faculty program directors, or bring concerns to and seek advice from the Dean of Students. The Divinity School does not have a formal grade appeal process.

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.

*Other Complaints*

Allegations 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 is 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](#).

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 following 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](#).

*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 of

Chicago 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.

### *Time Limit*

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.

### **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 an 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 abuses of authority can be challenging, and it is important that students with concerns confer with any of the individuals noted in the Informal Resolution section to discuss their unique situations and options for resolution. Some examples of clearly abusive behavior can, however, provide helpful guidelines. That a student receives a lower-than-expected score on an exam, for instance, does not by itself constitute clear evidence of abuse of authority. If a lower-than-expected score appears, though, to have been given in response to extenuating circumstances— if the student had, for example, invariably earned high marks during a time spent assisting the instructor by running personal errands, and then received the lower-than-expected score after informing the instructor that they can no longer render such assistance — it may represent an abuse of authority. To consider a different sort of case, it is not necessarily an abuse of authority for an instructor, contesting a claim made by a student during class, to correct the student in front of the entire class; if this is done belittlingly, however — if the instructor comments, for example, that the student should not have been admitted to the PhD program — it may be an abuse of authority.

### **Informal Resolution**

The Divinity School seeks to maintain a professional learning environment, and a core aspect of professionalism includes learning to resolve disagreements in a collegial and respectful manner. For this reason, all community members are expected to make a good-faith effort to address conflicts or concerns through informal methods, some of which are articulated below. For this reason, all community members are expected to make a good-faith effort to resolve any conflicts directly. Further, before filing a formal grievance under this policy, a student must first demonstrate that they have attempted to resolve the matter informally with the person responsible for the action or decision being grieved, and/or that person's supervisor (or higher administrative authority), or both persons.

Students may solicit counsel from their faculty advisor, program director, and/or Dean of Students to resolve a complaint using an informal process. Students may also bring concerns to the [Divinity Student Association \(DSA\)](#), who can bring student concerns to the Divinity School administrative leadership.

Students may also seek support outside the Divinity School. The following campus resources can assist students with concerns:

- [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](#) at 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 unique situations and provide information about options for resolution. The Associate Director also works to provide professional development workshops to improve mentorship and advising relationships and support constructive conversations around student concerns. Email [gradgrievance@uchicago.edu](mailto:gradgrievance@uchicago.edu) for assistance.

#### *Finding Support in Challenging Situations*

Any conflict or difficulty in a student's academic life can negatively impact mental health and well-being. In addition to seeking advice and assistance from the offices and individuals above, the Divinity School 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 from the advisers and programs available through [the Office of Spiritual Life](#).
- 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.

#### *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 program directors and the Dean/Associate Dean of Students 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. Faculty program directors and the Dean/Associate Dean of Students can arrange a meeting to be attended by both the student and the individual or individuals with whom there is conflict 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 unique case acted upon. Reports of this kind can be made either directly to the Divinity School or 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 Divinity School 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.

#### **Formal Resolution Process**

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

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].

Students wishing to file a formal grievance are required to submit a complaint using [this online form](#). The Dean (or their designee) will review all provided documentation and determine if:

- The case is appropriate for formal resolution under the grievance policy (i.e., it alleges that an abuse of authority occurred as defined above and is not covered by another policy); and
- The case has not been resolved by informal means.).

The Dean 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 or designee may request a meeting with the student to discuss the complaint. At this meeting, the student should be provided with supportive resources that might be applicable and helpful.

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

If the 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.

#### Grievance Review Committee

If a complaint meets the criteria for formal resolution, the Dean will convene a Grievance Review Committee to consider the case. The Committee is charged with reviewing all information about the case and making a recommendation to the Dean. The Grievance Review Committee will generally consist of three Divinity School faculty members, one Divinity School graduate student, and the Dean of Students of the Divinity School (or their designee). All members of the Committee are expected to operate in good faith and maintain confidentiality, 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 its 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 Committee's convening and composition. 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.

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

The Committee may designate a member or members to:

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

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, the identity of the support person must be disclosed in advance of the meeting. 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 written statements.

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 abuse of authority occurred. If the Committee finds that abuse of authority has occurred, their recommendation will include potential outcomes to appropriately address the policy violation.

The Dean will consider the Committee's recommendations and make a final determination.

#### *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, provide remedies for students in need of support, and facilitate productive conversations about challenging issues. In considering appropriate resolutions to grievance cases, the Divinity School 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 supervisors 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 training, amendments to teaching and advising assignments, removal from leadership positions or committee assignments, ineligibility for annual pay increases, and referral 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.

#### *Notification of Outcome*

The student and the respondent(s) shall be notified 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](#).