



UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR THE GRIEVANCES OF

POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

1. PREAMBLE

The University is committed to providing its postgraduate students with an education of the highest quality, as well as to 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 the grievances 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. Students should not feel that their grievances will be ignored or trivialized.
- (2) Staff of the University are required to take appropriate action in accordance with this policy when the grievances of postgraduate students are drawn to their attention.
- (3) Grievances will be taken seriously, investigated promptly and rigorously, and treated in confidence.
- (4) 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.
- (5) Wherever possible, grievances should initially be addressed at School-level, and referred to Faculty-level only if they cannot be resolved. Appeal to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) should be regarded as a last resort, when a student feels that resolution has not been achieved by all of the preceding processes.
- (6) 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

- (1) *Student* means a person registered full-time or part-time at the University for a qualification.
- (2) *Occasional student* means a person who is registered at the University for any unit for non-qualification purposes. An occasional student is deemed to be a student (as defined above) for all other purposes.
- (3) *Postgraduate Student* means a student who has been awarded a bachelor's degree or equivalent qualification, or who has been granted equivalent academic standing.
- (4) *Complaint* means an action or statement which expresses dissatisfaction about any behaviour that is perceived to be unfair, discriminatory, provocative, prejudicial or unjustified, and which requires prompt action or a response.
- (5) *Grievance* means a real or perceived complaint.

4. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this policy and these procedures are:

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

5. TYPES OF GRIEVANCE

The procedures described in this document aim to assist postgraduate students in resolving grievances relating to their registration, with specific reference to:

- working relations with members of staff;
- aspects of their academic performance;
- the outcome of examinations of coursework and research;
- administrative processes and the provision of student services.

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

- general grievances advanced by any member of the student body, whether undergraduate or postgraduate;
- grievances between students (see ‘Policy and Procedures for Student Grievances’);
- allegations of racial and sexual discrimination;
- allegations of misconduct by members of staff;
- grievances related to application or selection processes.

6. APPLICATION OF THE POLICY

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

7A. PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH GRIEVANCES AGAINST MEMBERS OF STAFF

(1) If a student has a grievance concerning an academic or administrative decision, or the behavior of a member of staff, this grievance 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’ (overstamped Annexure A), as well as any accompanying agreement.

(2) If the grievance cannot be resolved, it should be referred to the appropriate Postgraduate Coordinator within the School. The student is entitled to be assisted by the School’s Postgraduate Representative, if he/she so wishes.

(3) 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 he/she so wishes.

(4) 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.

(5) As a last resort, an appeal may be made to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), whose decision on the matter will be final.

(6) 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 member of the University's Postgraduate Association, as in (3).

(7) If the staff member against whom a grievance has been lodged is a Dean, the grievance should be referred to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), whose decision will be final. The student is entitled to representation by a member of the University's Postgraduate Association, as in (6).

7B. PROCEDURES FOR RESOLVING GRIEVANCES RELATED TO DECISIONS CONCERNING POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

(a) Appeals Procedures: Registration and Progress towards a Qualification or Study for Non-Degree Purpose

In each Faculty of the University, the Faculty Board has delegated appropriate powers to a Graduate Studies Committee, which is responsible for overseeing student 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).

(1) If a student wishes to appeal against any decision taken or ratified by the Graduate Studies Committee, he/she 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.

(2) The Assistant Dean or the Chair of the Graduate Studies Committee (acting on behalf of the Dean) 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.

(3) If the student is dissatisfied with the outcome, he/she may appeal to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), whose decision will be final.

(b) Appeals Procedures: Coursework

(1) 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 Co-ordinator.

(2) If the matter cannot be resolved by discussion with the Course Co-ordinator, it should be referred to the Head of Discipline/Department. If a resolution is not achieved, the grievance should then be submitted in writing to the Head of School.

(3) If the matter still cannot be resolved, the student should lodge a grievance with the Assistant Dean for Graduate Studies, who will consult with the appropriate colleagues (such as members of the academic staff, the Course Co-ordinator 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.

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

(c) Appeals Procedure: Cancellation of Registration as a Result of Unsatisfactory Performance/Progress

The appropriate procedure is set out in General Rule 5.7.2.

[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 student has the right to submit a further appeal to Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC): Academic, who may consult with the Dean. The decision of the DVC: Academic, 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.]

(d) Appeals Procedure: Examination of Research Reports, Dissertations and Theses

(1) 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 Research Director.

(2) If the student's concerns are not resolved, he/she should lodge an appeal with the Assistant Dean for Graduate Studies within one month of the date of the informal discussion. The Assistant Dean (acting on behalf of the 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.

(3) If the student is dissatisfied with the outcome, he/she may appeal to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), whose decision will be final.

7C. PROCEDURE FOR RESOLVING GRIEVANCES RELATING TO STUDENT SERVICES

(1) 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 Office) should initially discuss this grievance with the staff member(s) concerned.

(2) If the grievance cannot be resolved, it should be referred to the head of the relevant office, branch or division.

(3) If the grievance still cannot be resolved, it should be referred to the 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.

(4) If the grievance remains unresolved, it should be referred to the University Registrar, whose decision will be final.

8. RESPONSES TO GRIEVANCE/S

Students will generally receive a written response within one calendar month of submitting a written grievance

9. WITHDRAWAL OF GRIEVANCES

A 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 was laid,

10. DOCUMENTATION

All documentation relating to student grievances must be filed in the official student file.

11. RELATIONSHIP OF THIS POLICY TO OTHER UNIVERSITY POLICIES

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