DISMISSAL FROM A GRADUATE PROGRAM AND APPEAL PROCESS

In addition to those standards of conduct described in VCU Rules and Procedures and the VCU Honor System, graduate students enrolled at the university may be dismissed from the academic programs in which they are enrolled for failure to meet prescribed academic program requirements. Students appealing dismissal from their graduate degree programs should first pursue appeals at the program/department and/or the school level. After receiving the program/department and/or school decision, students have the option of filing an appeal with the graduate dean in the process outlined below.

Dismissal process

1. Dismissal is initiated at the program/department level by advisers/graduate program directors/department chairs via a special action form indicating the reason with relevant documentation attached. Reasons for dismissal may include but are not limited to:
    - Academic (D or F in class, too many grades of C or U, as determined by the student's academic program in conjunction with Graduate Council policy, GPA below 3.0, failure to secure a major adviser, failure of comprehensive exams, lack of progress on/unsuccessful defense of thesis/dissertation)
    - Discontinuous enrollment
    - Exceeding time limit
    - Honor policy violation
    - Academic misconduct
    - Professional misconduct
2. Request for dismissal is forwarded to the school dean/dean's designee, who reviews the action, signs the form and forwards it to the graduate dean within 10 business days.
3. The graduate dean/dean's designee reviews the action, signs the form, notifies the Office of the University Registrar and sends a dismissal letter to the student via official VCU email. This letter must include a statement of the student's right to appeal and inform the student that appeals must be initiated at the program/department and/or school level within 10 business days after receipt of the letter.

Appeal process

Preamble

Virginia Commonwealth University, through its Graduate School, defines minimum standards for admission and sets general rules governing eligibility for continuation. However, the individual graduate programs, through their respective graduate faculty and graduate program procedures, exercise principal responsibility for evaluating graduate student work. It is assumed that most disputes over evidence of unsatisfactory progress will be reconciled through discussions between faculty and students at the school/department/program level.

It is important that each graduate student be fully informed, not only of the VCU Graduate School policies and procedures, but also of any additional departmental program requirements beyond those established by the Graduate School. A copy of each departmental graduate policy statement should be readily available to all graduate students. The department should inform graduate students of degree requirements and associated school/program/department procedures at the time of matriculation.

A student may appeal dismissal from a graduate program under the following procedures.

1. The student has the burden of proof in all appeals.
2. The student must initiate the appeal process at the program level within 10 business days after receipt of the graduate dean's dismissal letter and according to the program/department and/or schools/colleges appeal processes. All program/department and/or school/college appeal processes should be exhausted prior to initiating an appeal to the graduate dean.
3. If all program/department and/or school/college appeal processes fail to resolve the issue, the student must provide the graduate dean with written notification of appeal, to include justification and all supporting documentation (correspondence and other paperwork leading up to the dismissal), within 10 business days of the school/college decision. All documentation must be provided at the time of written notification of appeal.
4. The graduate dean provides the graduate program director and school/college dean with copies of the student's appeal and asks the graduate program director/dean/department chair to provide the Graduate School with their response, including copies of correspondence and any other supporting documentation that led to the dismissal. The graduate program director and school dean must respond to the graduate dean's request for information within 10 business days.
5. The graduate dean will review the materials and may refer the matter to the admissions and academic standards committee of the University Graduate Council. The committee is composed of faculty members from various divisions of the university plus one ex-officio voting member from the Graduate School. AAS members who have direct knowledge of the student's case will be recused. A minimum of four members must be present to constitute a quorum. The committee will convene to review the documentation and consider the positions of the parties. At its meeting, the committee will hear presentations from and ask questions of the student and representatives of the school/department/program. The student and the school/department /program representative may each bring up to two persons who may provide support and advice but who may not speak for the parties.
6. After considering the materials submitted and the presentations by the parties, the committee will convene in closed session and decide, by majority vote, whether to recommend that the graduate dean uphold or reverse the dismissal. In the event of a less than unanimous decision, both opinions will be communicated to the graduate dean. The graduate dean renders the final decision and notifies the student via email within 10 business days.

7. The student may be allowed to register for courses during the pendency of the appeal, understanding that he/she will be dropped retroactively if the dismissal is upheld.

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University Graduate Council