

## DEPARTMENTAL GRADUATE STUDENT GRIEVANCE PROCESS

The Department of Sociology (SOCY) is a scholarly community whose aim is to create an environment conducive to learning. This is accomplished through the promotion of responsibility and encouragement of honesty, integrity, and respect among students, faculty and staff ensuring that all act in accordance with our behavioral standards while supporting individual rights. We are committed to the principles of truth, reflexive objectivity, fairness, honesty, and free inquiry, which includes the freedom to express careful and reasoned criticism of data and opinion. We are also committed to building a department where all members are supported and valued in their academic work. As a citizen of the academic community, each member of SOCY is expected to assume the obligations of responsible citizenship.

It is the policy of SOCY to uphold conduct standards in a fair, respectful, and equitable manner. We are committed to serving as an advocate for, and resource to, student victims of crimes, harassment and other traumatic experiences. **Per University policy, we are obligated as “Responsible University Employees,” which includes all University administrators, supervisors in nonconfidential roles, faculty members, graduate assistants, campus police, coaches, athletic trainers, resident assistants, and non-confidential first responders, to promptly notify the Title IX Officer in the Office of Civil Rights and Sexual Misconduct (OCRSM ) of any report of sexual misconduct brought to our attention.**

A graduate student grievance refers to treatment that is discriminatory, unethical, unjust, uncivil, or otherwise creates a hostile learning or working environment from a faculty member, a staff member, or another student. If the nature of the grievance falls under the purview of existing University policies, the student should follow the relevant policy in section I. If not, then the student should consult options detailed in section II and/or section III. Sections II and III of this policy are guided by [Transformative](#) and [Restorative](#) Justice approaches to conflict resolution. A flow chart illustrating the process detailed in these sections is on pages 6 and 7.

If the student is unsure whether or not their grievance should be submitted to the department or submitted to BSOS or the Graduate School, they may consult the Equity and Justice Committee (EJC) on which section of this document to follow.

### I. EXISTING UNIVERSITY POLICIES

It is the policy of the University and SOCY to maintain the campus as a place of work for faculty, staff and students, free from all forms of harassment. Harassment in the workplace or the educational environment is unacceptable conduct and will not be tolerated. The University has established policies and reporting processes that address Title IX, sexual misconduct and discrimination. These policies can be found:

- [Policy and Procedures on Sexual Harassment and Other Sexual Misconduct](#)
- [Non-Discrimination Policy & Procedures](#)

The University has established policies and grievance processes for students who believe that

their academic performance has been unfairly evaluated. For graduate students, the policy/process can be found:

- [Arbitrary and Capricious Grading Policies](#)

In addition, the Graduate Council has established grievance policies and procedures for Graduate Assistants who believe that they have been unfairly treated in respect to their employment and/or duties as a Research, Teaching or Administrative Graduate Assistant. The policy/procedure can be found:

- [Graduate Assistants Grievance Procedures](#)

## II. INFORMAL PROCESS

We believe that it is best to facilitate, with dignity, the resolution of disputes and concerns at the lowest level possible; it is best to attempt a resolution with the parties involved. A student can always approach an advisor or Director of Graduate Studies in a confidential and informal manner to seek guidance. Any member of the EJC is available for confidential consultation by appointment (no matter is too small). To assist in informal mediation, you may wish to contact the Graduate Student Ombuds Officer (<http://www.gradschool.umd.edu/Ombuds/>).

As a reminder, per University policy, many members of the department are obligated as “Responsible University Employees,” including all University administrators, supervisors in nonconfidential roles, faculty members, graduate assistants, campus police, coaches, athletic trainers, resident assistants, and non-confidential first responders. Responsible University Employees must promptly notify the Title IX Officer in the OCRSM of any report of sexual misconduct brought to their attention, including campus law enforcement. This means that seeking informal guidance for experiences with sexual misconduct will initiate a formal process external to the department.

If a graduate student believes that they have experienced treatment that is discriminatory, unethical, unjust, uncivil, or otherwise creates a hostile learning or working environment from a faculty member, a staff member, or another student, the student should attempt to resolve the matters locally, collegially, and informally. Third parties can confidentially report a grievance to the EJC if they witnessed discriminatory, unethical, unjust, uncivil treatment or if an incident directed against another graduate student is disclosed directly to them. A member of the EJC will reach out to the student involved in the incident to see if they would like to pursue an informal or formal grievance process.

EJC members are available for informal confidential discussions upon request. Discussions with EJC member(s) can provide assistance in determining the best course of action, from taking no further action, figuring out how to address the issue with the person(s) who are identified in the incident, to providing more knowledge on the SOCY grievance process, to discussing desired outcomes.

Potential remedies center on developmental and restorative responses. These may include mediation, mandatory educational seminars or online courses, reconciliation, (other examples) but may also include other solutions the EJC deems appropriate. The purpose of the formal grievance process is to resolve the situation satisfactorily through the development of mutually beneficial solutions. The purpose of the EJC's role in the grievance process is not to punish or sanction individuals, but to build mutual understanding.

If any member of the EJC committee has a COI with the aggrieved graduate student or the person(s) involved in the grievance they will recuse themselves from all deliberations on the grievance.

A successful resolution to the informal process is one in which the directly involved graduate student felt the process was fair and was satisfied with the outcome. If the issue has not been resolved to the satisfaction of that student or the treatment cannot be stopped through informal means, the graduate student may elect to file a formal grievance. The focus during the informal process is addressing graduate student satisfaction with the outcome because of the structural power disadvantages experienced by graduate students. The EJC will consult with the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), as appropriate.

The informal process to resolve grievances is encouraged but is not mandatory. Graduate students may always begin with the formal departmental process.

### III. FORMAL DEPARTMENTAL PROCESS

If it is not possible to achieve a mutually satisfactory resolution informally, or if students do not wish to first use the informal process, then the next step is to initiate the formal grievance process. This process, conducted within SOCY is strictly confidential. This confidentiality extends indefinitely if the matter is resolved within SOCY. If the matter is pursued outside the department after the SOCY resolution, the department may not be able to maintain confidentiality.

The confidential process proceeds in three phases, as detailed below, except in the following circumstances:

- If the grievance involves the DGS, the student may file the grievance with the Chair.
- If the grievance involves the Chair of the Department, the student may file the grievance with the Dean of the College.
- If the Dean is a party to the grievance, the student may file the grievance directly with the Dean of the Graduate School.

Phase 1. The process begins with the filing of a formal grievance with the DGS:

1. The student shall provide in writing a request to initiate a formal grievance process using the department's **grievance process form**. The grievance process form obtains information about the facts giving rise to the grievance including the following elements: names of the parties involved; date(s), time(s) and location(s) of the actions/incidents; names of witnesses, if applicable; and the

desired resolution of the grievance. The student should also provide any other information they would like to share about the incident. The chair of the EJC will forward the grievance to the DGS, and will upload the form to the EJC secure grievance process google drive folder.

2. The written grievance must be filed by an enrolled student within 90 calendar days from when the incident occurred or by the end of the academic semester in which the incident occurred, whichever is later. Students are encouraged to file the grievance soon after the incident. A grievant who has withdrawn or been dismissed has 90 calendar days from the date they left the university to file.
3. The DGS will conduct an investigation and provide a determination within 30 calendar days of the filing of the grievance. This investigation will include interviewing the parties involved and can include consulting with the EJC and appropriate campus administrators (such as University Counsel). The decision shall be provided in writing to the parties involved.
4. If the decision is accepted by the parties, the matter is deemed settled. If not, then the decision by the DGS can be appealed in Phase 2 of the process.

Phase 2. If the resolution proffered by the DGS is deemed unacceptable, the grieving party can file an appeal with the Department Chair as follows:

1. Either party may initiate the appeal process by sending a written appeal to the Chair of the Department within 30 calendar days of the announcement of the decision by the DGS.
2. The written appeal must be signed and include the original description of the facts, a clear explanation of why the party filing the appeal found the outcome(s) of the DGS's proceedings and decision(s) unsatisfactory, and a statement of the desired resolution/remedy.
3. The Chair will acknowledge receipt of the appeal within five calendar days of receipt of the written appeal.
4. The Chair will meet with the parties involved before reaching a decision. If the Chair has questions or would like more context, they may confidentially consult with the appropriate persons who are knowledgeable about the policies, practices and issues involved. The Chair shall endeavor to convey a written decision and, where appropriate, the remedy, to the parties involved within 30 calendar days of receipt of the letter of appeal. The written decision of the Chair will contain a statement of the issues, the controlling policy provisions, the Chair's assessment regarding the merits of the grievance, and a disposition of the grievance, including the remedy. The focus will be on developmental and restorative remedies that may include but not be limited to mediation, training, and development of equity and justice personal statements. If the decision is accepted by the parties, the matter is deemed settled. If not, then the decision of the Chair can be appealed in Phase 3 of the process.

Phase 3. If the resolution proffered by the Chair of the department is deemed unacceptable, either party can file an appeal with the Dean of the College as follows:

1. Either party may initiate the appeal process by sending a written appeal to the Dean of the College within 30 calendar days of the announcement of the decision by the Chair of the Department.
2. The written appeal must be signed and include the original description of the facts, a clear explanation of why the party filing the appeal found the outcome(s) of both the DGS and Chair proceedings and decision(s) unsatisfactory, and a statement of the desired resolution/remedy.
3. The Dean of the College will acknowledge receipt of the appeal within five calendar days of receipt of the written appeal.
4. The Dean or their designee will meet with the parties involved before reaching a decision. The Dean or their designee can confidentially consult with the appropriate persons who may be knowledgeable about the policies, practices and issues involved. The Dean or their designee shall endeavor to convey a written decision and, where appropriate, the remedy, to the parties involved within 30 calendar days of receipt of the letter of appeal. The written decision of the Dean or their designee will contain a statement of the issues, the Dean's or their designee's findings of fact, the controlling policy provisions, the Chair's assessment regarding the merits of the grievance, and a disposition of the grievance, including the remedy and/or disciplinary actions.
5. If the decision is accepted by the parties, the matter is deemed settled. If not, then the decision of the Dean can be appealed to the Dean of the Graduate School as set forth in graduate policy (as discussed in section I).

Remedies suggested by the filing party must be reasonable and within actions that can be taken in accordance with university policy and appropriate statutes. The Department will endeavor to reach a just and equitable resolution in each case.

Within limitations that govern an ordered intellectual community, the SOCY department accords its members freedom of inquiry, expression and action. Along with this freedom, is the obligation to do so responsibly. When that bond is broken, we are committed to addressing the issues and concerns as outlined above.

#### IV. ANONYMOUS PROCESS

Should a student wish to file a grievance anonymously, they may do so by declaring "Anonymous" in the aggrieved party information of the form. However, remedies in response to anonymous grievances will be limited to the EJC committee providing guidance to the aggrieved party about informal remedies available and providing guidance to the individual(s) named in the grievance with resources and guidance on the issue.

## V. GRIEVANCE DATABASE

All filed grievances (including anonymous grievances) will be maintained in a database, accessible only to EJC members. The database will be reviewed annually for consistent patterns involving specific courses, mentors, individuals in the department. If consistent patterns are observed, the EJC will inform the Department Chair.