

COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING GRADUATE STUDENT BILL OF RIGHTS

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Purpose

The University of Delaware College of Engineering (COE) is committed to fostering an environment that is respectful, supportive, and conducive to academic and professional success for all members of the community. The University expects all students, faculty, and staff to adhere to its policies and procedures to maintain an environment that is supportive and free from unacceptable behaviors such as intimidation, coercion, reprisal, harassment, and bullying. As such, working with key stakeholders, the College of Engineering has established a Graduate Student Bill of Rights to clarify what constitutes a supportive and equitable environment for graduate students. The primary intent is to allow PhD and Masters students (graduate students) to focus on their course work, research, and professional development without undue stress and uncertainty, and to provide guidance, clarity, and support on how to respond to sensitive situations that may arise during their graduate school experience.

A Graduate Student Bill of Rights benefits both students and faculty and is aligned with the [faculty handbook](#) and [student guide to university policies and student code of conduct](#). While this document is not an enforceable university policy, it demonstrates a commitment of COE graduate students, faculty, staff, and administration to fundamental standards. These standards are aligned with the [AAUP Statement of Professional Ethics](#): *which expects that University faculty demonstrate respect for students as individuals and adhere to their proper roles as intellectual guides and counselors, avoiding any exploitation, harassment, or discriminatory treatment of students, while acknowledging significant academic or scholarly assistance from them.* Therefore, graduate students have certain basic rights and responsibilities that are necessary to promote a productive climate and intellectual community.

Bill of Rights

Graduate students are expected to embody a commitment to the intellectual, cultural, and ethical development of themselves and their peers as citizens, scholars, and professionals. In alignment with the university's values, all members of the university community are also expected to adhere to the principles of inclusivity and respect for diverse viewpoints. In the College of Engineering, it is essential that faculty, staff, and students engage in thoughtful and considerate discussions, choosing words carefully, to promote understanding and constructive dialogue. Furthermore, it is expected that all members of the community work to create a supportive environment where we uplift and assist one another in our academic pursuits.

Graduate students have the responsibility to familiarize themselves with the policies set forth by the [Graduate College](#), the student guide to [university policies and student code of conduct](#), and the graduate handbook of their department or program. Further, graduate students have the responsibility to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity and professionalism throughout their research and scholarly endeavors. By embracing these expectations and policies, graduate students can cultivate an enriching and collaborative community that fosters personal and intellectual growth. The following sections outline their rights to ensure expectations are clear and transparent. This is a living document subject to periodic review and revision.

1. Clarifying and communicating expectations

- 1.1 Graduate students have the right to clear communication, accessible in written form in the Department Program Handbook, from the beginning of their program, regarding program requirements, expectations for progress and for completing an advanced degree, and conditions for dismissal from the program.
 - 1.1.1 Graduate students are exempt from new graduation or program requirements developed after admission to that same program of study, that might result in graduation delay.
- 1.2 Graduate students have the right to be informed of expectations for all aspects of their research and course work, including maintaining clear communication with their advisors and committee chairs, and to know the protocol and procedures for selecting members and engaging their committees.
- 1.3 Graduate students have the right to address concerns or issues related to their research performance prior to being dismissed from a program. Clearly-written, specific information about a student's performance with conditions for improvement must be provided to the student. The student will have a minimum of 3-months from the initial proposed dismissal to meet the conditions for improvement or dispute the report, before being dismissed from the program ([see Graduate College Dismissal Policies](#)). If the student wants to dispute the performance report, and cannot resolve their dispute with their faculty advisor, they have the right to seek external parties (department chair, program director or Associate/Assistant Dean) to help with determining a resolution.
- 1.4 Graduate students have the right to be informed of the status concerning their financial support from the point of enrollment and duration of their research and course work. Students should be informed in writing of termination of their financial support at least sixty (60) days prior to those changes. Note: International students require at least ninety (90) days' notice to accommodate changes associated with their I-20 status.

2. Safeguarding well-being

- 2.1 Graduate students have the right to a psychologically safe academic, research and working environment. Psychological safety means the belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes.
- 2.2 Graduate students have the right to balanced workloads. There should be sufficient time for both research and course work towards degree completion, and also for personal life and self-care.
- 2.3 Graduate students have the right to fair and equitable treatment from faculty, staff, and university administrators that is free from bullying, harassment or discrimination as aligned with provisions in the [faculty handbook](#).
- 2.4 Graduate students have the right to refuse tasks unrelated to research or academic activities (i.e., personal tasks for the advisor) without retaliation.
- 2.5 Graduate students have the right to academic freedom (i.e., to express opinions that relate to research ideas).
- 2.6 Graduate students have the responsibility to annually disclose any potential conflicts of interest arising from outside employment, business activities or financial interests that could interfere with their studies or research. This annual disclosure must be

made by October 1st each year by submitting a [Student/Scholar Awareness Document and Monitor Report](#).

- 2.7 Graduate students have the right to change their faculty advisor without retribution. Potential extended time to degree because of changes to advisor should not be interpreted as retribution.
- 2.8 Graduate students have the right to refuse to perform tasks that they believe to be unsafe in the lab or office, and to exercise their stop-work authority until the unsafe condition has been resolved, without retaliation. Graduate students have the responsibility to immediately communicate the exercise of this right to their faculty advisor. If there is a disagreement between the student and faculty member over safety concerns, the graduate student should seek help from the appropriate administrative office or safety office.
- 2.9 Graduate students have the right for whistleblower protections for exposing professional, ethical, or legal violations.
- 2.10 Graduate students have the right for impartial 3rd party (COE Office of Graduate and Postdoc Education or Graduate College) mediation or judgment. Requests for this support can be requested anonymously through the [COE Feedback Form](#).

3. Accessing support systems

- 3.1 Graduate student's (specifically students active in research) have the right to a meaningful advising relationship with faculty members, receive objective evaluation, consistent feedback and guidance concerning their research performance and course work with regular communication and availability of support (at least every month). Evaluations by advisors should be factual, specific, and complementary to the students Individual Development Plan (IDP) and should be shared with the student at least once a year.
- 3.2 Graduate students have the right to privacy and confidentiality in academic and personal matters, with appropriate protection of personal data and research results.
- 3.3 Graduate students have the right to due process, with access to formal guidelines and procedures and a fair and impartial hearing in case of academic disputes. Informal complaint procedures must be clearly defined at the department and college dean levels.
- 3.4 Graduate students have the right to co-authorship in publications when the student has made significant contributions of ideas or research work as outlined in the [publication and authorship agreement](#).
- 3.5 Graduate students have the right and responsibility to discuss with their advisor their readiness and suitability to attend research-related conferences that align with their academic career goals, and to attend when funds are available.
- 3.6 Graduate students should be encouraged and have the right to participate and attend professional development activities including seminars, presentations, career fairs, and student organizations.

Adapted from:

- University of Michigan Graduate Student Bill of Rights
- University of Chicago Pritzker School of Molecular Engineering Statement of Standards
- American Psychological Association
- University of Maryland College Park Policies and Procedures
- Brown University Policy and Code of Conduct

Content-based reference:

University of Delaware Faculty Handbook

Section 3: Conduct of Academic Programs

3.1 Instructional Program Policies: Instruction is the most fundamental of the educational responsibilities of the University. The University's primary mission is to foster the acquisition of knowledge and skills in its students. Research is of value in its own right, but it also contributes to excellence in the learning of University of Delaware students. Moreover, service activities within the wider community also complement the learning of students and constitute essential parts of the University's academic program. It is the stated objective of the University to foster the total intellectual, cultural, and ethical development of its students as citizens, scholars, and professionals. Learning outside the classroom must be considered an integral part of the educational program of the University.

Section 4.2: Academic Freedom and Standards of Conduct

4.2.5 Other Unlawful Harassment: Other unlawful harassment includes any verbal or physical conduct toward another that is based on the other's race, color, sex, religion, national origin, disability, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by law, and that (1) unlawfully creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive learning and/or working environment or (2) unlawfully interferes with an individual's course work or research. Threatening, intimidating, or engaging in hostile acts that create an unlawful, hostile environment based on an individual's race, color, gender, religion, national origin, disability, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by law may constitute unlawful harassment, whether the harasser is a co-worker, supervisor, student, or faculty member

4.2.6 Conflict of Interest and Ethical Conduct: What constitutes conflict of interest or unethical conduct on the part of those affiliated with a college or university has a moral as well as a legal base. The officers, faculty members, and other employees of the University are expected to always maintain relationships and practices in their University activities that are legally, ethically, and morally correct.

University of Delaware Student Guide to University Policies

Grade Grievance and Other Related Academic Complaints

b. Other complaints: a claim of abuse, ill-treatment, or exploitation involving the irresponsible or unjust misuse of the instructor's position of authority, power, and trust (e.g., pointed sexist or racist slurs and sexual or pecuniary blackmail).

2024-2025 Graduate Catalog

[Attendance, Registration, Leaves of Absence etc.](#)

[Process for changing advisors \(bottom of related policies\)](#)

<https://engr.udel.edu/graduate-programs/graduate-student-support/>