

**ACADEMIC REGULATIONS APPEALS COMMITTEE (ARAC)
GUIDELINES**

**DEVELOPED BY
DARCY MAYS
SUE MUNRO
ROBERT DAVIS**

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By
John Guthmiller
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INTRODUCTION

The Academic Regulations Appeals Committee (ARAC) considers appeals for waivers of undergraduate academic regulations. The only absolute in the ARAC process is the university rules with which the committee deals. These rules were established to help maintain the integrity of the institution, and a major purpose of ARAC is to help see that this integrity is maintained. Its role is extremely important and is one that is not taken lightly by committee members. A student petition to ARAC is considered an appeal to waive a rule. Waivers are granted only in exceptional cases

ARAC is a standing committee of the Office of Academic Affairs and is composed of faculty and administrators (chairs and program directors) from each degree program, as well as the University Registrar. The Associate Dean for Academic Affairs appoints the committee with faculty serving a one year term and the chair of the committee being appointed from the faculty group. Faculty appointees may be reappointed. In the event that such an appointment is vacant, a replacement is named by the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

Committee members who present student petitions (normally chairs or program directors) are to work with students to ensure that the petitions are complete. Important information about the format (see Appendix A), instructions for completing the forms (see Appendix B) and a list of ARAC contacts (see Appendix C) are found in the appendices.

Committee members are expected to attend all meetings. Meeting dates are reserved for the 2nd and 4th Mondays of each month, in conjunction with the chairs and program directors' regularly scheduled meetings. When business specific to ARAC is to be conducted, the chair of the ARAC committee will communicate to committee members the exact date and time no later than the end of the day Thursday prior to the required meeting. If a presenting member cannot make a scheduled meeting, it is his/her responsibility to contact **another** ARAC member to present the petitions on behalf of the absent member.

In the event that the Chair cannot attend a meeting, he or she will appoint another committee member to serve as the chair in his/her absence. The appointed chair does not vote unless there is a tie vote.

Upon resolution of the appeal, it is the responsibility of the presenting ARAC member to communicate in writing the result of the petition to the student. This correspondence should be copied to the ARAC chair, academic dean, department chair and advisor.

ARAC PROCESS

1. Any undergraduate student wishing to appeal for an exception to the undergraduate program academic regulations listed in the Undergraduate Bulletin begins by contacting the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs. The Assistant Dean instructs the student on the process, helps gather the required documentation, and gives the appeal documentation to the appropriate chair or program director to present the case before the committee.
2. The student must write a letter explaining his/her request and giving reasons for the request. The student is expected to document any claim that he/she makes in the letter. In cases of retroactive withdrawals or retroactive drops, the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs seeks feedback from the instructor(s) of the course(s) being considered.
3. The information is sent to the student's advisor for a recommendation, then to the department chair for a recommendation.
4. Once complete, all this information is forwarded to the chair of ARAC, to be included on the agenda. To appear on the agenda petitions must be submitted by noon of the Thursday prior to the next committee meeting, and only petitions that appear on the agenda can be presented.
5. The committee usually meets the 2nd and 4th Monday of each month. Occasionally changes are made to this schedule due to holidays or to accommodate certain requests.
6. Petitions are presented by the presenting members one at a time. Tabled petitions are presented first. The presenter distributes transcripts, reads the letter, and shows the documentation that has been provided. He or she then states the recommendation of the advisor and department chair, and moves for a vote.
7. The chair then asks for discussion. When relevant discussion ends, the chair calls for a vote for all in favor and for all opposed. A voice vote is used. If, however, the vote is close the vote is confirmed by a show of hands. The chair does not vote unless the committee vote is a tie. The number of favor/opposed votes is not recorded, nor is how each committee member voted recorded.
8. All cases on the agenda are heard at each meeting. Results can be approved, denied, tabled, or withdrawn. Petitions are tabled if required documentation is not provided. Petitions are withdrawn if the student's request can be granted by some other means or if the request is not something the committee can hear (such as a grade appeal, honors council ruling, etc.).
9. Following the meeting the results are entered into the ARAC database and

minutes of the meeting generated. These minutes are circulated to all committee members and to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. The database can be used to check on the consistency of the vote and to determine if a student has made similar requests in the past.

10. The committee will only rehear a petition when new documented evidence is provided or when it is remanded to the committee by the Dean or Associate Dean. A new letter from the student does not count as “new evidence.” For a petition to be reheard the same process must be followed, although documentation from the first request can be moved to the folder containing the second request. There is no deadline on producing new evidence; however, students typically do so within the next meeting or two.

11. All materials regarding the petitions are secured by the chair of the committee. At the end of each academic year folders with petitions and supporting documents are sent to Records and Registration for required storage.

12. A student dissatisfied with the outcome of his/her case communicates exclusively with the Associate Dean for Student Affairs. The student may not contact individual committee members, including the chair, or the Academic Affairs office regarding the results of a petition.

13. If any non-presenting member of the committee or an academic dean feels that a decision made by the committee was not consistent with university regulations or consistent with standard committee actions, he/she may refer the petition to the Dean or Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. Either the Dean or Associate Dean can ask the chair of ARAC for information on the petition, and can remand it back to the committee if he/she feels that is appropriate. Information about the committee and its purpose can be found in the VCU Qatar Student Handbook.

ARAC ADJUDICATION

Members make their decisions in ARAC cases based on the merits of individual petitions. However, although some petitions are unique, many are similar in nature. As a result of this similarity, certain guidelines have been established over the years in adjudicating petitions. Appendix D is an attempt to provide some of the thinking that goes into each of the different ARAC petitions. *None are considered absolutes regarding the final adjudication of any case.*

One of the most important considerations in evaluating the merits of a petition is **evidence**; a petition must be accompanied by evidence. As stated in the *Undergraduate Bulletin* petitions must include evidence to support any claim included in the student’s letter. Acceptable evidence includes such things as police reports, doctor’s notes, death certificates or notices, hospital records, and comments from a faculty member directly involved in the case before the Committee. Unacceptable as evidence are the student’s unsupported comments in his/her letter and letters or statements made by family

members, acquaintances, or friends. Any petition not accompanied by acceptable evidence will be withdrawn or tabled.

Students are expected to know and observe all academic regulations, including but not limited to add/drop deadlines, minimum grade point averages for remaining in majors, withdrawal deadlines, retroactive withdrawal policies, and graduation requirements for their particular degree. The University may send reminder notifications to students to alert them of impending deadlines, but the absence of such a courtesy reminder is not considered evidence in an appeal proceeding.

If the petition is related to a particular course(s), a statement from each faculty member involved must be part of the packet considered by the committee. Faculty comments are sought by the presenting members, who also must include a copy of the student's current transcript in the packet.

A petition must be accompanied by recommendations from the advisor and department chair. These recommendations are made after reviewing the student's petition, and are forwarded along with the petition for the committee's deliberation. Although their support or lack thereof is required, these are not considered votes. The final acceptance or denial of a petition is determined by an ARAC member vote.

No incomplete petition will be considered by the committee.

APPENDIX A

CORRECT FORMAT FOR ARAC PETITIONS

1. A petition for retroactive drop from ...
2. A petition for retroactive withdrawal from...
3. A petition for waiver of the requirement that 30 of the last 45 earned credits be earned in residence at VCU, to the extent of ___ credit hours.
4. A petition to retroactively add...
5. A petition for waiver of the continuance policy following a (number of) suspension.
6. A petition for a waiver of the requirement that limits special students to 11 credit hours, to the extent of ___ credit hours.
7. A petition for waiver of the policy stating that a student on academic probation is limited to 13 credits to the extent of ___ credit hours.
8. A petition for change in registration from credit to audit in ___.
9. A petition for change in registration from audit to credit in ___.
10. A petition for waiver of the ___ credit hour degree requirement to the extent of ___ credit hours.
11. A petition for waiver of the policy that 45 credit hours in upper level courses be presented for graduation, to the extent of ___ credit hours.
12. A petition for waiver of the university requirement that 25% of the course credits be taken at VCU. (Note: 25% of a typical 120 curriculum is 30 hours).
13. A petition for waiver of the rule that a student with a temporary grade on their transcript is not eligible to graduate.

APPENDIX B

STUDENT INFORMATION SHEET

The Academic Regulations Appeals Committee hears student requests for exceptions to the University's Academic Rules and Regulations. These policies are contained in the VCU Undergraduate Bulletin (see <http://www.pubapps.vcu.edu/bulletins/undergraduate/>). The request must be made in writing.

Steps to Follow in Preparing a Petition:

1. Contact the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs. She/he will help you prepare your petition and clarify the issues you are raising. She/he may ask questions to help you determine if your situation constitutes an exception to University policy. Because you will not appear in person before the committee, you need to explain fully the reasons why you think your request should be approved.

2. In most cases, you will need additional documentation to accompany your letter. Letters from medical professionals, faculty members, or employers may be helpful. **Letters from family and friends are not accepted as evidence.** Any reason for seeking a waiver which you cite in your cover letter must be accompanied by the appropriate documentation. Remember, you want to show that your situation is exceptional. Independent corroboration of your explanation, therefore, will help the committee understand your request more fully. Your advisor, dean, or director may be able to suggest appropriate documentation.

3. Give your letter and supporting documentation to the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs. A copy of your transcript accompanies your petition. Your contact person will tell you what to do next.

4. Academic Regulations Appeals Committee action does not constitute a reduction of tuition and fee charges. Reductions of tuition and fee charges are processed consistent with the official VCU Refund Policy. Exceptions to the official refund policy must be approved by the Refund/Waiver Appeals Committee. Please contact the Office of Student Accounting for information about a refund of tuition and fees.

5. Students receiving financial aid and petitioning to drop, withdraw, or change the status of courses from credit to audit risk the loss of some or all of their financial aid. Prior to submitting your petition, you should obtain a written statement from your financial aid counselor explaining the financial impact of the proposed actions. This statement is for your information and should NOT be presented to the Academic Regulations Appeals Committee.

After the petition is prepared, the procedure is as follows:

1. The Assistant Dean of Student Affairs forwards your petition to the Academic Regulations Appeals Committee.

2. Your representative (department chair) presents your petition to the whole committee, comprised of academic administrators and faculty members. The committee discusses the petition and votes on the request.

3. The committee's decision is final, and there is no other appeal except reconsideration of the petition if new information is provided. A new letter from you is **not** considered new information.

4. You will receive a letter that tells you what action the committee took. Copies are sent to the ARAC chair, academic dean, department chair and advisor.

APPENDIX C
CONTACT PERSONS 2011-2012
ACADEMIC REGULATIONS APPEALS COMMITTEE

Appendix D

Guidelines for Adjudication of Petitions

With regard to the 12 classifications of petitions considered by ARAC (see Appendix A), the following are some of the specific guidelines used to judge the merit of each case:

1. A petition for retroactive drop from
 - a. If the student has attended beyond add/drop, a petition is usually denied.
 - b. If the student did not attend any classes at VCU during the semester and is petitioning for a drop from all classes, the student is referred to as a “ghost student” and the petition is usually approved.
 - c. If the student attended only the first class during add/drop week and never again, and takes action soon thereafter to request the retroactive drop, the petition is usually approved.

2. A petition for retroactive withdrawal from
 - a. If the student is not given feedback regarding his/her academic progress in the course prior to the withdrawal date, the petition is usually approved. This lack of feedback, however, must be documented by the faculty member in question.
 - b. In most cases, students who continue attending class beyond the withdrawal period are not granted retroactive withdrawals.
 - c. Students who have a medical situation during a semester and wish to petition for a medical withdrawal from all courses can do so by contacting their Dean’s office. This petition does not come to ARAC.
 - d. If a student has a medical situation during a semester but fails to bring documentation to support a request for withdrawals from all courses until after the semester is over, these petitions will be heard by ARAC if proper medical documentation is supplied. If the documentation is deemed to have been sufficient for a medical withdrawal during the semester, then the petition is usually approved.
 - e. Selective withdrawals, implying a retroactive withdrawal from a course or

courses but not including all courses, require not only documentation of the situation that occurred (death in the family, serious illness, automobile accident, etc.) but also a statement as to why this situation only affected academic performance in some courses and not all. Selective withdrawals are usually denied unless such selectivity can be explained.

- f. Students may not ask ARAC to consider retroactive withdrawal requests once three years have passed after the semester in question ended. This rule can be waived by the chair of the committee and the petition can be presented to ARAC if the student can show he/she has been separated from VCU during the period in question and if there is some logical explanation as to why the petition was not brought forward in a more timely fashion.
 - g. Requests for retroactive withdrawals require a faculty feedback form completed by faculty in all courses from which retroactive withdrawals are being requested.
3. A petition for waiver of the requirement that 30 of the last 45 earned credits be earned in residence at VCU, to the extent of ___ credit hours.
- a. Requirement used to be that the last 30 credits have to be earned in residence at VCU. This was changed a few years ago and the number of petitions making this request has dropped significantly.
 - b. If the request is made in advance and a legitimate reason as to why the credits could not be earned at VCU is presented, most such petitions are approved. Reasons would include, but are not limited to, employment in another area, relocation due to changes in status with a spouse or due to a spouse's job changing, and academic opportunities that another school can provide that VCU cannot provide.
 - c. This request for a waiver of this policy is looked on more favorably if the student has completed most of his/her credits at VCU, as opposed to transferring many credits from community college or another institution.

4. A petition for retroactive add.....

- a. If a student is unable to register for a class or classes due to university error, requests for retroactive adds are typically approved.
- b. To be considered for a retroactive add in a course (or courses), a student must have a signed override card (or the equivalent) for each course and must not have any type of hold on his/her account. Presenters should not bring petitions to ARAC until both conditions are satisfied.
- c. Students who fail to secure enrollment in classes during the add/drop period, or fail to turn in override cards in a timely fashion, will not be retroactively added to classes.
- d. Advisors and faculty should not encourage nor allow students to attend classes in which they are not registered. A faculty member's adding a student to Blackboard does not equate to enrollment in a course.

5. A petition for waiver of the continuance policy following a ___ suspension.

- a. A suspension received by a student is not the consequence of only one course or one semester, but instead the accumulation of unsatisfactory academic performance over at least three semesters. Requests for waivers based on performance in a single course or a single semester are usually denied.
- b. If a student can document an ongoing situation that could affect academic performance over several semesters and that steps have been taken to rectify this situation, the committee normally approves a waiver.
- c. In the case of a first suspension the penalty involves separation from the university for two semesters. In many cases it is in the student's best interest to use this time to get his/her life together, to address the problem creating the academic difficulties, and/or to attend community college.
- d. In the case of a second (and subsequent) suspension the penalty involves separation from the university for five years. If, during this time, the

student shows that he or she has turned his or her academic career around, usually by attending community college with success (including, if possible, completing the requirements for an Associates Degree), the request to waive the suspension is usually approved.

- e. Students who are separated from the university for five full years and who, upon return, complete 12 credits with a grade point average of 2.0 or higher, are eligible to use grade exclusion to remove any D and F grades that they have earned. Due to this policy, there are times when it is to the advantage of the student to serve the entire suspension (thus being eligible for grade exclusion).
6. A petition for a waiver of the requirement that limits special students to 11 credit hours, to the extent of ___ credit hours.
- a. To avoid making admissions decisions, such requests are regularly denied.
 - b. Only admitted students are eligible to enroll for 12 or more credits. Special students wishing to enroll in more than 11 credits should apply for full-time admission to the university.
7. A petition for waiver of the policy stating that a student on academic probation is limited to 13 credits to the extent of ___ credit hours.
- a. The goal is to restrict students on probation to a maximum of four courses. To allow students to register for 1-credit labs associated with some courses, the limit was increased from 12 to 13 credits.
 - b. Approval of such requests are usually only given to students who wish to enroll in only four courses, with one or more of the courses worth more than three credits making the total credits exceed 13.

8. A petition for change in registration from credit to audit in ____.
 - a. Students requesting a change from credit to audit are usually approved if the request is prior to the withdrawal date.
 - b. After the last day to withdraw, such requests are typically denied as the change from credit to audit is usually an effort to avoid a poor grade.

9. A petition for change in registration from audit to credit in ____.
 - a. Very few students make this request. Most making such a request do so at the end of the semester, after they have determined that they are doing well in a course and hence want credit for the course. Most such requests are denied.

10. A petition for waiver of the 120 credit hour degree requirement to the extent of ____ credit hours.
 - a. 120 credits is considered a minimum for a college degree. All students are expected to meet this requirement.
 - b. Students requesting a waiver of the 120 credit hour requirement usually have their petitions denied. These students are encouraged to investigate the possibility of an independent study course, summer course, or a course at another institution (if they have moved) that will earn them the credit hours that they are short.

11. A petition for waiver of the policy that 45 credit hours in upper level courses be presented for graduation, to the extent of ____ credit hours.
 - a. Students who have far exceeded the minimum 120 credit hours and are only a few credits short of the minimum 45 upper level credits required are often approved.
 - b. Students who have an opportunity to meet the requirement by registering for an additional class, including independent study credits, are encouraged to do as opposed to waiving the upper level credit requirement policy.

12. A petition for waiver of the policy requiring that at least 25% of the required credit hours for the degree be earned in residence at VCU to the extent of ____ credit hours.
 - a. SACS guidelines stipulate that at least 25% of required credit hours be earned in residence at the university awarding the degree. No request for a student to graduate with fewer than 30 credits at VCU has been approved by ARAC.

13. A petition for waiver of the rule that a student with a temporary grade on their transcript is not eligible to graduate. Waivers will be granted if:
 - a. Student took course more than 3 years ago and the course is not needed for graduation; or
 - b. Faculty member of the course is no longer at the institution.