

Grade Appeals Policy

Introduction

All grades, except Incomplete, are considered final when assigned by an instructor at the end of the term. For the purposes of the grade appeal, a term refers to fall or spring semesters, or summer session.

An instructor may request a change of grade when a computational or procedural error has occurred in the original assignment of a grade. An instructor may not change a grade as a result of re-examination or the submission of additional work after the close of the term. No term grade except Incomplete may be revised by re-examination.

A student may initiate a grade appeal only in case of a clerical / procedural error or non-academic circumstances (described below). Students are encouraged to review their work with the instructor for an explanation of the grade assigned. A student may appeal a grade specifically on the grounds set forth in this policy, based on potential reporting errors or criteria not directly reflective of academic performance in this course.

Basis for Grade Changes

There are two valid bases for changing a grade through an appeal. The first is errors and corrections, wherein the appeal is to correct a mistake either in the computation or the reporting of a grade. The second is where it is established that non-academic criteria were applied to determine a grade which includes (a) discrimination based on ethnicity, political views, religion, age, gender, financial status or national origin; or (b) the application of arbitrary criteria in a manner not reflective of student performance in relation to course requirements.

Point of information: Other grade policies, outside of the grade appeal processes, address “good cause” considerations which may include illness, serious personal problems, an accident, a death in the immediate family, a large and necessary increase in working hours, or other situations deemed to be of equal gravity. Two grading policies may apply to “good cause” circumstances: an “Incomplete” or “Withdraw” grade. These processes are triggered during the term in which the course is taken and are not available subsequent to the grade being filed.

Initial Steps

The following are recommended preliminary steps that should be taken prior to filing a formal appeal to address grade concerns. These steps precede the formal appeal process, described in the next section.

If a clerical or procedural error in the reporting of a grade by the instructor can be documented within the term following when the grade was filed, a student may contact the instructor and/or the by-law unit chair¹ (or for graduate students, the graduate group chair) in writing (an email message is sufficient), describing the error. Grade changes to correct clerical and procedural errors may be

¹ A lead faculty contact may be a program director (e.g. the Merritt Writing Program)

filed by the instructor (or equivalent proxy) and approved by the Office of the University Registrar. Such grade changes should ensure fairness and equity based on syllabus or other policies, especially for those students whose grades will be unaltered. No final grade (except an Incomplete) may be revised by reexamination or additional coursework.

Concerns about non-academic issues (discrimination or arbitrary treatment, research freedom) should be discussed with the instructor, if possible. Otherwise, students are encouraged to discuss these matters with the by-law unit chair (or for graduate students, the graduate group chair) and/or the program's Dean².

Appeal Process

If there are sufficient and appropriate grounds to appeal a grade, based on the above specified criteria and procedures, a student may consider the following process.

Appeal Petition

Whenever possible, students are encouraged to work directly with their instructor to discuss grades, course policies and expectations. If a student wishes to appeal a grade after speaking to the instructor (and for undergraduates, the senate faculty member in charge of the course in the case where the instructor is responsible for a subset of sections and/or under a mentoring agreement) and the appropriate administrator (see *Initial Steps*), the grade appeal process commences with a written appeal petition.

An appeal petition includes a written summary (250 total words, see below) and is filed electronically with the program's Dean (who will communicate with the instructor and other appropriate administrators). The following is an outline of what a formal grade appeal petition should include:

- Contact Information: *Include name, university email address, student identification number, and phone number*
- Course information: *Include course number and title, instructor name*
- Background to appeal: *In 100 words, briefly describe attempts to resolve concerns with instructor. If the faculty program lead or Dean was contacted, note these details as well.*
- Brief description of appeal: *In 150 words, describe the grounds for the appeal itself. What are the primary criteria and considerations?*
- Appendix: *Include all related documentation*

Appeal Process

The program's Dean shall proceed to attempt to resolve the dispute independently. (If the program's Dean has a conflict of interest, *e.g.* is the instructor who filed the disputed grade, then in the case of undergraduates, the program's School Executive Committee Chair will serve as designate on the case; in the case of graduate students, the Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Education will serve as designate. In such a case, all reference to the program's "Dean" refers to this "designate.") After review of the appeal petition, the program's Dean may or may not approve further action.

If an appeal petition alleges discrimination or arbitrary treatment, an initial assessment of the grounds for the case will be considered by the program's Dean. If it is determined that this is potentially a

² A school dean of a given undergraduate or graduate academic program is the appropriate contact. The Vice Provost and Dean for Undergraduate Education is the contact for WRI or Core 1.

discrimination case³, the petition will be reviewed as a Title VI and/or Title IX matter by the appropriate officer(s).

Written notification about findings will be shared with the student and instructor within four weeks of receipt of the formal petition. If the student or instructor requests a reconsideration of the appeal decision, they must respond within one week of this notification to the Provost (or designate). If there is no request for reconsideration from the student or instructor, the grade shall be sustained or altered in accordance with the findings.

A final appeal to the Provost may be based only on (1) a violation of due process in the grade appeal process or (2) new and substantial information. This final appeal is limited to a 100 word summary, with related evidence, and must be filed to the Provost's Office within one week of the findings. The Provost (or the Provost's designate) will decide if further process is warranted and if so, how this process will be structured. If further process is warranted, additional documentation or interviews supporting the appeal may be requested.

The final decision should occur within the term of the appeal. Decisions may include: 1) no change, 2) removal of course from transcript, or 3) grade correction. In cases where it is determined that nonacademic criteria were significant factors in establishing the grade, students may have the option of either receiving a P or S in the course or retroactively dropping the course without penalty.

If a grade appeal is related to the final term before graduation, submission of an appeal must be made within 30 days after the last day of a student's final term and considered within 30 days after receipt.

Timeline

The following timeline should be followed in all grade appeals. Failure to take actions within this timeline will significantly limit and potentially disqualify the grounds for an appeal.

The following timeframe begins in the term following the one in which the grade in question has been filed.

At the beginning of the term, the student will no later than

Weeks 1-3: Initiate communication with instructor and/or program faculty lead, seeking informal resolution of concerns

Weeks 4-5: Develop a formal appeal petition, if concerns are unresolved

By Week 6: Submit this petition and supporting evidence to the program's Dean for review

The goal of the appeal process is for findings to be shared with the student and instructor as soon as possible. The following are estimated times for reviewing the petition, exploring information, and summarizing findings.

³ Discrimination refers to protected groups based on ethnicity, political views, religion, age, gender, financial status or national origin.

In the process that follows, the program's Dean will:

Weeks 7-9: Review the formal appeal. Findings and summaries are developed, with the potential for seeking further information or consultation.

Weeks 10-12: If possible, findings are shared. Please note that some cases are complex and require either further consultation or information gathering, with associated time added. The final decision should occur within the term of the appeal.

Findings: When findings are released, the student and instructor have one week to respond via a brief summary (100 words) to the Provost (or Provost designate). This is the final step in the appeal process, and there may be no further petitions or appeals.

Informational Item: Please note that the timeline for appeals concerning the final term before graduation is abbreviated to 30 days.

Final Note

These procedures are designed solely to guide grade appeal processes. No punitive actions may be taken against the instructor solely on the basis of these procedures. Neither the filing of an appeal nor the final disposition of the case shall, under any circumstances, become part of the personnel files of the instructor. The use of nonacademic criteria in assigning a grade, however, is a violation of the Faculty Code of Conduct and in some instances Title VI and/or Title IX policies, which may result in potential sanctions.