

Grading Grievance — Challenging a course grade*

The ultimate responsibility for the integrity of the academic grading process belongs to the university as an institution. Individual faculty members routinely act as agents for the institution in evaluating the student's academic performance and in assigning final course grades. In the event of a student's challenge to a final course grade, the burden of proof lies with a student who claims a grievance. The faculty member has an obligation to award course grades on the basis of standards set at the beginning of the course. The following process will guide the university's response to allegations that a faculty member acted arbitrarily and capriciously in assigning course grades. The procedure does not apply to mathematical errors in calculating the grade, academic dismissals from the university, or questions of professional judgment concerning course content, instructional methods and appropriateness of performance standards. In addition, the policy does not apply to the Law School.

I. Definitions

For the purposes of these procedures, the term "Dean's Designee" means a faculty member appointed by the Dean (often the Associate Dean). Because the Dean hears appeals, the Dean cannot appoint him- or herself as the Dean's designee.

II. Time Limits for Challenging a Course Grade

Students who want to challenge their course grade must do so within the time limits set out below:

For fall, winter and summer quarters, the procedure must be initiated by the close of business on the **third Friday** of the following quarter.

For spring quarter, the procedure must be initiated by the close of business on the **third Friday** of fall quarter.

III. Burden of Proof

The student challenging the course grade has the burden of supplying evidence that proves that the faculty member acted arbitrarily and capriciously in assigning the course grade.

IV. Procedures for Challenging a Course Grade

To the greatest extent possible, grievances should be resolved at the level of authority closest to the classroom.

A. Meeting with faculty member:

Students begin the process by scheduling a meeting with the faculty member teaching the course to discuss the course requirements and the student's performance in the course. If the challenge cannot be resolved at this level, then the student wishing to proceed further may request informal mediation; the student must do so within the deadlines set out in Section II above.

B. Informal Mediation:

Step 1: Filing a Request for Informal Mediation

If the course for which the student is challenging the grade is a course that is offered by a particular department (for example, the Chemistry Department), the student should file his or her written request for informal mediation with the department chair. If, however, the course is one that is offered by a school and not a particular department (for example, a course that is offered by the School of Nursing), the student should file his or her written request for informal mediation with the dean's designee for that school. The request should include the date, the student's name, the name of the course, the professor's name, and a brief explanation of the challenge. This request must be signed by the student.

Step 2: Selection of a Method for Resolving the Dispute

Once the request has been made, the department chair or dean's designee (whichever is appropriate) assumes the role of mediator. As the mediator, the designee will select a method for resolving the dispute. If the mediator selects a face-to-face meeting, the mediator will determine who should be present and the role or roles that each person will play.

Step 3: Mediator's Decision

Within three class days after the end of the mediation, the mediator will send the faculty member and the student a short memo setting out his or her recommendation. If both the faculty member and the student agree with the mediator's recommendation, the mediator's recommendation will become binding. If, however, either the faculty member or student disagrees with the recommendation, the recommendation will not have any effect, and the student's grade will not be changed. In such instances, the student may choose to initiate the formal procedure.

C. Formal Procedure

Students who are dissatisfied with the results of the informal mediation may file a formal grievance with the dean's designee of the school in which the course is being offered. *However, the student who filed the grievance can, at any time, withdraw his or her grievance. If the student withdraws his or her grievance, the process will immediately stop.*

Time Limits for Filing a Formal Grievance

If a student chooses to file a formal grievance, he or she must do so within five class days after receiving the mediator's recommendation.

Content of Formal Grievance

The formal grievance must be in writing and must set out the date, the student's name, the name of the course, the faculty member's name, and student's signature. In addition, the student must describe in detail his or her grievance, the evidence that supports that grievance, and the remedy that the student proposes.

Resolving the Grievance

Step 1: Notifying the faculty member that a formal grievance has been filed

After receiving the grievance, the dean's designee will send the faculty member a copy of the grievance and the faculty member will submit a written response within five school days. The dean's designee will also send the student a copy of the faculty member's response.

Step 2: Selection of Grievance Committee

In addition, after receiving the grievance, the dean's designee will give the student the option of having the grievance heard either (a) by a committee made up of three members of that school's faculty or (b) by a committee made up of two faculty members of that school plus one student from that school who is in good standing. The dean's designee will select both the faculty members and the student. The dean's designee will function as chair of the committee without a vote.

Step 3: Challenges for Bias

After selecting the committee members who will hear the grievance, the dean's designee will send both the faculty member and the student a list of the proposed committee members. If they choose, both the faculty member and the student may challenge members of the committee for bias. Such challenges must be in writing

and must set out the reasons for the challenge. The dean's designee will rule on the challenges, and, if appropriate, appoint new members to the committee. Such challenging of committee members can only occur once for both student and faculty member.

Step 4: Scheduling the Hearing

Once the committee has been selected, the dean's designee will schedule the hearing. As a general rule, the hearing should be scheduled so that both the student and the faculty member have at least five class days to prepare for the hearing, and so that the hearing is held within fifteen school days of the date that the grievance was filed. The dean's designee does, however, have the right to extend these time limits to accommodate the schedules of the student, the faculty member, and the committee members who will hear the grievance. The dean's designee oversees the distribution of the written documentation to the committee in sufficient time to insure a careful advance review of the materials. Both the student and the faculty member may elect to bring to the hearing a support person of their choice from within the University community. The support person is not permitted to speak, question or otherwise participate in the hearing process. If the student and/or faculty person elects to invite a support person, that information should be provided to the dean's designee at least two days in advance of the hearing.

Step 5: Conducting the Hearing

The dean's designee will preside over the hearing. As a general rule, the hearing will be conducted as follows:

1. The dean's designee will open the hearing by introducing the student, the faculty member, and the committee members who will hear the grievance.
2. The dean's designee will ask the student to present the evidence supporting the grievance.
3. The dean's designee will ask the faculty member to respond to the student's evidence.
4. The dean's designee will provide the student with an opportunity to respond to the faculty member's statements and evidence.
5. The dean's designee will give the committee members hearing the grievance an opportunity to ask both the student and faculty member questions.

6. The dean's designee will end the hearing by telling the student and faculty member that the committee members will meet in a closed session to decide the merits of the grievance. The dean's designee will not attend or participate in the closed session.

Step 6: Deciding the Grievance

To change a grade, a majority of the committee members must agree to the change. If a majority of the committee members do not agree to the change, no change will be made.

Step 7: Preparing the Written Opinion

Within five class days after the hearing, the committee members will prepare and deliver to the student, the faculty member, and the dean's designee a written document setting out the committee's decision. Unless Part V below applies, the committee's decision is final and cannot be appealed.

V. Limited Appeal to the Dean

If the student or faculty member believes that his or her procedural rights were violated during the formal grievance, they may, within five class days of the decision, file a written appeal with the dean of the school that offered the course. In the appeal, the student or faculty member should set out the procedural right that he or she believes was violated and any evidence he or she has to support the claim. The dean will review the written material that has been submitted, conduct any investigation that he or she believes is necessary, and make a decision. The dean may affirm the earlier decision, remand the case for further action, or reverse the earlier decision.

The decisions of the dean are not appealable.

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