

## **ACADEMIC GRADING GRIEVANCE POLICY\***

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.

### **I. Time Limits for Challenging a Course Grade**

Students who want to challenge their course grade, which begins with notifying the department chair, must do so within the time limits set out below and in Attachment A:

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 by must be initiated by the close of business on the **third Friday** of fall quarter.

### **II. 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.

### **III. 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 I above and Attachment A.

## **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, the student should file a written request for informal mediation with the department chair. If, however, the course is one that is offered by a school/college and not a particular department, the student should file a written request for informal mediation with the dean's office for that school/college. 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. The mediator 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. The mediation should occur within ten business days of the student's request.

### ***Step 3: Mediator's Decision***

Within three business days after the end of the mediation, the mediator will send the faculty member and the student a short memo setting out the 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 the grievance. If the student withdraws the grievance, the process will immediately stop.*

#### **IV. Time Limits for Filing a Formal Grievance**

If a student chooses to file a formal grievance, it must be done within five business days after receiving the mediator's recommendation.

#### **V. 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 the student's signature. In addition, the student must describe in detail the grievance, the evidence that supports that grievance, and the remedy that the student proposes.

#### **VI. 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 business 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/college's faculty or (b) by a committee made up of two faculty members of that school/college 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***

The dean's designee will send both the faculty member and the student a list of the proposed committee members by email. The faculty member and the student each may challenge members of the committee for bias within 2 business days. Such challenges must be in writing and must identify the reasons why they feel the proposed committee member cannot render an objective, unbiased decision. The dean's designee will rule on the challenges, and, if appropriate, appoint new members to the committee.

##### ***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 business days to prepare for the hearing, and so that the hearing is held within fifteen business 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.

Neither the student nor the faculty member may bring legal representation to the hearing. However, 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. 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 business 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:

- a) The dean's designee will open the hearing by introducing the student, the faculty member, and the committee members who will hear the grievance. Support persons, should they be present, are not permitted to speak, question or otherwise participate in the hearing process.
- b) The dean's designee will ask the student to present the evidence supporting the grievance.
- c) The dean's designee will ask the faculty member to respond to the student's evidence and to explain the evidence and the process leading to the decision.
- d) The dean's designee will provide the student with an opportunity to respond to the faculty member's statements and evidence.
- e) The dean's designee will give the committee members hearing the grievance an opportunity to ask both the student and faculty member questions.
- f) The dean's designee will end the hearing by asking if the student and faculty member have any final statements and by telling the student and faculty member that the panel members, but not the dean's designee, will meet in a closed session to decide the merits of the appeal. The student and faculty member are each allowed, but are not required to make a final statement summarizing their respective positions. They and the chair will then leave the hearing.
- g) The grievance committee will then meet (or set a meeting time) to conduct their deliberations.

### ***Step 6: Deciding the Grievance***

To change a grade, a simple majority of the committee members must agree to the change. If a simple majority of the committee members do not agree to the change, no change will be made. The committee's responsibility is limited to determining a change in grade. It is not empowered to make other decisions or recommendations.

### ***Step 7: Preparing the Written Opinion***

Within five business days after the hearing, the committee will prepare and deliver to the dean's designee a written document addressed to the dean's designee setting out the committee's decision. The dean's designee will distribute the report to the student (via the student's Seattle University email account and/or ground mail to the student's mailing address on file), faculty member, and department chair/program director. Unless Part VII below applies, the committee's decision is final and cannot be appealed. If the committee decides that a grade should be changed, the dean/dean's designee will submit a grade change form to the registrar, immediately after the limited appeal deadline has passed.

### **VII. Limited Appeal to the Dean**

If the student or faculty member believes that the grievance process failed to follow the appropriate procedure and that the procedural violation materially affected the grievance decision, they may file a limited written appeal with the dean of the school/college that offered the course within five business days of the notification of the outcome of the grievance. In this limited appeal, the student or faculty member should set out the procedure that they believe was not followed, any information they have to support the claim, and a statement explaining how that alleged procedural error affected the grievance decision. The dean will review the written material submitted, conduct any investigation that they believe is necessary, and make a decision within five business days as to whether material procedural error occurred. This decision is final and not subject to further appeal. If the dean finds that a material procedural error occurred, then the matter shall be remanded to the appeal panel to remedy the material procedural error and reexamine its original decision and make such changes as are deemed appropriate. The decision of the appeal panel on remand is final and not subject to further appeal.

## **Appendix**

### **Definitions of Terms in this policy**

**Dean's Designee** - an individual appointed by the Dean, often an Associate Dean or Assistant Dean.

**Business day** - weekdays, Monday through Friday, excluding university holidays.

## Attachment A

### Timeline for Deadlines and Activities Associated with the Grading Grievance Policy

Deadline	Activity
Third Friday of the following quarter	Initiation of grade challenge by student for fall, winter, and summer quarters
Third Friday of the fall quarter	Initiation of grade challenge by student for spring quarter
10 business days after grade is challenged	Mediation should occur
3 business days after informal mediation	Mediator notifies faculty and student of recommendation
5 business days after receiving mediator's recommendation	Student filing of a formal grade grievance (Dean's designee immediately sends the faculty member a copy of the grievance)
5 business days from receiving the grievance	Faculty member submits a written response
5 business days following selection of the grievance committee and within 15 business days of the date that the grievance is filed	Grievance hearing
2 business days before the hearing	Student/faculty notifies dean's designee of support person identity
5 business days after hearing	Grievance committee's written decision
5 business days after receipt of decision	Limited appeal to Dean

*\*Formerly titled Grading Grievance — challenging a course grade*

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                       04/2004  
                       09/19/11  
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