

GRADUATE PROGRAMS: GRADE APPEAL POLICY

STATEMENT OF POLICY

I. **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of the grade appeal process is to provide a mechanism for student appeal of a final course grade that was given for impermissible or arbitrary reasons. Students who believe their final course grade was assigned by criteria other than those applying to other students or other than announced in advance in their class will be able to file a grade appeal. The grade appeal policy **only** applies to the appeal of a **final course grade** and not individual graded assignments. The procedure outlined in section IV is not intended to be used to review the judgment of an instructor in assessing the quality of a student's work. **There shall be one policy for the appeal of a final course grade. All graduate students will follow this policy when appealing a final course grade.**

II. **Responsibility of Faculty and Students.**

A. **Faculty Responsibility.** The faculty sets the evaluation standards for the courses they teach and uses these standards in determining the grades on individual assignments and final course grades. Faculty members are responsible for including information in their course syllabi about all course requirements, all assignments/activities that will be graded, the method that will be used to evaluate each assignment, and the grading scale that will be used to determine the final grade. The course syllabi should be distributed to each student enrolled in a class. In the event that the faculty member decides to make changes in the course requirements and in methods and standards for evaluating a particular course, this information shall be shared in writing and orally with all students in the class prior to making an assignment. Faculty members are responsible for using previously established standards to grade all course assignments regardless of a student's race, color, creed, national origin, sex, age, sexual orientation, disability, veteran status, or other personal characteristics. Faculty members are required to explain to the student how contested grades were determined.

B. **Student Responsibility.** The act of registering denotes an implicit declaration of the student's acceptance of university regulations and course requirements. Failure to abide by university regulations will subject the student to appropriate disciplinary action. The university also expects the student to obey the law, to show respect for properly constituted authority, to perform contractual obligations, to maintain absolute integrity and a high standard of individual honor in scholastic work, and to maintain conduct appropriate for a community of scholars. Students are responsible for being aware of all university policies regarding academic integrity issues as published in the graduate catalog.

III. Grounds for Grade Appeal.

A student may appeal a course grade if the grade was

1. assigned in a manner not consistent with published standards and procedures; or
2. based upon the student's race, color, religion, national origin, age, sex, disability, veteran status or sexual orientation; or
3. assigned because of personal malice towards the student; or
4. the result of an error in calculating or recording grades.

Individual graded assignments that contribute to a final course grade are not subject to appeal unless it can be established that the grade for the individual assignment was given for one of the permissible reasons cited above and resulted in an unfair final grade.

IV. Grade Appeal Process

There are three levels of the appeal process, which must be followed in sequence. They are as follows:

1. Level 1: Appeal to the Instructor/Faculty Member

As soon as possible, but within ten (10) business days of the end of the semester that the contested final grade was issued, the student must send to the instructor, in writing, his or her concerns and request discussion for resolution. Within 10 business days of receipt of the student request, the faculty member shall meet with the student and a written statement documenting the outcome of the meeting shall be sent to the department chair. Documents supporting the faculty member's decision on the grade appeal should accompany the written statement.

2. Level 2: Appeal to the Department Chair and Graduate Program Coordinator (GPC)

If the issue is not resolved at the faculty level, the student may submit a written statement to the Chair of the department, detailing his/her reasons for a change of grade, specifically identifying and documenting the permissible ground(s) which the student believes affected the grade. **For a grade appeal to be considered, at the time the appeal is first filed, it must be based upon one of the permissible grounds listed in Section III. The student cannot re-file or continue the same appeal using permissible grounds that were not presented at Level 1.** In the event the Department Chair or GPC is the instructor, the student's Level 2 Appeal must be submitted to the associate dean of the division. If the dean of the division is the instructor of the course, then the associate dean shall consider the appeal.

Within five (5) business days of receipt of an appeal, the Chair in conjunction with the GPC shall

- a. ensure that the student has a copy of the Graduate Programs Grade Appeal Policy;
- b. forward a copy of the student's written complaint to the instructor and request any

- additional written documentation from the student and the faculty member regarding the permissible ground presented by the student; and
- c. confer with both parties, either separately or jointly, to attempt to resolve the issue of the contested grade.

Based on the evidence presented by the student and the faculty member, the department chair in consultation with the GPC shall submit a written decision. That decision will be presented to the dean, and copies will be sent to the student and the faculty member. All associated documentation must be kept by the department chair until all levels of appeal have been exhausted. Documentation may be requested by the dean at Level 3 of the appeals process.

3. Level 3: Appeal to the Dean

In the event that the student wishes to appeal the chair and GPC's decision, the student must appeal within seven (7) business days of the dated communication from the chair to the dean of the College or School that houses the course indicating that they wish to have their case heard by the School-wide or College-wide ad hoc committee. The appeal to the dean must be in writing. The dean has the responsibility to determine if the presented evidence warrants the convening of the ad-hoc committee. If the evidence warrants the convening of the ad-hoc committee, the student will be notified of that decision. If it is not necessary, the dean will issue the final decision regarding the appeal.

The Ad Hoc Appeal Committee guidelines are listed in Section V. The Committee shall commence deliberations within ten (10) business days of receipt of the appeal from the dean. The Committee shall conduct one or more meetings, during which it will:

- a. request evidential documentation that was presented at previous appeal levels; and/or
- b. conduct a hearing with individual or both parties at issue, where said parties will be allowed to call witnesses as approved by the Ad Hoc Committee chair.

When such evidential documentation has been presented, or at the conclusion of the appeals' hearing, the Ad Hoc Committee shall meet in executive session to deliberate. The Committee shall:

- i. limit its concern to the specific allegations on unfairness specified in the student's written documentation; and
- ii. reach a final decision (by a simple majority vote of those present) that will either support or reject the original course grade.

Within five (5) business days of the Committee's decision, the Committee Chair shall forward, in writing, to the dean of the division the Committee's decision, also providing a justification for it. The dean of the division shall, within five (5) business days of the Committee's decision, provide a written notification of that decision to the student, with a copy to the respective department chair. If the decision is in favor of the student's appeal, the department chair has the

responsibility to collaborate with the faculty toward reassigning the appropriate grade and submitting the grade change to the appropriate university offices.

V. Creation and Composition of the Ad Hoc Appeal Committee

An Ad Hoc committee will be composed of no less than three (3) full-time regular faculty members drawn from the entire School/College, a graduate student, and a non-voting representative from administration. The university's advocate for Adult and Graduate Students may be included in lieu of the graduate student. A quorum shall consist of three members of the committee.

VI. Representation of Parties

The appeals process is an internal University process and does not adhere to external legal interventions. Legal representation by faculty or student is not permitted during the appeals process. However, both the faculty and the student are entitled to a non-legal advisor in the hearing before the hearing panel.

VII. Compliance with Timelines

The intent of this policy is to resolve all grade appeals in the semester immediately following the semester in which the grade was given. Failure by the student to comply with any of the scheduled timelines without justifiable excuse shall result in forfeiture of the right of appeal and dismissal of the appeal. The presentation of an excuse shall be made to the dean of the school or college to which the appeal is filed.

A student may appeal to the next level of appeal if there is unjustified failure of any person in the appeal process to comply with scheduled timelines that is not caused by illness or other extended absences from campus.

VIII. Definitions

- A. Whenever business day is used in this document, it shall mean any day except Saturday, Sunday, institutional holiday, or operational closing.
- B. Correspondence between the parties may be as certified mail, registered mail, commercial service, personal delivery service, the university email accounts or hand-delivery by an employee or the student or his/her representative that obtains a signature. Where email is used, the time and date stamp on the email shall serve in determining compliance with timelines.

Effective Date: This policy becomes effective upon approval.

Amended and Approved: This the 19th day of September, 2014.

Debra B. Miller, Chairman
WSSU Board of Trustees

Vivian H. Burke, Secretary
WSSU Board of Trustees