

GRADE APPEAL/ACADEMIC GRIEVANCE POLICY

Introduction

This policy specifies the conditions under which one may appeal a course grade or other academic decision (such as the failure of a comprehensive exam or thesis defense, the decision to disqualify a student from a major program, accusations of academic dishonesty that have led to academic consequences, academic probation, suspension, or disqualification, and the like). In every case, the student must attempt to resolve the dispute informally before filing a formal grievance.

Faculty members at CSULA have the sole right and responsibility to assign grades. It is assumed that the grades assigned by faculty members are free from error, prejudice, or capriciousness. In the absence of compelling reasons to believe that one of these criteria is missing, the grade assigned by the instructor of record is to be considered final and correct. It is the responsibility of anyone appealing a grade to demonstrate otherwise.

I. Basis for Grade Appeal or other Academic Grievance

It is presumed that the assignment of final course grades and other academic decisions result from consistent, fair, and equitable application of clearly articulated standards and procedures. Students appealing such decisions must demonstrate that the standards and procedures were not clearly stated or that they were not applied in a consistent, fair and equitable manner. An appeal may NOT be based on a disagreement with the standards and procedures themselves. Further, an instructor's evaluation of a student's work and performance in that instructor's course must not be over-ridden merely because of a difference of opinion or evaluative judgment, provided it is formed in accordance with the generally accepted canons of the relevant discipline and of the University and the Department/Division/School where said course is offered.

A student may appeal a final course grade or a grade on a Comprehensive Examination or a project (e.g., art exhibition) or thesis required for graduation. Students who believe that individual exams and/or assignments demonstrate evidence of prejudicial, capricious, or arbitrary grading and that those grades had direct bearing on the final grade should attach them to the grade appeal as supporting documentation. Students may also appeal other types of academic decisions. These include, but are not limited to: denial of admission to or dismissal from a course, major or program; placement on academic probation; or suspension or dismissal from the University.

An appeal may be initiated only on a claim that the decision/final grade was based on:

- (1) Clerical error.
- (2) Capricious or prejudicial evaluation.
- (3) Inconsistent or inequitably applied standards for evaluation.

The burden of proof in the appeal of a grade or other academic decision is on the student. In every appeal, the student must present evidence that the grade/decision being appealed was based on one of the three flaws articulated above.

II. Informal Resolution

Before a student may initiate a formal Grade Appeal or other Academic Grievance, he or she must attempt to resolve the issue informally. Students who believe that they have a basis for an appeal (as outlined in Section I) should notify the course instructor of this fact, either orally or in writing. If the matter is resolved to the mutual satisfaction of the two parties and the resolution is that the final course grade is to be changed, the instructor should complete a Change of Grade form within three (3) days of resolving the matter.

If the student and instructor are not able to resolve the problem to the satisfaction of both parties, the formal process may then be initiated. In the event that an instructor is not available to discuss informal resolution with the student, the formal process shall be initiated.

III. Formal Appeal Process

A formal appeal of a course grade or other academic decision must be made within sixty (60) days of formal notification to the student of the decision or grade. For the purposes of this policy, the posting of course grades on the University's Golden Eagle Territory (GET) constitutes formal notification to students of course grades. For all other decisions, formal notification will normally be in the form of a letter from the appropriate University, College, or Department authority.

A formal appeal is to be filed in the office of the Dean of the College in which the course was offered¹ (for grade appeals), or in which the student's major department is located (for all other academic decisions, such as program or department academic decisions, academic suspension, or disqualification).

A formal appeal must include (1) the Grade Appeal/Academic Grievance Form (available on the Judicial Affairs Office website: <http://www.calstatela.edu/univ/stuaffrs/jao/> as well as the web site of each College); (2) a written statement clearly presenting the basis for the grade appeal and (3) any documentation that supports this claim (such as the course syllabus, exams, papers, assignments, or other corroborating documents).

When the appeal concerns a course grade, the Respondent shall be the instructor of record for the course. When an appeal concerns the grade on a comprehensive exam or a thesis or project, the Respondent shall be the chair of the exam, thesis, or project committee. For all other academic appeals, the Respondent shall be the person upon whose authority the decision was rendered (e.g., the Chair of a program, department, division or school if the decision was to disqualify the Appellant from the program or major). Where the Respondent is not clearly identified, the Dean of the College or the Provost shall designate the appropriate party to respond on behalf of the College or the University.

¹ In cases in which a course is offered by a unit other than a department in one of the six Colleges (e.g., by the Library or the Division of Student Affairs), appeals should be submitted to the equivalent of the Dean for that unit. If a student is uncertain where to file an appeal, they should contact the office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs or the Judicial Affairs Office (in the Division of Student Affairs).

A. Step One: College Level Appeal

Upon receipt of a formal appeal, the College Dean (or designee) shall convene a meeting of the student, the instructor of the course (or the Director of the program in which the academic decision being appealed was made, if distinct from the Department/Division/School chair), and the Department/Division/School chair. This meeting shall be held within fourteen (14) days of the date on which the appeal is filed. In this meeting, the Dean shall attempt to resolve the dispute to the mutual satisfaction of all parties.

In the event that an instructor is not available to participate in the formal process, the Department/ Division/School chair shall appoint another instructor whose area of expertise most closely approximates that of the instructor of record (and/or that most closely matches the material covered in the course), to represent the interests of the latter.

If at this meeting a grade appeal is resolved in the student's favor (and with the concurrence of the faculty member and department chair), the Dean shall ensure that a Change of Grade form is completed within three (3) days. If any other academic decision is over-turned as a result of mutual agreement of all parties at this meeting, the Dean shall ensure that any action required to formalize that agreement is taken in a timely manner (but in every case, within thirty (30) days of the meeting).

If the matter is not resolved at the College-level meeting, the Dean of the College shall forward the Appeal and all supporting paperwork to the office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. At this time, the instructor, program chair, or department chair may also forward a statement to the Provost, regarding the case (if they have not already submitted to the Dean documentation in support of their position).

The College Dean shall keep a record of all formal appeals filed in the College, and report to the Provost annually (at the end of each Academic Year) the disposition of each appeal at this level.

B. Step Two: University Level Appeal

Any appeal that is forwarded from a College Dean to the Provost shall be heard by the University Student Grievance Committee. For the purpose of this (interim) policy, the University Student Grievance Committee already in place shall be utilized for these hearings.

The Committee shall convene and, if necessary, hold any hearing(s) within thirty (30) days of receipt of the appeal at this level. The Committee shall consider the documentation submitted by the appellant, as well as any written response submitted by the instructor, program chair, or department chair. The committee may call witnesses before them, if they determine that such witnesses could provide relevant information not available in the written documents before them. The student may request a hearing before the committee; if a student is given a hearing before the committee, the instructor (in the case of grade appeals), program director or chair must also be offered the opportunity to be heard by the committee.

The Committee's deliberations and decision(s) in Grade Appeals shall be limited to the following issues:

(1) whether, in fact, the evidence presented establishes that the grade assigned was erroneous, capricious, or prejudicial, or involved the inconsistent or inequitable application of standards for evaluation; and if it is judged that the evidence does establish that one of these conditions was operative, (2) what is the appropriate course grade.

In all other Academic Student Grievances, the Committee shall investigate (1) whether the evidence presented by the appellant establishes that the academic decision in question was erroneous, capricious, or prejudicial, or involved the inconsistent or inequitable application of standards for evaluation, and if found to be so, (2) what is the appropriate academic remedy.

Student members of the Grievance Committee shall be limited to discussion of (1). Only faculty members of the Committee shall establish the answer to (2). In every case, the Committee's decision shall be bound by any other relevant campus or CSU system policies.

The Committee shall deliberate on the case and issue a finding within fourteen (14) days of the conclusion of the hearing(s) related to the case. The Committee's decision should be addressed to the Appellant, with copies to the Respondent, the College Dean, and the Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, and shall include a summary of their findings, the final decision, and the reason(s) for this decision. A copy of the Committee's findings shall be placed in the files in both the Dean's office and the Provost's office.

In the event that the Committee finds in the appellant's favor, the Provost shall ensure that within three (3) days of receipt of the Committee's finding a Change of Grade form is completed or other remedy initiated. In cases in which the instructor of record of a course refuses to sign the change of grade form, the Department Chair shall complete the form in their place.

IV. Finality of Grievance Committee Decisions and Conditions under which Appeals Allowed

The Committee's decision is final and binding on all parties. However, any party to the dispute (either the student or the respondent) may appeal a Committee decision *on grounds of procedural violations*. If either party alleges that the procedures outlined in this policy were violated, they must present a written appeal to the President outlining their allegations. The President (or designee) shall then investigate only the issue as to whether there were procedural violations in the handling of the Appeal; if there is a finding of procedural violations, the President shall send the case back to the first step of the formal appeal (outlined in Section III, above) to begin again.

V. Annual Reports and Record Retention

The Dean of the College shall keep a copy of any formal Appeal filed in the College for a period of one year; after that time, the file shall be destroyed. The Provost shall retain for a period of three years each Appeal and all documentation submitted initially as well as at any time during the proceedings; after that time, the file shall be destroyed.

Annually, at the end of each Academic Year, the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs shall report to the President and to the Academic Senate the number of formal academic appeals received in each College, the nature and dissolution of each appeal at the College and (where applicable) at the University level.

The timelines in this policy may be extended by the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs, if the appellant can present documentation of extenuating circumstances that prevented a timely filing of the appeal (or a timely response at a later stage).