

Department of Information Studies
College of Computing and Information
University at Albany, State University of New York
Student Final Grade Grievance Procedures and Structure
Approved by Faculty 1 February 2005

Background

The Information Studies Student Affairs Committee has faculty and student representation and has established procedures for dealing with grievances related to student academic standing (grievance of final grade in a course).

Students who wish to challenge a final academic grade or evaluation of their work in a course, seminar, or internship must follow the procedures outlined in this document in order to file a grievance.

It is expected that the grounds upon which an academic grievance is based should be clearly identified. Such grounds may include variance from University grading standards/policies, grade calculation inconsistencies with that announced in published course syllabi, procedural abnormalities, or other factors that are alleged to have denied the student a fair evaluation. It is not expected that grievances will propose that the professional obligation of faculty to fairly evaluate academic material within their field of expertise will be supplanted by alternate means without procedural cause. [1]

The focus on fair process and not caliber of work has been unwritten in university policy that is now written in the new university policy. [2]

Grievance Procedures

The following numbered list gives the order in which students should pursue an academic grievance, starting with [1]—resolution with the faculty member involved. Students should be sure to complete each step, in order, before moving on to the next level of resolution.

___ 1. The student will first attempt to resolve the grievance directly with the faculty member involved.

___ 2. If the grievance is not resolved to the student's satisfaction at level 1 above, the student will appeal to the Chair of the Department of Information Studies. The student will submit in advance of a meeting with the Chair a memo in which he or she identifies the course by name and number, the semester the course was taken, the semester the grade was assigned (if different), and the name of the instructor of record for the course. The memo will state the basis for the grievance including a statement on why the student thinks the final grade is not correct. The student should also attach relevant documentation such as the course syllabus, copies of graded assignments, and any relevant correspondence with the instructor (email or other).

The Chair will review the written grievance and may initiate a negotiated resolution between the student and faculty member, where appropriate asking for a response and documentation from the instructor involved. The Chair does not evaluate the caliber of the student's work, focusing only on whether a mediated resolution is appropriate and on attempting to mediate the dispute. The Chair will send a written response to the faculty member, to the student, and to the student's permanent folder.

___ 3. If this negotiation is not sufficient at level 2 to resolve the issue at hand, the Chair will refer the student to the DIS Grievance Committee in writing, including any documentation gathered so far and the Chair's level 2 written response. The Chair will also send a copy of the referral to the Dean. The student will forward a copy of the prepared memo to the chairperson of the DIS Grievance Committee. The committee will act as expeditiously as possible in its attempts to resolve the issue, but may deliberate up to 60 academic year school days from the date on which the student has submitted all materials requested. Grievances pertaining to a grade may be filed with the Committee through the seventh week of the term following the one in which the grade was issued. The Committee will forward a written response to the Chair, to the instructor, to the student, and to the student's permanent folder. This written response will explain the committee's deliberation process and its proposed resolution based upon documents and interviews, as appropriate.

___ 4. If the student is satisfied with the outcome of the grievance at level 3 above, the Chair will forward a copy of the DIS Grievance Committee's written response to the Dean for his/her information. The entire case will be filed with the student's permanent record.

If the student is not satisfied with the results of the process at level 3, the Chair will forward a copy of the DIS Grievance Committee's written response to the Dean. At the Dean's discretion, he or she may review the documents, ask for additional materials from the student and/or instructor, conduct interviews, and initiate a negotiate resolution of the case. The Dean will generate a memo to the Chair, to the instructor, to the student, and to the student's permanent folder detailing the Dean's deliberation process.

___ 5. In the event that the student is not satisfied with the outcome of the grievance at level 4 above, she or he may petition the Graduate Academic Council (GAC) or Undergraduate Academic Council (UAC) who, acting through their respective Committees on Admission and Academic Standing (CAAS), may elect to consider the grievance. Action on an academic grievance by the appropriate CAAS, once accepted by the GAC or UAC, is final and not subject to further formal review within the University. [3] **It is only at this final level of grievance that a grade may be changed against the will of the faculty member(s) involved.** Should this occur, the Chair of the GAC or UAC, or its respective CAAS, as appropriate, may consult at his/her discretion with departmental faculty and/or appropriate scholars to determine an appropriate grade and authorize its recording by the Registrar. [4]

Student Files

All documents pertaining to a student's grievance will be kept in a separate folder in the student's permanent record for a minimum of three years after the student leaves the university. [5]

In order to keep a paper trail of the grievance deliberation process, DIS administration and committee members will keep all documents, noting meeting dates as appropriate, and labeling each document with both date and review level.

Committee Structure

1. The DIS Grievance Committee will consist of the DIS Student Affairs Committee and additional student and faculty members appointed by the Chair to bring the number to five, with at least three faculty members. When possible the student representatives will be at the same degree level as the student filing the complaint.
2. A quorum will consist of four members of the Committee, at least two of whom must be faculty members.
3. Committee deliberations are confidential.
4. Any member of the Committee who is directly a party to a grievance is disqualified from participating in the resolution of the grievance in which she or he is involved. If a member is disqualified, the Chair will appoint a substitute for the duration of the grievance process. If the chairperson is disqualified, the faculty member whose last name starts with the letter closest to the beginning of the alphabet will assume the role of chair for the specific deliberation.

Committee Procedure

1. The Committee's work focuses on evidence regarding the student's final grade grievance. This evidence consists of the memorandum filed by the student with the Committee that triggers Committee involvement (see above), and any document(s) filed by the instructor whose grade assignment is being challenged. The Committee does not evaluate the caliber of the student's work, focusing only on whether the grading or evaluation procedure denied the student a fair evaluation.
2. The student bears the burden of establishing the error in grade assignment. With few exceptions, the Committee's work is limited to a review of the documents referred to in the preceding paragraph.
3. The Committee reserves the right to "conduct a hearing with all parties present or it may decide to meet with each party separately. The nature and number of the representatives attending any such meeting will be at the discretion of the committee. The procedures adopted are those which the committee believes will provide the parties involved with an opportunity to present their sides of the issues to the committee and for the committee to gather the information and evidence it deems necessary to make its decision." [6]

4. A faculty member cannot be compelled to appear before the Committee nor to provide the Committee with any information. The Committee will not be prejudiced in its recommendations by the refusal of the faculty member either to appear before the Committee or to provide the Committee with information.

5. The Committee is advisory to the Chair to whom the Committee will forward a written recommendation that includes the rationale for its recommendation.

6. The Committee's written report, the Chair's response, and the Dean's response become part of the student's file as do any additional documents that are produced as a result of the student's grievance reaching a university-wide committee.

Notes

[1] State University of New York at Albany. "Academic Grievance Procedures," Graduate Bulletin.

[2] State University of New York at Albany. "Procedures for Resolving Academic Grievances." April 21, 2003.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] State University of New York at Albany. "1978 SUNY Records Retention and Disposition Schedule." Table 5. Disposition Number 11827.

[5] State University of New York at Albany. "Procedures for Resolving Academic Grievances." April 21, 2003.