Procedures Regarding Academic Grievances
School of Education (SOE)

Students who seek to challenge an academic grade or evaluation of their work in a course or seminar, or in research or another educational activity, may request a review of the evaluation by filing an academic grievance. The grounds for an academic grievance should be clearly identified. Such grounds may include variance from University grading standards or policies, grade calculation inconsistent with a published course syllabi, procedural abnormalities, or other factors that are alleged to have denied the student a fair evaluation. Grievances should not 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. The student bears the burden of establishing the error in grade assignment.

Only two entities on campus can change a student’s grade: the instructor of record (or faculty person[s] responsible for the evaluation being appealed) and the Graduate Academic Council of the University. The procedures described in this document apply to grievances related to grades, academic honesty, and academic standing in the School of Education (SOE). These procedures are advisory to the instructor of record and may inform the recommendations of the Dean and later deliberations of the Graduate Academic Council. Prior to consideration by the SOE Academic Standing Committee, efforts must be made at the department level to mediate or resolve the student’s concerns.

1. Departmental Review

A student who disputes a grade or evaluation should initially pursue the matter directly with the faculty member(s) involved. If the student is concerned that a direct appeal will have undesirable consequences or if the decision being appealed was a decision of the departmental faculty as a whole, s/he should meet with some other persons(s) within the Department, such as the academic advisor, appropriate Department Committee, or the Department Chair, who may help facilitate these conversations.

If the student is not satisfied with results of direct conversations with the faculty, the student may make a formal complaint in writing to the Department. The person against whom the complaint is made must be informed of the formal complaint. The Department will attempt to mediate through discussions with each of the persons, together or separately. If mediation proves unworkable, the Department or its appropriate committee will render a decision regarding the merits of the appeal. Departmental review and decision should take place as expeditiously as possible, preferably within 30 days of the complaint.

If a student’s grievance directly involves a Department Chair, a Department Committee, or a decision of a Department as a whole and the student is concerned about undesirable consequences of a direct appeal, then the student may go directly to the Office of the Dean for initial review. The Dean’s Office will forward the grievance to the SOE Academic Standing Committee, if deemed necessary, or, with the student’s approval, forward it to normal departmental review.
2. SOE Academic Standing Committee Action

If any student feels an academic complaint was inadequately resolved at the Departmental level, the Academic Standing Committee as constituted in the SOE By-Laws is the next step for redress. A formal grievance should be filed with the SOE ASC before the end of the next regular (i.e., fall or spring) semester following the one in which the event leading to the complaint occurred.

a) The student must provide a written chronology of events leading up to the specific grievance. This chronology must detail the specific complaint (issue, event, circumstance being grieved), include a description of the redress or remedy being sought, and describe the ways redress was sought and outcomes of prior levels of review. The chronology should be accompanied by any documentation the student deems pertinent to establishing the student’s claims.

b) Upon receipt of this detailed complaint and documentation, the chair or designee of the ASC shall notify in writing all parties concerned. Other parties may be contacted at the discretion of the ASC to comment on the student’s appeal in writing or to augment the documentation.

c) The ASC’s work focuses on evidence regarding the student’s grievance. This evidence consists of the documentation supplied by the student to initiate the appeal to the Committee and any document(s) filed by the faculty or instructor whose grade assignment is being challenged or other parties at the invitation of the ASC. 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. The work of the ASC is devoted primarily to a review of the assembled documents.

d) The ASC reserves the right to conduct a hearing to obtain additional information. This hearing can take place with all parties present or with each party separately. The nature and number of the representatives attending any such meeting will be at the discretion of the Committee. The ASC will adopt hearing procedures, if it deems necessary, to provide the parties involved with an opportunity to present their sides of the issues and to gather information and evidence it deems necessary to make its decision. No party can be compelled to appear before the committee or to provide the committee with any information, nor shall the committee be prejudiced in its recommendations by the refusal of any party either to appear before the committee or to provide the committee with additional information.

e) The Committee is advisory to the Dean to whom the Committee shall forward a written recommendation that includes the rationale for its recommendation.

f) The meeting in which the ASC determines its findings on the grievance requires a quorum (i.e., 2/3 of the committee) to proceed.

3. Decision of the Academic Standing Committee

The Committee will provide a written decision including a vote. The recommendation will be based on a vote of the majority of the members present.

In the case of a tie vote, the recommendation will be that the grievance is not sustained.
The Chair of the ASC will forward the Committee's written recommendation to the Dean within five working days of the meeting.

In the case of academic honesty grievances, the ASC can recommend any of the following to the Dean:

- no action be taken against the student(s) involved
- a letter of reprimand be sent to the student, and a copy kept in the ASC confidential file
- the student be placed on disciplinary probation and in the event s/he is found guilty of any other acts of academic dishonesty, a more stringent penalty could result
- suspension, with denial of registration at the University at Albany for a specified period of time
- expulsion, with no opportunity to return to the School of Education other action

In cases related to grades and academic standing, the ASC may recommend a particular remedy or redress to the Dean.

4. Decision of the Dean

The Dean of the School of Education carefully reviews the ASC recommendation and makes a final decision. S/he notifies all parties and the ASC in writing of the disposition and rational within 10 working days after receiving the ASC's written recommendation. The complainant and the named party are apprised of the appeal process. If the Dean is a party in the case, the Associate Dean shall decide the case.

5. Appeal Procedures

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.

The complainant or named party may file an appeal with the Graduate Academic Council or the Undergraduate Academic Council should they feel the issue has not been resolved. Grounds for appeal may include, but are not limited to, procedural error, new evidence, additional information, action unsupported by evidence. Any appeal must be filed within thirty (30) days of the receipt of the Dean's decision. Procedures for these appeals may be obtained from the appropriate Council. Decisions of the Graduate or Undergraduate Academic Council are final.

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.

6. Records

The ASC shall keep a confidential file in the Office of the Dean to maintain records of case proceedings, until the student graduates or leaves the university.