

## GRADE APPEALS

### PURPOSE

The purpose of the Grade Appeal Policy is to provide the student with a safeguard against receiving an unfair final grade, while respecting the academic judgment of the instructor.

This grade appeal procedure applies only when a student initiates a grade appeal and not when the instructor decides to change a grade on his or her own initiative. This procedure does not cover instances in which students have been assigned grades based on academic dishonesty, which are included in Westfield State's Academic Honesty Policy. Grade appeals alleging discrimination, harassment or retaliation in violation of Westfield State's Sexual Harassment Policy should be concurrently referred to the appropriate office at Westfield State as required by law and by Westfield State policy.

### POLICY

#### 1. Underlying Principles

- A. Students and faculty should make every effort to resolve questions about grades without seeking a formal grade appeal. A formal grade appeal is a last resort.
- B. A grade appeal will be pursued only if there is a valid basis and substantial evidence. The responsibility for developing and presenting the case for changing a grade rests with the student making the appeal.
- C. Instructors have the responsibility to provide careful evaluation and timely assignment of appropriate grades. Course and project grading methods should be explained to students at the beginning of the term, and instructors should retain grading calculations for a minimum of one semester after the conclusion of a course. Westfield State presumes that the judgment of the instructor of record is authoritative, and the final grades assigned are correct.
- D. Grades will be changed only on clear evidence of error or manifest injustice in grading.

- E. If the instructor no longer works at the University or is unavailable, the department chair may represent the instructor in this process.
- F. Interpretation of this policy is the purview of the Vice President of Academic Affairs or designee.

## 2. The Basis for a Grade Appeal

- A. Only final course grades may be appealed.
- B. Grades may be appealed that are alleged to be caused by:
  - 1. Unfair and unequal application of grading standards or applying grading criteria to one student or some students in a manner that treats them differently.
  - 2. Unfair or unannounced alteration of assignments, grading criteria, or computational processes from the instructor's previously articulated standards.
  - 3. Computation dispute about calculation of a final grade or its transmission to the Registrar.
  - 4. Sanctions for academic dishonesty without an admission or finding of academic dishonesty.

## 3. Establishment of the Grade Appeal Committee

The Grade Appeal Committee (GAC) will be comprised of four (4) faculty members and two (2) student members as selected by their representative governing bodies.

## 4. Process for Grade Appeal

### A. Step One

- 1. Students must initially appeal a grade to the course instructor between the time of grade submission and the first ten (10) business days of the following fall or spring semester, or within ten (10) business days of a notice of a change of grade. It is the

student's responsibility to arrange to meet with the instructor. The deadline to meet with the instructor should be no more than ten (10) business days of initiating the appeal, or in cases between fall and spring semester appeals, within ten (10) business days of the start of the term.

2. Within ten (10) days following an unsuccessful appeal to the instructor, the student will discuss the problem with the appropriate department chair. The department chair shall then act as mediator to attempt to bring the matter to a mutually agreed resolution among all three parties within ten (10) days of his/her discussion with the student. If the instructor is the department chair, the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies or Associate Dean of DGCE, as appropriate, will act as the chair.
3. If a mutually agreed resolution is not reached, within ten (10) days of reaching impasse, the department chair may make a recommendation to the instructor.
4. If the department chair disagrees with the academic judgment of the instructor, the department chair may recommend a change of grade to the instructor. Within ten (10) business days of receipt of the recommendation from the department chair, the instructor shall make a decision to either a) affirm, or b) change the appealed grade. Within this time frame, the instructor must communicate his/her decision to the department chair.
5. The department chair shall inform the student of the decision within ten (10) business days of receiving the instructor's final decision. The department chair will communicate this decision to the student in writing.

## B. Step Two

1. The student will respond to the department chair and course instructor in writing within ten (10) business days if the student is taking the appeal to Step Two. At that time, the student will also submit a written appeal to the Dean of Undergraduate Studies or Dean of DGCE, as appropriate, explaining the basis and providing

the evidence for the formal appeal. The Dean will then transmit copies to the faculty member and to the faculty member's department chair.

2. If the Dean determines that there is a basis for a grade appeal, the Dean will convene the GAC. The student, instructor, and department chair will be given at least ten (10) business days notice of the time and place of the hearing. A copy of the student's written appeal and accompanying evidence must be available at least five (5) business days prior to the GAC hearing for review by the instructor and department chair in the Office of Academic Affairs or DGCE, as appropriate.
3. The student, instructor, and department chair will be encouraged to attend the meeting, but are not required to do so. The meeting will be closed to all other outside participation. The student and instructor may each be accompanied by one person, but that person may not be legal counsel and may not participate in the process in any way.
4. At least four (4) members of the GAC, including at least one student member, must be present in order for a hearing to be held.
5. The GAC is strongly encouraged to conclude its work no later than the end of the semester in which the appeal is filed. In the event that the student filing a formal grade appeal is a graduating senior, the GAC will make every effort to expedite the process.
6. Through its inquiries and deliberations, the GAC is charged to determine whether clear and convincing evidence of unfair treatment such as arbitrariness, prejudice, and/or error might justify changing the grade. The GAC will meet in closed session and make its decision based on a majority vote. In the event of a tie vote, the original grade will stand.
7. If the GAC determines that no compelling reason exists for changing the grade, the committee will report its conclusion in writing to the student, instructor, department chair, and Dean within five (5) business days of the hearing, and the matter will be considered closed.

8. If the GAC determines that compelling reasons exist for changing the grade, within five (5) business days of the hearing the GAC will request that the instructor make the change, providing the instructor with a written explanation of its reasons. Should the instructor decline, he or she must provide a written explanation for refusing within five (5) business days.
9. The GAC, after considering the instructor's explanation and upon again concluding that it would be unjust to allow the original grade to stand, will then determine what grade is to be assigned (or recommend an administrative withdrawal from the course). In determining what grade is to be assigned, the GAC may obtain records from the course instructor, department chair, and student. A formal, written report of the GAC's decision must be forwarded to the student, instructor, department chair, Dean, and the Registrar's Office within ten (10) business days of the receipt of the instructor's written explanation. Under no circumstances may persons other than the original faculty member or the review committee change a grade.
10. Should the GAC determine that the instructor's written explanation justifies the original grade, the committee will report this in writing to the student, instructor, department chair, and Dean within ten (10) business days of the receipt of the instructor's written explanation, and the matter will be closed.
11. The Office of Academic Affairs will maintain official records of grade appeal hearings. Records will not be released to individuals outside the University except under the conditions specified in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Access to official records must be authorized by the Vice President of Academic Affairs or designee.

## REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed bi-annually by the Vice President of Academic Affairs.