

# College of Information Science & Technology

## Graduate Student Grade Appeal Policy

### Purpose

This grade appeal policy seeks to articulate and protect both the rights of students to fair and impartial evaluation of their academic performance and the responsibilities of faculty members as those who determine student grades. A course grade assigned in a manner consistent with University policy can be changed only by the instructor. University administrators can direct a grade to be changed only when it is determined through the procedure established by this policy that the faculty member assigned the course grade in an arbitrary or capricious manner.

This grade appeal policy applies to final course grades. A course grade is deemed to have been assigned in an arbitrary or capricious manner if, by a preponderance of the evidence, a student establishes that:

1. The course grade was based upon the student's age, color, creed, disability, gender, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation, other personal characteristic, or for some other arbitrary or personal reason unrelated to the instructor's exercise of his or her professional academic judgment in the evaluation of the academic performance of the student; or
2. The course grade was assigned in a manner not consistent with the standards and procedures for evaluation established by the instructor, usually at the beginning of the course in the course outline, commonly called the course syllabus (a course outline is primarily the information provided by the instructor at the beginning of the course, and not necessarily the master syllabus generated by the department which may be applied to multiple offerings of a course in time or place), but supplemented on occasion during the semester in other written or oral communications directed to the class as a whole; or
3. The course grade assigned by the instructor was the result of a clear and material mistake in calculating or recording grades. Individual elements (e.g., assignments, tests, activities, projects) which contribute to a course grade are generally NOT subject to appeal or subsequent review during a grade appeals procedure. However, individual elements may be appealed under these procedures providing the following conditions are met:
  - a. The student presents compelling evidence that one or more individual elements were graded on arbitrary or capricious grounds (defined above);
  - b. Grounds can be established for determining a professionally sound grade for the appealed element(s); and
  - c. The ensuing grade for each appealed element would have resulted in a different course grade than that assigned by the faculty member.

### Charge

The Student Grade Appeal Committee of the appropriate College unit will hear grade appeals from graduate students. Students may initiate a grade appeal when they believe their evaluation in a course has been arbitrary or capricious. The Student Grade Appeal Committee will adopt the UNO Graduate Council's criteria for determining whether a course grade has been assigned in an arbitrary or capricious manner. These criteria are published in the Grade Appeal Policy for UNO Graduate College Courses in the current UNO Graduate Catalog.

## **Composition**

The Student Grade Appeal Committee (“the Committee”) shall consist of the faculty members of the Graduate Program Committee (GPC) of the IS&T unit which offers the course for which the grade is being appealed. For grade appeals in doctoral-level courses, the IS&T Doctoral Program Committee (DPC) shall handle the grade appeals process. Any faculty member who has a conflict of interest in the appeal shall recuse himself or herself. If the GPC chair has a conflict of interest, the most senior faculty member by rank on the GPC shall chair the Committee. If two or more faculty members qualify to chair the Committee, the Department Chair of the IS&T unit which offers the course shall select a Committee Chair. The Committee shall have at least three faculty members. If fewer than three eligible faculty GPC members are available, then the Committee chair may invite as many other members of the IS&T graduate faculty as necessary to reach the minimum number of faculty required. For grade appeals filed at the end of the spring term or during the summer term, the GPC chair may form a grade appeal committee during the summer if at least three eligible graduate faculty members volunteer to serve on this committee; otherwise these appeals shall be acted upon at the start of the fall term.

## **General Procedures**

The student must first attempt to resolve the matter with the course instructor.

If the resolution with the instructor is unsatisfactory, the student is encouraged to discuss the matter with the student’s advisor. Based on this discussion, the student may initiate an appeal by filing a simple, clearly written statement of the reasons for his or her appeal. The statement should address why the student feels the grade was awarded in an arbitrary or capricious manner. This statement shall be filed with the GPC chair. The chair shall then determine whether any GPC members have a conflict of interest and exclude these from the Committee. The chair shall then call for a meeting to consider the appeal.

The initiation of an appeal must be filed within thirty (30) calendar days following receipt of the grade from the Office of the Registrar.

The Committee shall act as expeditiously as possible and in no case delay its decision for more than thirty (30) days from the date of the filing of the appeal except where it can be shown that the student appellant has caused the delays or has, for good cause, given prior permission to extend the inquiry for a period beyond the thirty (30) calendar day limit. Grade appeals filed at the end of the spring term or during the spring term shall be acted upon as expeditiously during the summer term if a grade appeal committee can be formed or otherwise at the start of the fall term.

The Committee shall have the power to order a change of the grade of the appealing student for a course within the jurisdiction of the respective College unit, upon finding that the original evaluation was arbitrarily or capriciously awarded.

The Committee shall inform the faculty member and student involved of its decision. If the decision is to recommend that the grade be changed, the faculty member will have seven (7) working days to file the appropriate form. If this does not occur the Committee chair will file the appropriate form to make the change effective.

Any principal may file an appeal of the Committee decision in writing to the Graduate College per Graduate College guidelines.

### **Procedures during the hearing**

Except as forbidden by University and other policies and laws on confidentiality, all written material pertinent to a case must be submitted to the Grade Appeals Committee Chair at least three (3) working days prior to any meeting in which the case will be considered.

After that time, additional written material will not be accepted. The Committee, as part of the pre-appeal process, will evaluate the relevancy of submitted material prior to the appeal hearing.

The chair shall make the relevant material available to committee members and principals to the dispute at least two (2) working days prior to any meeting in which the case will be considered.

The Committee will so conduct itself that:

1. Its members and the principals to the dispute are fully cognizant of its procedures before their deliberations begin;
2. The rules and precedents of academic due process are fulfilled at all times, especially those concerning confidentiality.

The hearing is a closed meeting. If any person is invited to appear before the Committee and speak, then all principals to the dispute will be invited to attend, although they need not do so.

Principals appearing before the Committee will be entitled to hear whatever any person invited before the Committee has to say, and the right of rebuttal will be extended to all speakers. All people speaking before the Committee will confine themselves to answering the Committee's questions or to rebuttal; they will not be allowed to speak otherwise, and should be informed of this provision beforehand.

The following information **must** be presented:

- The formal syllabus for the course from which the student is appealing the evaluation and the course syllabus or course outline given to the student.
- If available, the materials that were used to ascertain the grade of the student, tests, papers and any other graded materials.

The following information **may** be presented:

- The oral testimony or written statements of student members of the instructor's classes past and present.
- Standardized student evaluation forms from past or present classes.
- The oral testimony or written statements of faculty and administrative employees.
- The testimony or written statements of any other person the chairperson shall give leave to inject information.
- The anonymized grades of all class members. Such grades shall include each individual item considered in awarding a grade and the final totals awarded to all students in the class. In no circumstances shall the identity of any other class member be disclosed.

The following information **may not** be presented:

- Evidence of cheating or other forms of academic dishonesty. Violations of academic integrity are covered under UNO's Academic Integrity Procedures as published by the UNO Office of Academic & Student Affairs.
- Extraneous, immaterial or irrelevant material dealing with the instructor or student.

### **Voting**

Upon completion of the hearing, the Committee Chair shall excuse all but the members of the Committee. The members shall then vote on the validity of the claim and any change that they feel proper. All members of the committee have one vote, and in the case of an even number of committee members a tie vote is considered a vote in favor of the student filing the appeal.

This and all other votes of the committee shall be by secret ballot. As soon as the votes have been counted, the ballots shall be destroyed. In no case shall the number of votes cast on either side of the issue be disclosed to anyone.

### **Further Student Appeal Procedure**

As per the UNO Graduate College Appeals Policy, "if the matter is not resolved, the student may file an appeal in writing to the campus Dean for Graduate Studies, who shall inform the student of the grade appeal procedures approved by the Graduate Faculty or by their duly elected representative Graduate Council for that campus, and shall forward the appeal to the student-faculty committee or council that has been designated to hear graduate-level course grade appeals on that campus. Since awarding grades in courses occurs at the individual campus level, the decision of the campus committee or council designated to hear the case on behalf of the campus Graduate Faculty shall be final and is not subject to further appeal."