

# **Policy and Procedure for Grade Appeals**

## **Policy**

Students have an expectation that their grades are determined fairly and honestly. Students also have right to question the procedure by which their grade was determined. It is the policy of St. Cloud State University to address student grade appeals fairly and expeditiously. Grade appeals are often based upon misunderstandings between students and faculty. Thus, whenever possible, it is best to resolve them informally. It is important that anyone involved in a grade appeal understands that this procedure is neither a judicial nor a disciplinary process.

## **Procedure**

A student who considers a grade to have been determined improperly must arrange a meeting with the Chair of the department/program in which the course is taught. If the grade appeal involves the Chair of the department/program, the Chair of the Department Mediation Committee (or someone designated by the department) will act in this capacity. The purpose of the meeting is to explain the steps, including the timeline involved in making a grade appeal. The grade appeal process, from the formal initiation to resolution, must be completed within 30 business days following filing.

### **Step 1. Informal consultation with the faculty member.**

Within ten business (duty) days of the first day of instruction of the next regular semester the student will communicate with the instructor via e-mail, telephone, or by arranging a meeting with the faculty member to explain their concern about their grade. If the instructor is not available for consultation because the instructor of the course is no longer employed by the university, this consultation must occur with the Chair of the department. The student should fully explain the nature of her/his concern about their grade. The faculty member may elect to respond to the student immediately or at a later time; however, the student must receive the faculty member's response within 10 business days of the faculty member receiving the complaint. If the faculty member's response is either not satisfactory to the student or is not made within the required time, the student may elect to proceed to Step 2.

### **Step 2. Formal Grade Appeal.**

If the matter is not resolved through informal consultation, the student may file a Formal Grade Appeal by submitting a Grade Appeal Form to the Chair of the department/program in which the course is offered (download the PDF form, or obtain one from the Office of Academic Affairs, Deans' offices or departmental offices). The Formal Grade Appeal Form must be accompanied by all documentation that will serve as the basis of the grade appeal and must be submitted in both electronic and paper form. At this time, the complaint is formally initiated and the 30-day deadline to resolution is active. The Department Chair will verify that the student has consulted or attempted to consult the faculty member as required by Step 1, will sign, date and forward the Student Grade Appeal Form to the person(s) responsible for coordinating hearing grade appeals within the department (or someone designated by the department). If the grade appeal concerns the person(s) responsible for coordinating hearing of grade appeals within the department, the Chair of the department will act as the responsible party for coordinating the grade appeal.

The person(s) responsible for coordinating the grade appeal within the department will inform the faculty member against whom the grade appeal has been brought and will provide a copy of the Grade Appeal Form and a copy of all documentation to the faculty member. The faculty member in question will have 10 business days to respond and the response must be in both electronic and paper form.

After the faculty member's response has been received but no later than 10 business days after the faculty member received a copy of the Grade Appeal Form, the person(s) responsible for coordinating the grade appeal within the department will arrange a hearing with the student and faculty member and the departmental faculty grade appeal committee. If the instructor in question is a member of the departmental faculty grade appeal committee, the instructor will withdraw from the committee and the remaining members may choose another member to replace the instructor for the hearing of the grade appeal. The committee should resolve the grade appeal within 10 business days of receiving the faculty member's response.

1. If the contested grade is an "F" or a "U," the committee may let it stand or change it to "W," "U," or "S."
2. If the contested grade is a passing grade, the committee may let it stand or change it to "S," meaning that the course would be counted toward graduation requirements but not be computed in the student's grade point average or change it to a "W".

Within 10 business days after the hearing, the person(s) responsible for coordinating the grade appeal within the department will provide a copy of the Grade Appeal Form to both the student and faculty member that is signed by the members of the departmental grade appeal committee indicating the outcome of the appeal. A copy of the Grade Appeal Form will be forwarded to the dean/director of the appropriate college/school.

If the departmental grade appeal committee fails to hear the grade appeal within the required time limits, the Provost (or designee) may extend the deadline for action and notify the dean/director of the appropriate college/school to monitor the process to see that it occurs within the extended time limits.

### **Step 3. Request for Formal Grade Appeal Review.**

If the student is not satisfied by the decision of the departmental grade appeal committee, they may request a review of the faculty committee's decision by completing the back of the Grade Appeal Form and submitting it to the Provost (or designee) within 10 business days of that decision. A request for a Formal Grade Appeal Review may be made only for the following reasons:

1. a procedural error which substantially affected the hearing's outcome;
2. failure of the faculty committee to hear the appeal or to render a decision;
3. new or newly discovered information of a character which may have substantially affected the outcome.

If the Provost (or designee) determines that there is not sufficient justification to warrant a Formal Grade Appeal Review, the decision is final and not appealable.

If, however, such circumstances are found by the Provost (or designee) to exist, they will forward the request for a Formal Grade Appeal Review to the Faculty Association Academic Affairs Committee. A committee consisting of at least three members of the Academic Affairs Committee will hear and conduct the review. If a member of the Academic Affairs Committee is a member of the department of the grade appeal that is being reviewed, they will withdraw from the committee. The review will be conducted within 10 business days of Provost's (or designee's) determination that a grade appeal review is warranted. The Provost (or designee) shall convene and chair the committee as a non-voting ex-officio member.

Coordination, notification, and distribution of reports of the committee shall be handled through the Office for Academic Affairs. When the student or faculty member meets with a Grade Appeal Review Committee, any individual of their choosing may accompany them. The participation of such persons shall be consistent with the process of informal mediation. These individuals may not speak during mediation and are only present to provide support. Lawyers or legal representatives may not serve as advocates because this is not a legal proceeding.

1. If the contested grade is an "F" or a "U," the committee may let it stand or change it to "W," "U," or "S."
2. If the contested grade is a passing grade, the committee may let it stand or change it to "S," meaning that the course would be counted toward graduation requirements but not be computed in the student's grade point average or change it to a "W".

The decision to the Faculty Association Grade Appeal Review Committee is final, and is not appealable.

The assignment of grades is the exclusive prerogative of the faculty. Only the faculty member who assigned the grade, the departmental faculty committee, or the Faculty Association Grade Review Committee as described in this process has the authority to change a grade.

If the student or faculty member involved feels that any grade appeal review decision is arbitrary, capricious or improper, he/she may appeal to the Provost (or designee). If the Provost (or designee) finds that the grade appeal review committee's decision was arbitrary, capricious or improper, they may return the matter back to the Grade Appeal Review Committee with the requirement of responding to the specific concerns raised by the Provost.

Under extraordinary circumstances, the administration finds it necessary to change a grade directly (under the limits imposed in the procedure) because of the failure of the departmental grade appeal committee or the Faculty

Association Grade Review Committee to act, a written justification for such an action will be given to the faculty member, the chair of the department of the affected faculty member, the chair of the Academic Affairs Committee and the President of the Faculty Association. Annually, all grades changed by the administration must be communicated to the Faculty Association through Meet and Confer.

Grade Appeals during summer sessions can have a significant impact on student progress. Faculty and students should make every effort to resolve issues at Step One, including the use of electronic media. If the faculty member for the class in question is unavailable a committee formed in collaboration with the colleagues within the school or department will collect information and attempt to resolve the grading concern at Steps One and Step Two. For grade appeals that move to Step Three the Faculty Association shall select at least three members of the Academic Affairs Committee to meet and hear grade appeals following the usual practices of committee convening and selection.

Where possible electronic communication (e.g., conference phone calls, Skype, Adobe Connect, etc.) should be used to make sure the student and faculty member have every opportunity to work together to resolve the disputed grade. If deemed necessary by the Provost, a duty day can be paid to faculty who are not under contract to meet with the departmental or Faculty Association committees. Resolution of the Grade Appeal should be within 10 business days. All other procedures and timelines will apply during expedited grade appeals.

## **Rights and Responsibilities under the Grade Appeal Policy**

### **Introduction**

Unless the instructor agrees to change the letter grade, a successful course grade appeal can result only in a final course grade change to W, S, or U. The grade appeal process cannot, for instance, result in the change of a grade of D- to a C. A grade of S counts toward graduation requirements but is not computed in the student's grade point average: a grade of U is not computed in the student's grade point average. To assign a grade of S during this process, the grade appeal committee must determine that the student's work in the course is equivalent to a grade of C or better.

### **Definitions**

**Student** refers to the student who is appealing a final course grade.

**Instructor** refers to the instructor whose grade is being contested.

**Committee** refers to the Departmental Grade Appeal Committee.

### **Rights and Responsibilities**

Throughout this procedure, the following processes, rights and responsibilities apply:

#### **Student**

1. The student has the responsibility to notify the instructor of the student's concern regarding a final grade. Notification may be face to face, by telephone, by email, by mail, or as facilitated by the department chair (see Department section below).
2. The student has the responsibility to present documentation and complete required forms.
3. The student has the right to contact the Student Government Association Academic Affairs Committee to receive assistance and coaching in the grade appeal process.
4. The student has the right to be accompanied by any individual of their choosing to any meeting of the Grade Appeal Policy process, including the student's initial notification of the instructor.
5. The student has the right to speak to and to present evidence to the committee reviewing the grade appeal.
6. The student has the right to receive the committee's written recommendation.

#### **Instructor**

1. The instructor has the responsibility to present documentation and evidence to the student during the grade appeal process. The instructor must be available for a meeting during office hours, or a mutually agreed upon time. The instructor will explain the grading process and the grade given to the student. The grading process must be explicitly stated in the course syllabus that was made available at the start of the course.

2. If invited by the committee, the instructor will meet with the committee. The instructor will explain the grades and grading process in question to the committee. The instructor has the responsibility to present documentation and provide evidence to the committee.
3. The instructor has the right to speak to and to present evidence to the committee regarding the grade appeal.
4. The instructor has the right to receive the committee's written recommendation.
5. The instructor has the right to change the student's grade at any point in this process, based on a review of the student's performance or to correct clerical errors.
6. The instructor has the responsibility to maintain confidentiality.

#### **Department**

1. The department and/or chair has the right and responsibility to assist the student and instructor in reaching an informal resolution. To this end, the department or department chair may assist the student in notifying the instructor of the student's concern. The chair may refer the student to the Student Government Association Academic Affairs Committee to receive assistance and coaching on the grade appeal process.
2. Early each fall semester, each department has the responsibility to establish a grade appeals committee and a departmental procedure for grade appeals that is within the general guidelines of this policy. A written copy of the departmental procedure will be given to any student who files a grade appeal. The departmental information sheet given to students will set forth the steps of a student grade appeals process.
3. The department has the responsibility to maintain confidentiality.

#### **Committee**

1. The committee has the responsibility to follow both the guidelines of this policy and the department procedure for grade appeals. Departmental policy cannot be in conflict with this university policy.
2. The committee has the responsibility to generate a written response, with copies given to all involved persons and filed according to this policy and department policy.
3. The committee has the responsibility to maintain confidentiality.