

Graduate Grade Appeal Procedures

The forms are available in department offices, Deans' Offices, the Registrar's Office, and the Office of the Dean of Students. Students can also complete the [Notice of Intent to Formally Appeal a Grade](#) form online, print it and initiate the process by submitting the form to the chair of the department in which the course is offered.

The grade appeals procedure is designed to give the student the opportunity to correct an injustice. It should be utilized only when the student contends that the final course grade assigned by the instructor is arbitrary or capricious. It is not to be used to challenge grades on individual assignments. "Arbitrary or capricious" implies that:

- * The student has been assigned a grade on the basis of something other than his or her performance in the course; or
- * Standards utilized in the determination of the student's grade are more exacting or demanding than those applied to other students in the course; or
- * The grade is based upon standards that are significant, unannounced and unreasonable departures from those articulated in the course description distributed at the beginning of the course.

The assessment of the quality of the student's academic performance is one of the major responsibilities of university faculty members and is solely and properly their responsibility. A grade appeal is not appropriate when a student simply disagrees with the faculty member's judgment about the quality of the student's work. A student who is uncertain about whether or not a grade should be appealed or who needs additional information about the grade appeals process can contact the Graduate College.

The burden of proof is always on the student appellant to prove that a change of grade is an appropriate action in his or her case. Students must adhere to the timelines delineated in this policy or the right to appeal may be lost (the Graduate College Dean may, under extreme circumstances, extend timelines at his/her discretion).

Informal Appeals Process

The student must begin the grade appeals process by contacting the instructor in an attempt to resolve the disagreement in an informal and cooperative atmosphere. This discussion should take place within the first ten class days after the beginning of the following semester (unless the next semester is a summer session, in which case the "next semester" is interpreted as fall semester). If the student and instructor cannot, after consultation, reach a satisfactory resolution within the first ten class days from the beginning of the following semester, the student may begin the formal grade appeal process.

Formal Appeal Process

1. Following the failure to reach resolution through the informal grade appeals process and not later than the 15th class day of the semester, the student must complete the [Notice of Intent to Formally Appeal a Grade](#) form. The forms are available in department offices, Deans' Offices, the Registrar's Office, and the Office of the Dean of Students. Students can also complete the [Notice of Intent to Formally Appeal a Grade](#) form online, print it and initiate the process by submitting the form to the chair of the department in which the course is offered. On the form, the student will be asked to
 - o verify that he or she has been unsuccessful in reaching a resolution through the informal appeals process;
 - o precisely and specifically state the reasons for the appeal; and
 - o offer suggestions as to what the student would consider a fair resolution of the appeal, with supporting reason or reasons.

The form should be submitted to the chair in whose department the course in question is offered (or the Graduate Dean if the chair's grade is being appealed). After all signatures are obtained, copies of the form will be distributed to the student and the instructor.

2. The instructor will be asked to submit a written response to the department chair (or to the Graduate Dean if the chairperson's grade is being appealed) and to the student within five class days of the receipt of the appeal. The department chair (or the Graduate Dean if the chair's grade is being appealed) will attempt to resolve the appeal within five additional class days through conferencing with the instructor and student appellant. If not resolved within five class days, the department chair will request in writing to the department's Student Grade Appeal Committee that the Committee consider the appeal.

The Student Grade Appeal Committee is constituted from the department's Personnel Committee according to the department's policy. Criteria for creation of the Committee are that there be no fewer than three faculty members, and that the members are selected at the beginning of the academic year, to hear formal appeals from fall, spring, and summer semesters. One or more alternates must be chosen at the beginning of the year to replace members of the Student Grade Appeal Committee who might be unavailable to hear a case in a timely manner or who might have a conflict of interest. Departments of fewer than five faculty should request that the Dean of the Graduate College solicit the service of faculty from another department(s). (Outside faculty are required because neither the faculty member who assigned an appealed grade nor the chair can serve on the Student Grade Appeal Committee.) In addition, departments may choose to follow the Student Government Association's recommendation of including one voting graduate student appointed by the department's Personnel Committee. If a department chooses to include a student, he or she must be in good academic and disciplinary standing.

A quorum for decisions of the Committee is two-thirds or more of the assigned members. The highest ranking, and within rank the most senior faculty member of the Committee shall be the chair. Departmental Student Grade Appeal Committee membership selection policies should be on file in the Dean's Office.

3. The student appellant and the instructor(s) involved may submit additional brief written summaries of the evidence to the chair of the Student Grade Appeal Committee within five class days after the chair notifies the Committee that a formal appeal has been filed. The student has the right to consult with a Radford University faculty member of the student's choice. The faculty member may also attend the grade appeal hearing if one is conducted. Based upon the evidence presented and any additional evidence requested by the Committee, the Committee will meet to decide if there are grounds for a hearing. Minutes of the meeting must be kept and copies of any evidence presented shall become part of the record.
 - o If the Student Grade Appeal Committee decides by a majority vote at a meeting at which a quorum is present that there are grounds for a hearing, a formal hearing will be scheduled not sooner than ten and not later than twenty class days after the notice of a hearing is given to the instructor and the student appellant.
 - o If the Student Grade Appeal Committee decides by a majority vote at a meeting at which a quorum is present that there are no grounds for a hearing, the appeal goes to step 5 of the process, and, if certified, the grade remains unchanged.

In either case, the student and the instructor shall be notified in writing within two class days of the Committee's decision. Copies of the minutes of the Student Grade Appeal Committee meeting shall accompany the notification of the decision. Should a hearing be necessary, the Committee chair will notify in writing the student appellant and the instructor at least three class days prior to the hearing date. The Student Grade Appeal Committee cannot change a grade without a full hearing as described in the next step.

4. If a hearing is to be held, the Student Grade Appeal Committee will conduct the hearing at which both the student appellant and the involved instructor(s) must be present. The student may also elect to have present a faculty advisor, who may privately counsel the student but may not address the Committee or question witnesses. Neither party may be represented by legal counsel at these proceedings. In the event that either the student or the faculty member is absent at the time of the appeal as a result of illness, resignation or any other reason found valid by the Student Grade Appeal Committee, the Committee may delay the hearing until a more appropriate time. If the Committee determines that the reason is not valid, the Committee may proceed with the hearing and notify the absent party that a full hearing was held in his/her absence. The faculty member and student appellant shall place all available pertinent grade records and student class work for the student bringing the appeal in the hands of the Student Grade Appeal Committee. Access to work of other students in the course must protect the privacy rights of the students either by requiring permission of the students or through having their names redacted. Members of the Committee must be present at the hearing in order to be eligible to vote. Minutes of the hearing must be kept. The hearing should proceed as follows (The procedures to be followed in grade appeal hearings will be followed by departments unless amended in writing by the department and approved by the Graduate Dean at the beginning of the academic year prior to any appeals being heard.):
 - The Chair of the Student Grade Appeal Committee calls the hearing to order. All those present for the hearing introduce themselves and indicate their roles in the hearing. The Chair points out that one member of the Committee will be taking notes. The Chair reminds all present that all participants are bound by the Radford University Honor Code and asks for the verbal assurance of each that he/she will uphold the honor code. The Chair then states the purpose of the hearing and briefly explains the procedure.
 - Any witnesses present are dismissed from the hearing room. They are asked to remain available outside the room, to be called upon as needed.
 - The student appellant makes a statement about the reason(s) for the appeal. This statement should be limited to the reason(s) included on the "Intent to Formally Appeal a Grade" form.
 - The instructor makes a statement stating his/her position as to why the awarded grade was appropriate.
 - Members of the Committee may direct questions, first to the student appellant and then to the instructor. The instructor has the opportunity to ask questions of the student appellant, and the student appellant may ask questions of the instructor.
 - The student appellant may call upon his/her witnesses, one at a time. Witnesses are questioned by the Committee. The instructor may also ask questions of the witnesses if he/she wishes to do so. Each witness is thanked and dismissed.
 - The instructor may call upon his/her witnesses, one at a time. Witnesses are questioned by the Committee. The student appellant may also ask questions of the witnesses if he/she chooses to do so. Each witness is thanked and dismissed.
 - The instructor is given the opportunity to make a brief final statement that summarizes his/her position that the original grade was appropriate.
 - The student appellant is given the opportunity to make a brief final statement that summarizes his/her position that a change of grade is warranted.
 - The Chair asks everyone to leave the hearing room except the members of the Grade Appeal Committee. The student appellant and the instructor are informed that they will be notified in writing within five days of the Committee's decision. They are also informed that the Committee's decision is final and may not be appealed.
 - The Committee deliberates and reaches a decision. The Chair dismisses the hearing. One of three outcomes may result from the hearing:
 - If two-thirds or more of the members of the Grade Appeal Committee present and voting (excluding abstentions) vote in favor of a change of grade, the chair of the Grade Appeal Committee shall so inform the professor by written memorandum, with copies to the student appellant and the department chairperson.
 - If the majority but less than two-thirds of the members of the Grade Appeal Committee present and voting (excluding abstentions) vote in favor of a change of grade the chair of

the Grade Appeals Committee shall so inform the professor by written memorandum, recommending that the grade be changed, with copies to the student appellant and the department chair. If the professor chooses to make a grade change, such a change must be made within 5 class days. If the professor chooses not to make the grade change, no grade change shall be mandated.

- If less than a majority of the Grade Appeals Committee members vote in favor of a change of grade, no grade change will be made.

The Chair of the Committee shall inform the student appellant of its decision by written memorandum, with copies to the instructor, the department chairperson, and the Graduate Dean. The written memorandum shall be transmitted within five class days of the hearing and shall include a description of the process followed from informal appeals through the hearing decision, copies of all materials presented, and a copy of the minutes of the hearing.

As is usual in academic debate, the individual proposing the change has the opportunity to speak first and last. Since the student appellant maintains the burden of proof to demonstrate that a change of grade is justified, he/she will give the initial opening statement and the final closing statement.

5. The Graduate Dean or appointed impartial representatives shall review the process, all related materials, and hearing minutes within five class days of the receipt of all materials.
 - If the Graduate Dean or appointed impartial representatives certifies that the procedures were followed, the grade appeal is completed. If indicated by the Grade Appeal Committee in its findings, grade changes are initiated as indicated in step 6.
 - If the Graduate Dean or appointed impartial representatives finds substantive errors in the process that the Graduate Dean or appointed impartial representatives believes could have reasonably altered the decision reached, reconsideration by a separate Grade Appeal Committee in another College department shall be initiated by the Graduate Dean. The reconsideration shall begin at step 4 of this process.

The Graduate Dean shall advise all parties of the outcome of the process review. The Graduate Dean cannot reverse the decision of the Grade Appeal Committee but can only send it to a second committee based upon procedural errors.

6. Changes of grade shall be initiated as follows:
 - If the Grade Appeal Committee rules in favor of a grade change, the Graduate Dean shall request that the faculty member contact the Registrar's Office to change the grade within five class days after the Graduate Dean's certification of the process.
 - If two-thirds or more of the Committee voted for a grade change and the faculty member does not initiate a grade change within five class days of the request by the Dean, the Dean shall forward the Committee's decision to the Registrar, who shall then change the grade.

- **Decisions reached through this process are final and may not be appealed.**