Motion re Changing the Language of the Grade Appeal Procedures
Sponsor: Faculty Issues Committee

The Faculty Senate recommends the following changes to the Grade Appeals Procedure:

Office of the Registrar
Grade Appeal Procedures
Forms are available in department offices, Deans’ Offices, Advising Centers, and the Registrar’s Office. Students can also complete the Notice of Intent to Formally Appeal a Grade form (PDF) online, print it and initiate the process by submitting the form to the chair of the department in which the course is offered. In the case of 200-level courses with a CORE prefix, submit the form to the Director of the Core Curriculum.

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 academic dean’s office (this policy is implemented within the college that administratively houses the department through which the course was offered, irrespective of a student’s major or class standing).

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 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 online and in department offices, Deans’ Offices, Advising Centers, 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, and 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 verify that he or she has been unsuccessful in reaching a resolution through the informal appeals process; precisely and specifically state the reasons for the appeal; and 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 College Dean if the chair’s grade is being appealed). **In the case of 200-level courses with a CORE prefix, submit the form to the Core Curriculum Director.** 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 College 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 College 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. **In the case of 200-level courses with a CORE prefix, the Student Grade Appeal Committee is constituted as a subcommittee of the Core Curriculum Advisory Committee.** 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. 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 College solicit the service of faculty from another department(s) within the College. (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, the Student Government Association strongly recommends that each department’s Student Grade Appeal Committee include one voting student member appointed annually by the department’s Personnel Committee. He or she must be a junior or senior major in the department who is in good academic and disciplinary standing. Including a student on the Student Grade Appeal Committee is in keeping with a longstanding Radford University policy to fully involve students in responsible leadership, advisory and governance capacities (e.g., Internal Governance Committees and Search Committees) whenever possible.

A quorum for decisions of the Committee is three-fourths 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.

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.

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 will be given an opportunity to either be present or to testify and answer questions remotely. The student may also elect to have present available, physically or virtually, 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 unable to either be present or to testify and answer questions remotely 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 unavailable party that a full hearing was held in his/her physical or virtual 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 or able to participate fully via remote link 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 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, whether physically or virtually, 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 participating in the hearing vote in favor of a grade change, the grade shall be changed as indicated in step 6, after the Dean's review and certification of the process.
  • If less than two-thirds of the members of the Committee present vote in favor of a grade change, no grade change shall be mandated.
  • In the event the faculty member concerned refuses to participate in the appeals procedure (e.g., does not submit a written response to the appeal or refuses to provide available materials essential for the appeals procedure), the Grade Appeal Committee may, by a simple majority vote of those present participating in the hearing and voting (excluding abstentions), initiate a grade change. This decision shall have the same effect as a vote of more than two-thirds (i.e., the decision is binding).

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 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 Dean shall review the process, all related materials, and hearing minutes within five class days of the receipt of all materials. If the dean 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 Dean finds substantive errors in the process that the Dean believes could have reasonably altered the decision reached, reconsideration by a separate Grade Appeal Committee in another College department shall be initiated by the Dean. The reconsideration shall begin at step 4 of this process.

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

6) Questions will be posed and discussions and deliberations will take place without regard to the race, color, sex, sexual orientation, disability, age, veteran status, national origin, religion, or political affiliation of any participant in the grade appeal process.

7) Changes of grade shall be initiated as follows:

If the Grade Appeal Committee rules in favor of a grade change, the Dean shall request that the faculty member shall submit a grade change form to the Registrar’s Office to change the grade within five class days after the Dean’s certification of the process.

If two-thirds or more of the Committee voted for a grade change (or a simple majority if the faculty member refused to participate in the procedure) 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.

Source: http://www.radford.edu/content/registrar/home/about/academic-policies/grade-appeal.html

Rationale

The changes are proposed for the following reasons:

1. To allow for the participation of individuals with information relevant to a grade appeal who are no longer at Radford University and for whom it would be difficult or expensive to return.

2. To clarify the path for grade appeals in 200-level courses with the CORE prefix.

3. To preclude the introduction of prejudicial comments into the grade appeal process.