

University of Southern Mississippi Grade Appeal Process

- A. A student who is dissatisfied with his/her final grade in a course must first attempt to negotiate a change in the grade with the instructor teaching the course. If the instructor is not a member of the university faculty at the time the student receives notice of the final grade, the student should attempt to negotiate a grade change with the chair of the department in which the course was taught.
- B. Should the decision of the instructor in Step A be unacceptable to the student, the student should secure the university's appeal form for grade review from the Office of the Provost and provide the information required. The student will sign and date a log. The purpose of the log is to enable the University Grade Review Council to monitor the accessibility and effectiveness of the grade challenge process. At the same time, the student will be assisted in scheduling an appointment with the chair (or, if unavailable, the chair-elect) of the council. The student must then return to the instructor who assigned the disputed grade. The student must provide the instructor with a copy of the written summary explaining the rationale for the grade challenge, as required in item 4 of the procedure checklist, and ask the instructor to sign the appeal form. The instructor has three working days to consider his or her response to the student's appeal, after which the student should proceed to the department chair, whether or not the instructor has signed the grade appeal form. The department chair, in separate or joint conference with the instructor and student, shall attempt to reach an agreement for a final grade and shall sign the appeal form. If the instructor is the department chair, the student should go directly to the dean of the college or in the case of a graduate course, Office of Graduate Studies.
- C. Should the department chair be unable to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of all parties, the appeal will then be referred, in the case of undergraduate courses, to the dean of the college in which the instructor teaches. The dean shall attempt to resolve the disagreement and shall sign the appeal form.
- D. If the grade challenge is for a grade assigned in a graduate course, the signed grade appeal form will be sent by the department chair to the Office of Graduate Studies. If the grade challenge is for a grade assigned in a course taught as part of the International Studies Program, the signed appeal form will be sent by the department chair to the Center for International and Continuing Education.
- E. The council will hear a student's petition if 40 percent of the council's members vote to hear the case under the criteria spelled out below. The chair of the council will distribute the student's appeal package to all council members. Shortly thereafter, the chair will call for a mail ballot by council members to determine whether 40 percent of the members believe the case should be presented before the entire council. All members must vote either in the affirmative or the negative to hear the case. Ballots must be signed. The criterion to which members must refer, when voting whether or not to hear the case, is whether the student's appeal concerns an issue relevant to the final grade determination upon which a difference of opinion is reasonable.
- F. If, after following the procedure outlined in Section E above, the membership of the council elects not to hear a student's petition, the chair shall so notify the complainant, the instructor, the provost, and the members of the council. This notification, which must be in writing, shall indicate only that the council will not hear the challenge because it does not fall within the council's purview.
- G. In those cases where fewer than 40 percent of the council vote for a hearing, the student may appeal to the provost, who may convene the council if he/she believes the case to have merit.

Hearing Procedures

- A. The student must present his/her own case before the council by offering evidence and, if desired, by calling witnesses. Witnesses must be present in the hearing room (or must have submitted a written statement) and may remain only while making their statements before the council. After the student's presentation, the faculty member may also present statements and witnesses. The council does not have the authority to require attendance or statements. In the event that either the student or faculty member involved in a grade challenge is reasonably unavailable to participate in any phase of the process, the provost may appoint a representative to consult with and represent the absent party. This representative may be appointed only upon the specific written request of the unavailable party.
- B. No plea is necessary, nor will guilt be implied. No ruling will be made concerning teacher competence, course difficulty, or other matters of a purely academic nature.
- C. Both parties have the right to seek advice from a full-time adviser of The University of Southern Mississippi, an uninvolved instructor, friend, or any person outside the university community. Although the adviser may be present during the hearing, the student may consult the adviser only at the beginning of the hearing or during a recess granted by the chair.
- D. During the hearing, all comments made by one participant to the other must be directed through the chair. Any member of the council may question either participant or any witness directly.
- E. After all the evidence has been heard and each party has had sufficient opportunity to present testimony, the participants will be excused. They will remain outside the hearing room until council members have decided that no additional clarification of issues is necessary. At that time the parties involved will be dismissed by the chair of the council.
- F. The members of the council will then discuss and vote on the matter. All voting will be by secret ballot. (Printed ballots will be provided by the chair.)
- G. No member may abstain from voting. The chair will count the ballots aloud before the council immediately following the balloting.
- H. The possible outcomes, as determined by the vote of a simple majority of the members present, of any council deliberation will be
 - 1. rejection of the student's appeal for a grade change;
 - 2. acceptance of the student's appeal for a change to the grade requested; or
 - 3. acceptance of the student's appeal for a change of grade but with consideration of the grade to be assigned. In this case, a discussion of whether to assign the grade applied for in the student's grade appeal form or to modify the student's request will follow. A vote will then be called by the chair, and the letter grade that receives a simple majority will be the new assigned grade. In the case of a tie, voting will continue until a letter grade attains such a majority.
- I. Within one week after the hearing, a letter stating the council's decision will be sent by the chair to each participant, as well as to the appropriate department chair and college or Office of Graduate Studies and to the provost's office. In the case of a grade change, a copy of the letter will be sent to the registrar. This letter will constitute authorization to change the grade in question. It will be the responsibility of the chair to follow up with the registrar, one month after the hearing, in order to ensure that the grade change has been made.
- J. For any question of procedure, the council will abide by the most recent edition of *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*.
- K. No portion of any council meeting may be tape recorded.
- L. All materials submitted by both parties to the Grade Review Council will be retained in the Office of the provost.

Guiding Principles, Responsibilities, and Time Lines

- A. The presumption is that the grade was awarded in a fair and equitable manner. The student has the burden of proof to demonstrate to the council that the grade was awarded in an arbitrary or a capricious manner.
- B. A student who is dissatisfied with a final grade must first attempt to negotiate a change with the instructor of record and must follow the steps prescribed above in the order enumerated. The information for the appeal must be written on or attached to the standard appeal form for grade reviews, which will serve as the basis for deliberation at each step. The student must initiate the appeal, and either the student or a representative requested by the student and approved by the provost's office must be present at each stage of the appeal. It is the responsibility of each reviewing official (department chair, dean, associate provost) to provide each party concerned with a copy of the appeal form showing the action taken.
- C. A student must initiate the appeal procedure within thirty (30) school days (excluding Saturday, Sunday, and official student holidays) of the beginning of the semester subsequent to the one in which the grade was awarded or 120 calendar days after the issuance of spring semester grades should the student not be enrolled during the summer term. The following special cases should be noted:
1. The "120-day rule" shall also apply to the student who is not in residence during the semester following the awarding of the grade in question.
 2. For the case of a challenge of a grade to which a grade of "I" was changed, the time limit shall be gauged from the submission of the removal of the incomplete grade-by using the change of grade form-to the registrar by the dean of the college involved. It is the responsibility of the registrar to notify those students whose grades have been changed. In the absence of such notification, the time limit shall be gauged from the date on which the student was first notified of the grade awarded. (This date must be documented by the student.)
 3. In cases for which a grade of "I" was automatically changed by university regulations to a grade of "F," the grade is considered to have been awarded at the end of the semester following the one during which the "I" was received.
 4. Except for items returned to the student, faculty members should preserve all materials used in determining the grade for at least the number of days indicated above.
- D. The grade challenge procedure will have been officially initiated when the student picks up the grade appeal form from the Office of the Provost and signs the logbook. If the appeal is initiated during either the fall or spring semesters, the student has sixty (60) days in which to complete the grade appeal form and return it with accompanying documents to the Office of the Provost. If the appeal is initiated during the summer term, the student has to complete the process within forty (40) days of the beginning of the fall semester. If the student fails to complete the process in the allocated time, the student loses the right to appeal. The provost's office, either independently or upon petition by the student, may determine that the 60-day requirement cannot be met due to inaction by the administration or by the council and may set a new deadline. Additionally, the student may petition in writing to the provost's office for an extension. This letter of petition must include the reasons for the request and the proposed ending date for the extension. Whether or not the extension is granted, the parties concerned and the members of the Grade Review Council must be advised of the decision.
- E. After the appeal process has been initiated, it is the responsibility of the student either to ensure that deadlines are met or to request an extension as provided for in Section D. It is the responsibility of the department chair to request copies of all pertinent documents and data from the student and the faculty member for duplication. Copies of this material will be provided to each person involved, including all members of the Grade Review Council, should the case reach that level by the council chair. It is recommended that the following items be submitted in support of every grade challenge:

1. A copy of page(s) from the course grade book with names (but not the grades) of other students in the class deleted;
2. All tests, quizzes, reports, exams, or other materials that were used in determining the grade (student should supply copies of those that were returned); and
3. A description of the procedure utilized to calculate the course grade as well as the grading criteria actually given to the students (either orally or in writing) at the beginning of the course. In addition, whatever else either party deems pertinent may be submitted as part of the appeal package (e.g., handouts, class notes, letters of support).

F. A faculty member whose grade award has been challenged may elect not to participate in the hearing or in any other phase of a grade challenge. However, this will not prevent the council from hearing and, if the facts so warrant, deciding the case and changing a grade.

G. All documents presented to the council will become a part of the official record and will not be returned.

H. Council meetings are closed; thus, witnesses may be present only while they are making their statements.

I. The names of the members of the University Grade Review Council (with the exception of the chair) shall not appear in any university publication nor be released by any university faculty member or administrator.

J. A council member may not participate in council deliberations for any case involving a challenge to a grade in his/her department. A council member holding a joint appointment may not participate in council deliberations for any case involving a challenge to a grade in either department.