For Students Considering Appealing a Grade:
Frequently Asked Questions

Please note that details can be found by reading the Bylaws of the Grade Review Council. This page is intended to complement those Bylaws by addressing frequently asked questions and explaining the process to students who are considering a grade appeal.

1. When can I appeal a grade through the Grade Review Council?
The Grade Review Council only hears cases in which a student believes his or her grade was assigned in an “arbitrary” or “capricious” fashion. In other words, the Council reviews only those cases where the student persuasively argues that a grade assigned was given in an unfair, inconsistent, unpredictable, irregular and/or haphazard way. The argument must be made by the student that the grade was not given according to the rules and policies of the class, and/or that he or she was treated in a way that is inconsistent with other students in the course.

2. What if my professor made an error in calculating my grade? Should I appeal?
No. You should talk with your professor about correcting the error. If the professor is no longer working at the University, you should speak with the director of the school in which the course was offered.

3. What if the professor is just too hard, or I don’t agree with how my work was evaluated?
These cases are not appropriate for grade appeals. If the professor has high expectations for those in the class and you did not do well as a result, that is not a situation in which the grades were assigned in an arbitrary way. Similarly, if you do not agree with the professor’s evaluation of your work, you should talk with the professor, but the professor has the authority to evaluate your performance according to the standards he or she has set for the class. As long as those standards are followed consistently, you do not have a case for a formal grade appeal. You do, however, have the right to bring to the attention of those overseeing the course any issue of concern. You should first talk with the professor and, if you do not find resolution to your complaint, you should talk with the director of the school offering the course. If you still do not find resolution, you should talk with the Dean’s office of the college offering the course to express your concerns.

4. What are the first steps in appealing a grade?
1. Step one is to talk with the instructor of record to see if you can resolve the situation without a formal appeal.
2. If not, and you believe the grade was assigned in an arbitrary and/or capricious fashion (see question 1, above), you should come to the Office of the Provost to sign an official log and obtain the packet of information you need to guide your formal appeal. If you are on the coast campus, you should go to the Office of the Vice Provost for Gulf Park.
3. After you receive the form and paperwork, you must next meet with the chair of the Grade Review Council to review the process. The chair’s contact information will be given to you by the Office of the Provost.

5. What if I am a fully online student and don’t live in the area? Do I have to come to Hattiesburg to do the grade appeal?
No. Please contact the Office of the Provost at Provost@usm.edu for instructions on how to file a formal grade appeal from a distance.
6. What if I am a student on the Gulf Park campus? Do I have to come to Hattiesburg to do the grade appeal?
You may initiate the appeal through the Office of the Vice Provost on the Gulf Park campus after speaking with your professor (see #4, above). If the Council decides to hear your case, we recommend that you attend the hearing in person in Hattiesburg if possible. We understand that sometimes that is not possible due to work or other conflicts, and arrangements can be made if necessary for students on the coast. Please contact the Office of the Provost for further details.

7. How long do I have to appeal a grade?
For a fall semester class: You have 30 school days (not counting Saturday, Sunday or University holidays) from the start of the spring semester to start the formal process.

For a spring semester class: If you are NOT enrolled for summer classes, you will have 120 calendar days after the end of spring semester to file a formal grade appeal. If you ARE enrolled in summer classes, you have 30 school days (not counting Saturday, Sunday or University holidays) from the start of the summer semester to start the formal process.

For a summer semester class: You have 30 school days (not counting Saturday, Sunday or University holidays) from the start of the fall semester to start the formal process.

For ALL semesters: Once you sign the log in the Office of the Provost, you have officially started the appeal. You have 60 calendar days to gather and submit all the information. To ensure that the packet arrives at the Office of the Provost within the 60-day limit, we encourage students to submit their materials to their instructor within two weeks of signing the log in the Office of the Provost. See Bylaws for details.

8. What kinds of documentation will I have to provide for a grade appeal?
1. A completed official form given to you by the Office of the Provost
2. A statement regarding the reasons that you believe you deserve a change of grade in the course. In this statement, you should provide a clear argument and sufficient detail to allow others to understand the grounds for your claim. Remember, the burden of argument and proof is on you to demonstrate through evidence why you believe the instructor acted in an arbitrary and/or capricious manner in assigning you this grade.
3. Any additional materials you wish to provide, such as copies of your tests, papers, or other assignments, or correspondence between you and the faculty member.

9. Once I submit all the materials and meet with everyone I am supposed to, what will happen next?
The instructor will provide his or her response to your appeal and submit it to the school director, who, after review, will submit it to the college Dean. The Dean submits the complete appeal packet to the Office of the Provost, where it will be reviewed and submitted to the chair of the Grade Review Council. Finally, the chair will review the packet of materials and share it with the members of the Grade Review Council, and they will vote on whether or not to hear the case. If they do choose to hear the case, you will attend a hearing to discuss your appeal. The committee will then decide whether they will leave the grade as given or change it.

10. What if the Grade Review Council decides not to hear my case? Can I appeal that decision?
You may appeal to the Office of the Provost to request that a hearing be called. The decision of the Provost is final.