
Grade Appeal Policy

University of Massachusetts
Dartmouth • Approved May 2004

Preamble

Students and faculty should make every effort to resolve questions about grades without seeking a formal grade appeal. Grade Appeal is a last resort.

A grade appeal will be pursued only if there is a valid basis and evidence. The responsibility for developing and presenting the case for changing a grade rests with the student making the appeal.

The process is non judicial and the same for all University of Massachusetts Dartmouth students in all courses.

Rights Concerning Grading Practices

At the beginning of a course, students have a right to be told what and how much work will be required and the detailed basis of grading in the course. Any modifications must be communicated clearly and in a timely manner.

Both during a course and at its end, students have a right to know how their work was evaluated and the bases for the calculating of scores and grades. If an instructor is no longer available, the department chairperson is responsible to facilitate this communication. In matters of grading, the chairperson can act for a faculty member who is no longer working at UMass Dartmouth.

Faculty have a right to judge their students' academic work. Others' judgments will not be substituted.

I. What Can Be Appealed

A. Only final course grades may be appealed

B. Grades may be appealed that are alleged to be caused by:

1) Unfair and unequal application of grading standards or applying grading criteria to one student or some students in a manner that treats them differently.

2) Unfair or unannounced alteration of assignments, grading criteria, or computational processes.

3) Computation dispute about calculation of a final grade or its transmission to the registrar.

4) Failure to document a finding of plagiarism that results in a punitive final grade. Definitions of appropriate kinds of documentation are provided by the Academic Ethics Committee in their Plagiarism Policy report approved in April, 2004.

II. Role of the Grade Appeal Office

The Grade Appeal Officer serves students and faculty as an ombudsperson for grading issues. S/he provides students and faculty with someone to "go to" with questions relating to grading fairness and process.

The Grade Appeal Officer provides the first level of adjudication when issues related to grading arise between students and faculty by conducting an informal investigation of the issue and suggesting a non-binding solution where possible.

The Grade Appeal Officer serves as facilitator for a formal grade appeal process when one is to occur.

III. Selection of the Grade Appeal Officer

The Grade Appeal Officer will be appointed by the Provost/Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs on the recommendation of the President of

the Faculty Senate. The President of the Faculty Senate will recommend only from a list of three tenured or emeriti/ae faculty members proposed by the Student Senate.

The Grade Appeal Officer will be appointed for three years.

The Grade Appeal Officer's name and function shall be widely publicized, especially at the end of each term.

IV. Process for Grade Appeal

A. Informal Resolution

Students with questions concerning final grades should first contact the faculty member involved to ask about the issue. The student may also notify the Grade Appeal Officer at the same time. If the student and faculty member do not reach accommodation, the student should bring the issue formally to the Grade Appeal Officer, who will then attempt to gather information from both parties and find a solution acceptable to both. If that adjudication stage does not bring closure to the issue, a formal grade appeal action may begin.

B. Formal Appeal

1) A formal appeal is submitted in writing to the Grade Appeal Officer explaining the basis and providing the evidence for the formal appeal, with copies to the faculty member and to the faculty member's department chair. This must be done within the first 20 class days of the following semester, excluding summers, or within 25 working days from the date that the grade is made available to the student by the Registrar's office, whichever is later, or by a specific later date set by the Grade Appeal Officer.

2) Using this written statement,

within ten days the Grade Appeal Officer will determine whether the basis for the appeal is valid and whether the student has evidence to support the appeal. When the basis is valid and evidence is present, the GAP will inform the student, the faculty member, and the chair in writing and a formal appeal will continue. If the complaint does not have a valid basis or does not contain evidence, the Grade Appeal Officer will return the appeal to the student with a written explanation and so notify the faculty member and the department chair. The student may either discontinue or submit a revised appeal. Only one revised appeal is allowed and must be submitted within ten days of the Grade Appeal Officer's finding of no basis or evidence. A final finding of no basis or evidence ends the Grade Appeal process.

3) If the Grade Appeal Officer finds a sufficient basis and evidence, the student may proceed with the appeal process. In order to continue the procedure, the student will so inform the Grade Appeal Officer in writing within five class days.

4) The formal appeal is considered by a Grade Appeal Committee (GAC) within ten class days from the date of the student's written request for a formal hearing.

The GAC is a standing three-person appeal committee with staggered three-year terms, appointed and charged by the Faculty Senate President annually to hear all formal grade appeals. The Grade Appeal Officer will be present in an advisory, non-voting role. The student and the faculty member shall have the right to attend and may produce witnesses and evidence, question witnesses, and examine all evidence presented. The standing motion before the GAC will be

to support the appeal. The GAC will deliberate this motion in closed session. A majority vote is required to pass this motion. The decision is conveyed in writing to the student, the faculty member, the chairperson, the Grade Appeal Officer, and the Dean of the College of that department. The Dean will implement the decision.

5) Within ten class days of receiving the decision of the GAC, either the student or the faculty member may, with sufficient cause, appeal the decision of the GAC in writing to the Dean of the College. "Cause" is defined as new evidence or procedural error.

Within ten class days of receiving the written appeal, the dean must notify the student, faculty member, department chair, and Grade Appeal Officer of his/her decision and will direct the Registrar to make the change. The Dean's decision is final.

In Spring 2004, The Student-Faculty Academic Affairs Committee approved this revision of UMass Dartmouth's Grade Appeal Policy and recommended it to the Faculty Senate for approval. The Faculty Senate in turn recommended it to the Chancellor. Chancellor MacCormack approved it (May 2004).