Grade appeals are pursued through the formal process described below. Students and faculty should make every effort to resolve questions about grades without seeking a formal grade appeal. A formal grade appeal is a last resort.

The Academic Standards Committee need not defer action on academic standards determinations based on a pending grade appeal, although the committee retains discretion to stay the effect of its decision when appropriate.

a. What Can Be Appealed

Only final course grades may be appealed. For purposes of this section, a semester grade in a full-year course is appealable.

b. Bases of Appeal

Grades may be appealed that are alleged to have been caused by:

i. Discriminatory application of grading standards as defined under Massachusetts or federal law, or University discrimination policy.

ii. Post hoc alteration of grading criteria.

iii. Computation dispute about calculation of a final grade or its transmission to the Registrar.

iv. Failure to document a finding of plagiarism that results in a punitive final grade. Definitions of appropriate kinds of documentation are provided by the UMass Dartmouth Academic Integrity Policy.

c. Role of the Grade Appeal Officer

The Grade Appeal Officer serves students and faculty as an ombudsperson for grading issues. The Grade Appeal Officer provides students and faculty with someone to “go to” with questions relating to grading fairness and process; assists students and faculty attempting to find an informal resolution when issues related to grading arise; and adjudicates Formal Appeals when they occur.
d. Selection of the Grade Appeal Officer

The Grade Appeal Officer will be appointed for a three-year term by the Associate Dean, subject to ratification by the Law Academic Council, from a list of three tenured or emeriti/ae faculty members proposed by majority vote of the Executive Board of the Student Bar Association. Faculty members with administrative appointments (such as the Dean, Associate Dean, and Director of the Law Library) are ineligible to serve as Grade Appeal Officer. The Grade Appeal Officer’s name and function shall be widely publicized, especially at the end of each term.

If the faculty member whose grade is being appealed is the Grade Appeal Officer, the Associate Dean shall select a faculty member from the list of those originally proposed by the Student Bar Association to serve as the Grade Appeal Officer in that appeal.

e. 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 Associate Dean is responsible to facilitate this communication. In matters of grading, the Associate Dean 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.

f. Grade Appeal Process

i. Informal Resolution

A student with a question concerning a final grade should first discuss the issue with the faculty member involved. The student may also notify the Grade Appeal Officer at the same time, who may attempt to help the student and faculty member reach an accommodation. If the student and faculty member do not reach accommodation, the student may pursue the Formal Appeal process below.

ii. Formal Appeal

(a) Within ten business days after the LEC made the grade available to the student, the student must submit a Formal Appeal by e-mail to the Grade Appeal Officer, with copies by e-mail to the faculty member and
the Associate Dean. The Formal Appeal must explain the basis for and provide evidence supporting the Formal Appeal. Failure to submit a timely Formal Appeal ends the Grade Appeal process.

(b) Within five business days of receiving a Formal Appeal, the Grade Appeal Officer will determine, based solely on the Formal Appeal, whether the basis for the appeal is valid and whether the student has evidence to support the appeal. If the Grade Appeal Officer finds that the Formal Appeal lacks a valid basis or does not contain supporting evidence, the Grade Appeal Officer will submit that determination by e-mail to the student, with a copy by e-mail to the faculty member and the Associate Dean. A finding that the Formal Appeal lacks a valid basis or does not contain supporting evidence ends the Grade Appeal process, and is unappealable.

(c) If the Grade Appeal Officer finds both a valid basis and supporting evidence, the Grade Appeal Officer shall transmit his or her finding by e-mail to the student and to the faculty member. The faculty member shall then have ten business days from receipt of the finding to submit to the Grade Appeal Officer by e-mail a response with any supporting documentation, copied by e-mail to the student. The student shall then have five business days after receipt of the faculty member’s response to submit a rebuttal by e-mail to the Grade Appeal Officer with any supporting documentation, with a copy by e-mail to the faculty member. The Grade Appeal Officer may (but need not) request that the student and faculty member attend a hearing at which each may state their positions. The Grade Appeal Officer will transmit his or her decision on the Formal Appeal by e-mail to the student and the faculty member, with a copy to the Associate Dean, who will implement the decision.

(d) Within five business days of receiving the Grade Appeal Officer’s decision, either the student or the faculty member may appeal the decision by e-mail to the Dean. The Dean may not reverse the Grade Appeal Officer’s decision unless the decision was arbitrary and capricious or the result of applying standards other than those listed in Section 19(b). Within ten business days of receiving the appeal, the Dean shall notify the student, faculty member, and Grade Appeal Officer of his or her decision, and will direct the LEC to make any necessary change. The Dean’s decision is not reviewable.