

# **Student's Guide to Grade Appeals**

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## Suggestions for Students

An appeal of a grade requires time and effort on the part of several people – primarily, the student who makes the appeal. This paper is intended to help you prepare your appeal carefully and quickly.

### Do you really have reason to appeal?

You may feel that you had poor instruction or that course objectives were unreasonable and the grades were lower than they should have been. Such problems need to be corrected, but they cannot be corrected through the grade appeals system. Appeals based on such arguments will end in failure and a student who has spent hours preparing an appeal will feel frustrated as a result.

The University Regulations states:

*The grade appeal system affords recourse to a student who has evidence or believes that evidence exists to show that an inappropriate grade has been assigned as a result of prejudice, caprice, or other improper conditions such as mechanical error, or assignment of a grade inconsistent with those assigned to other students. Additionally, a student may challenge the reduction of a grade for alleged scholastic dishonesty.*

*In essence, the grade appeals system is designed to protect students from grade assignments that are inconsistent with policy followed in assigning grades to others in the course.*

A grade will not be raised because a faculty member graded tests very severely, providing the faculty member applied the same rigorous standards to all students. Nor will proof that a faculty member has been antagonistic toward you be sufficient cause to raise a grade unless evidence exists that such antagonism did in fact result in a lower grade.

These comments are not meant to discourage you from making an appeal. Rather, they are intended to remind you that the grounds for appeal are limited. If you are not certain whether you have grounds for appeal, we suggest that you discuss your case with the chairperson of the College/School Grade Appeals Committee or with someone on the staff of the Dean of Students office.

### **Have you already exhausted other avenues for changing the grade?**

The grade appeals procedure requires that you try to resolve the dispute at the lowest possible level. The University Regulations states:

1. Talk to the faculty member before you initiate a grade appeal. When you do, listen to the faculty member's side of the story and make your arguments objective ones. Many grade errors are unintentional. Most faculty members are anxious to initiate a grade change in such circumstances. However, faculty members are human and may resist a belligerent student bent on forcing them to change a grade.
2. Talk to the head of the department or someone the head designates to handle grade appeal issues. The head of the department may refer you to some other individual in the department to listen to your case and try to mediate a solution. Procedures vary from department to department and may take several days, so be sure that you have notified the chairperson of the College/School Grade Appeals Committee of your intent to appeal before you take this step.
3. File a formal appeal with the Grade Appeals Committee of the college/school in which the contested grade was awarded. Remember, you must give notice that you plan to appeal within two weeks after the beginning of the semester following the semester in which the original grade was awarded. You then have 2 weeks from the time you file notice to prepare your appeal.

### **Preparing your written appeal.**

The outcome of your case may depend on how well you prepare your appeal. It need not be long, in fact, extraneous material is likely to confuse the issues and hurt your case. The following points should help you.

1. State the basis for the appeal; i.e., whether you believe there was prejudice on the part of the faculty member, a mechanical error, or inconsistent grading practices. Be explicit. The appeals committee must know your grounds for appeal.
2. State the evidence in support of your appeal. Stick to the facts. Name-calling, hyperbole, and exaggerated claims will not help your case.
3. Include any physical evidence that you have, such as your personal record or tests, comparisons of your score and grade with scores of other students and their grades, and so forth. You may not have the physical evidence needed to support

your case because it consists of class records. This need not concern you. Such evidence must be made available to the Grade Appeals Committee by the faculty member.

4. After preparing a rough draft of your appeal, have someone critique it and suggest improvements. This should be done by an impartial individual who has had some experience with grade appeals. Members of a grade appeals committee or staff in the Dean of Students Office are appropriate individuals.

### **Further Appeal**

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After a hearing, you will be notified of the result and the vote of the committee. The same notice will be sent to the faculty member and either may appeal to the University Grade Appeals Committee.

Before you appeal a decision, remember that reasonable people weighed the evidence and made the best decision they could make on the basis of that evidence. If the decision went against you, you are likely to feel that it is wrong. (Both parties to an appeal think they are right, or they wouldn't be in the appeal process!) However, the question to be considered before requesting an appeal is, "Did I receive a fair hearing?"

**An appeal of a college/school decision will be granted only on the following grounds:**

- Substantial procedural irregularities or inequities existed in the college/school hearing.
- Substantial new evidence has been uncovered.
- The appellant substantiates that the college/school decision may have been erroneous or unfair.

You should understand that appeals are not granted because of some possibility that irregularities or inequities existed or that new evidence might be uncovered. The appellant must present evidence in support of such contentions.

If a request for appeal is filed, it must be carefully prepared. The decision to grant an appeal will be made solely on the basis of the written statement and the records of the college/school hearing. An appellant does not appear before the University Committee to support his/her request for appeal.

**When it's all over.**

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There are no "victories" or "defeats" in the grade appeals process. Its purpose is to arbitrate differences over grades that could not be solved on a personal basis because both parties to the appeal believed they were right. Based on the evidence at hand, a disinterested group of faculty members and students does its best to render a fair judgment and right any wrongs that might have been done.

## Initiating a Grade Appeal

You may only appeal the *final* grade for a course. You may appeal if:

- You are able to demonstrate that "an inappropriate grade was assigned as a result of prejudice, caprice, or other improper conditions such as mechanical error, or assignment of a grade inconsistent with those assigned other students."
- You wish to challenge the reduction of a grade for alleged scholastic dishonesty.

Remember that the burden of proof is on the student, except in cases of academic dishonesty, where the burden of proof is on the instructor.

**Note:** Appeals regarding the decision of a graduate examination committee, acceptance of a graduate thesis or the application of professional standards relating to graduate student retention should be directed to the Graduate Council (Young Hall, Room 170).

### When You Should NOT Appeal:

- If you feel the course was poorly designed or you received poor instruction — these may be legitimate concerns, but are more appropriately addressed by the department head.
- If you feel that students were graded too severely, provided that all the students in the class were graded *in the same fashion*.

## Process of Filing a Grade Appeal

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These steps must be completed in the following order:

### Informal Attempt

1. Contact your instructor to request a grade change.
2. Contact your program director (if applicable) to request a grade change.
3. Contact the school head to request a grade change.

### Formal Attempt

(if step 1 fails to resolve the issue)

4. Prepare and submit a written appeal, within **30 calendar days** after the start of the following regular semester (excludes summer session), to the Grade Appeals Committee chair of the college or school in which the course originates.
5. It will be reviewed by the Grade Appeals Committee within **7 days** to determine if a hearing is needed.

6. If needed, a hearing will be scheduled within **14 days** after notification is given to both parties.
7. A written decision is sent to both parties within **3 days** of the hearing conclusion.
8. Both parties have 6 days to appeal the decision in writing to the University Grade Appeals Committee.

### **How to Prepare a Written Appeal**

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It is critical that you give ample time and attention to your written appeal. Your success in this process may be determined by your ability to present thorough and accurate information. The decision to grant an appeal hearing will be made based only on the written documentation reviewed by the committee.

- Write your appeal in the form of a letter addressed to the members of the Grade Appeal Committee. Your opening paragraph should clearly state the basis for your appeal and quote your reason directly from the *Student Regulations*. (Example: *I am appealing my grade of "C" in MA 20000 because I have evidence that indicates there was a mechanical error in the calculation of my homework grades.*) It is very important that the members of the committee clearly understand the basis of your appeal.
- Clearly state any evidence and facts that support your grade appeal. If you have negative comments about the instructor or the class, this is not the appropriate place to share those thoughts. Likewise, exaggerated claims that cannot be verified will only hurt your case. A request for a grade appeal is a professional document.
- Attach copies of any documentation that you have, which may include: personal grade records, copies of graded work, email communication with the instructor, comparisons to the work of other students and statements of support from other students. Not all of these items will apply to you depending on the basis of your appeal. Additionally, you may not be in possession of these documents if they are part of the instructor's class records. If that is the case, the committee will request this documentation from the instructor.
- Have another person review your appeal documentation. This individual should critique it not only for spelling and grammar, but also for ease of understanding. Staff members in the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities, academic advisors, and professors are appropriate for this task.



## Grade Appeals Official Policies

This section has been replicated from Regulations Governing Student Conduct, Disciplinary Proceedings, and Appeals in the University Catalog Student Conduct Guidelines (<https://catalog.purdue.edu/content.php?catoid=13&navoid=15921>).

### Adoption by Faculty

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The faculty of the University at the West Lafayette Campus has adopted the following procedures for grade appeals pursuant to the authority delegated to the faculty. The Board of Trustees hereby approves such procedures for the West Lafayette Campus.

### General

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In the academic community, grades are a measure of student achievement toward fulfillment of course objectives. The responsibility for assessing student achievement and assigning grades rests with the faculty, and, except for unusual circumstances, the course grade given is final.

The grade appeals system affords recourse to a student who has evidence or believes that evidence exists to show that an inappropriate grade has been assigned as a result of prejudice, caprice, or other improper conditions such as mechanical error, or assignment of a grade inconsistent with those assigned other students. Additionally, a student may challenge the reduction of a grade for alleged scholastic dishonesty.

The only University authorities empowered to change grades are the instructor or, in the case of teaching assistants, the faculty member in charge of the course in question and the chairman/chairwoman of the University Grade Appeals Committee acting in behalf of the school and University grade appeals committees.

Informal attempts must be made to resolve grade grievances and appeals at the lowest possible level - through the course instructor, through the department head, or through other informal procedures outlined by the college/school and/or department in which the course was taught.

Graduate students who wish to appeal grades received in regular coursework may do so through the grade appeals system. Cases involving the decisions of graduate examination committees, the acceptance of graduate theses, and the application of professional standards relating to the retention of graduate students shall be handled by procedures authorized by the Graduate Council rather than the grade appeals system.

When a student initiates a formal grade appeal, he/she should be prepared to state in what way his/her grade assignment was arbitrary, capricious, or otherwise improper. At that time, he/she

may seek the assistance of the dean of students, the chairperson of one of the grade appeals committees, or his/her academic advisor.

In appealing a grade, the burden of proof is on the student, except in the case of alleged academic dishonesty, where the instructor must support the allegation.

### **College/School Grade Appeals Committee**

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Each of the colleges/schools of Purdue University at the West Lafayette Campus will establish a Grade Appeals Committee to hear grade grievances and appeals that are not resolved informally at a lower level. Each committee will consist of two students (undergraduate or graduate corresponding to the status of the appellant), three members of the instructional faculty, and a non-voting chairperson. The chairperson of the committee will be an assistant or associate dean of the college/school appointed by the dean. The chairperson will be responsible for assuring adherence to established procedures, convening members for an appeal, and maintaining records. The chairperson has the authority to grant warranted time extension in the appeals process described below.

Voting members of the committee will be selected from a pool of at least eight students and eight instructional faculty. The pool of members of the committee will be selected according to school/college procedures in the spring (not later than May 1) to commence serving on the first day of the following fall semester. No member shall serve more than two consecutive terms in the pool.

### **University Grade Appeals Committee**

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A University Grade Appeals Committee, with the authority to hear appeals of school committee decisions, shall be established for the West Lafayette Campus. The University committee shall be responsible to and report to the Faculty Affairs Committee of the University Senate. In all appeal cases, the committee shall consist of two students (undergraduate or graduate to correspond to the status of the appealing student) and four members of the instructional faculty. They shall be selected in the following manner: four undergraduate students nominated by the student body president and confirmed by the Student Senate; four graduate students appointed by the Committee on Student Affairs of the University Senate; and eight faculty members selected by the University Senate. The student members shall be appointed annually. Two of the faculty members of the committee shall be elected annually for a three-year term.

The members shall be selected in the spring (not later than May 1) to start serving on the first day of the following fall semester. No member shall serve more than two consecutive terms. If any appointing authority fails to make the initial appointments to the University Grade Appeals Committee within the specified time, or to fill any vacancy on the panel of members within five days after being notified to do so by the chairperson of the University Grade Appeals Committee,

or if at any time the University Grade Appeals Committee cannot function because of refusal of any member to serve, the chairperson of the Faculty Affairs Committee may make appointments, fill vacancies, or take such other actions as he/she deems necessary to constitute a University Grade Appeals Committee.

Annually, at the last University Grade Appeals Committee meeting of the academic year, the members for the coming year plus all retiring committee members shall elect (by majority vote) one of the eight regular faculty members to act as the new non-voting chairperson of the committee.

The University Grade Appeals Committee shall adopt its own hearing proceedings, and establish uniform procedures to be followed by the college/school committees. The chairperson of the University Grade Appeals Committee shall be responsible for insuring that all school grade appeals committees are properly constituted and functional.

### **Initiating a Grade Appeal**

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Prior to initiating a grade appeal, the student is strongly encouraged to resolve the situation with the instructor, department head, or head's designee. The department head is strongly encouraged to facilitate an informal resolution process between the parties.

### **Appeal Process**

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A student who wishes to initiate a grade appeal must file a written statement of allegations, facts, and circumstances concerning the grade assigned with the chairperson of the Grade Appeals Committee of the college/school in which the course was taken. This must be done within 30 calendar days after the start of the regular semester following the one in which the questioned grade was given.

After receipt of the student's written statement, the chairperson will promptly furnish a copy of the statement to the involved instructor who has seven days to make a written response. The chairperson will submit the statement of appeal and any responses to each of the members of the college/school grade appeals committee. Committee members will review the written documents within seven calendar days from the date they are received. If one voting member of the committee rules that the allegations warrant a hearing or are best addressed through a hearing, a hearing will be held; otherwise, the appeal will be denied. With reasonable cause, the chairperson may override the decision not to hear the case.

If the appeal is to be heard, the chairperson will promptly give notice of the time, date, and place of the hearing to the parties involved. The hearing will be scheduled not more than 14 calendar days after notice to the student and instructor.

The instructor will promptly make all pertinent grading records available to the college/school committee's chairperson. In advance of the hearing, the chairperson may at his/her discretion make available to the student those records (or portions thereof) that he/she judges to be relevant in light of the student's allegations.

### **Conduct of College/School Grade Appeals Committee Hearing, General**

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The hearing shall be closed, unless both parties agree in writing that it be open. The chairperson's determination of the hearing location and the number of individuals that can be conveniently accommodated shall be final. The student and the instructor are both entitled to be accompanied at the hearing by advisors of their choice. Because the hearings are administrative and not judicial in nature, the advisors may not be lawyers. Both parties have the right to present evidence and witnesses in their behalf and to confront and question opposing witnesses.

Under normal circumstances, if the duly notified student complainant does not appear for the hearing the complaint shall be dismissed, the case closed, and these actions not subject to further hearing or appeal. If, however, a duly notified faculty member does not appear, the hearing will continue on the presumption that there is no desire to challenge evidence or witnesses presented by the student.

An official audio recording shall be made of each hearing and filed by the chairperson of the respective college/school committee for at least one year. The recording will be confidential and used only if further appeal is granted by the University Grade Appeals Committee or under legal compulsion.

At the conclusion of the hearing, the committee may (by a majority vote of the committee membership) recommend changing the original grade. A written report of the committee's decision shall be sent to both parties and the chairperson of the University Grade Appeals Committee no later than three days after the conclusion of the hearing. Either party may, within six class days of receipt of the decision, file a written notice of intent to request further appeal with the chairperson of the University Grade Appeals Committee. If no such notice is received by the chairperson within the six-day period, the decision shall not be subject to further hearing appeal. If, at that time, the instructor who originally gave the grade is not willing to initiate a recommended change, the chairperson of the University Grade Appeals Committee shall file the directed change with the registrar who shall record the new grade.

The chairperson of each college/school committee will maintain a written record of all grade appeals heard in the college/school and provide an annual overview of the grade appeals process to the Provost.

## **Appeal of a College/School Committee Decision**

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Under certain specific circumstances (Sec III-E-7-b) either the student or the instructor may file a request for an appeal of the college/school grade appeals committee decision. If the appeal request is granted, the case will be heard by the University Grade Appeals Committee. The process may be initiated by filing a personally signed notice of appeal with the chairperson of the University Grade Appeals Committee within the six-day limit (Section III-E-6-d). The notice shall be accompanied by a written statement of the alleged procedural irregularities or new evidence, or a substantial enumeration of why the appellant believes the college/school committee decision is erroneous or unfair. Upon request, the respective college/school committee chairperson immediately will transmit the audio recording of the college/school hearing and any other items of evidence presented at the college/school hearing to the chairperson of the University Grade Appeals Committee. The decision of the University Grade Appeals Committee to grant or deny appeals from school committees shall be final.

If the University Grade Appeals Committee finds, on the basis of the appellant's written statement and other available evidence, that substantial procedural irregularities or inequities existed in the college/school hearing or that substantial new evidence has been uncovered, the University Grade Appeals Committee shall hear the case de novo. Additionally, the committee may, at its discretion, hear appeals from the college/school level, when the appellant's statement substantiates to its satisfaction that the college/school decision may have been erroneous or unfair. If the University Grade Appeals Committee grants an appeal, the chairperson shall promptly give notice to both parties of the time, date, and place of hearing (which shall be held not less than five and, whenever practicable, not more than 10 days after the receipt of such notice), as well as providing them with a copy of the procedures and sequence of events to be followed in conducting the hearing.

## **Conduct of University Grade Appeal Committee Hearing, General**

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The appeal hearing shall be closed, unless both parties agree in writing for it to be open. The chairperson's determination of the hearing location and the number of individuals that can be conveniently accommodated shall be final. The appellant and opposing parties are both entitled to be accompanied at the hearing by advisors of their choice. Because the hearings are administrative and not judicial in nature, the advisors may not be lawyers. If an appeal is heard on the basis of procedural irregularity or new evidence, both parties have the right to present evidence and witnesses in their behalf and to confront and question opposing witnesses. If, however, the University Grade Appeals Committee elects to hear an appeal on the grounds that the college/school grade appeals committee's decision appears to be erroneous or unfair, it shall not accept additional evidence but shall consider only matters introduced at the college/school hearing. The audio record of the college/school hearing shall be made available for audition by

both parties and the members of the University committee. Additionally, the committee may, at its discretion, have a transcript of the college/school hearing prepared. If a transcript is prepared, it will be safeguarded and used in the same fashion as audio records of hearings.

If a duly notified appellant does not appear for the hearing, the committee may close the case and it will be subject to no further hearing or appeal. If the opposing party (having been duly notified) does not appear, the hearing will continue on the presumption that there is no desire to challenge evidence or witnesses that may be presented.

An official audio recording shall be made of each hearing and kept by the chairperson of the University committee for at least one year. The recording will be confidential and used only under legal compulsion in civil court proceedings.

After the University Grade Appeals Committee hears an appeal, it may (by a majority vote of the committee membership) recommend changing the original grade. A written report of the University Grade Appeals Committee's decision shall be sent to both parties no later than 15 days after the conclusion of the hearing. If the instructor who originally gave the grade is not willing to initiate any recommended grade change, the chairperson of the University Grade Appeals Committee shall file the change with the registrar who shall record the new grade. The University Grade Appeals Committee's decision is final, and shall not be subject to further hearing or appeal.

### **Other Academic/Grade Appeal Jurisdictions**

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Informal boards or committees may be established within academic departments to resolve grade grievances and appeals.

Students involved in cases of alleged academic dishonesty may be subject to disciplinary penalties under Section III-B-2-a of the Regulations Governing Student Conduct, Disciplinary Proceedings, and Appeals.